ANCIENT HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC INTEREST: THE VIEW FROM 2004

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Readers will be aware of a surge of popular interest in the ancient world. It can be seen in novels, coffee-table books, ‘sub-coffee-table’ books, public functions, television documentaries, stage-plays, opera and film. All this interest can’t be bad for the subject. Colleen McCullough, author of a series of novels on Republican Rome from the time of Marius to that of Caesar (with possibly one more to come), takes great satisfaction in the thought that she has excited and reinforced public interest in the ancient world and swollen the numbers of those undertaking its study at the school and college level in the United States. One of her fans, the Premier of NSW, added – in direct response – the figures for this State. HSC enrolments in Ancient History had risen from 7218 in 2001 to 8715 in 2003, making Ancient History the tenth most popular subject at this level. Premier Bob Carr made that observation in the lead-up to his public dialogue with the author at the Sydney Town Hall (on which, see below). Subsequent to the initial composition of these thoughts, the figures for 2004 have become available. The number of candidates undertaking Ancient History has risen to 9,718, meaning that, for the first time since the syllabus restructuring in 2000, Ancient History has outstripped Modern History (with a current candidature of 9,521). Ancient History is now the ninth most popular subject at the HSC. The popular press is quick to lay much of that development at the feet of the “blockbusters”, with accompanying photographs of the cuirass-clad Russell Crowe and Brad Pitt.

1 The current essay sets out to explore the extent to which this is an unalloyed blessing. At the end of all that exploration, rather than returning to the place from which I set out and understanding it for the first time, I remain undecided, torn by mixed emotions and awaiting self-definition!

‘Sub-coffee-table’? I remember that Michael Grant, the great popularizer (who died just short of his ninetieth birthday whilst this article was in preparation), was keen, when characterizing his own work, to draw a distinction between coffee-table and ‘sub-coffee-table’ books (‘To meet modern needs’, Times Literary Supplement March 31, 1972, 361-62). The former, I imagine, are displayed to impress guests and visitors; the latter are kept close to hand to be drawn out at moments of leisure for entertainment and enlightenment). Grant’s essay (on the popularization of the subject) remains an interesting read.


3 That is a development in which those who care about a well-rounded knowledge of the past will take little satisfaction. Both subjects at the HSC level should parallel each other’s success. Much of the significance of the ancient world lies in its legacy and the reception of that legacy; and much of the understanding of the modern world lies in its ancient origins.
Ancient History is currently centre-stage. In the light of that current enthusiasm, I was invited to submit a "Comment" to the *Macquarie University News*. This was pruned a number of times to meet the journalistic requirements of 500 words, and I offer here my initial thoughts — and a few supplementary ones.

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Linda Doherty, 'Sixpacks, swords ease history back into classrooms', *SMH Weekend Edition* October 9-10, 2004. Another attraction is also registered: "a wave" of web-based archaeological programs designed for students. Other less spectacular, but in fact far more profound, explanations are canvassed. John Bennet, general manager of the Office of Board of Studies, is quoted as noting the steady growth in ancient history over a number of years. Pam Panczyk, vice-president of the NSW HIA, emphasises the paradox of distance and the immediacy of ancient life-experiences and the revelations of archaeology: "It's the whole hands-on thing and the air of mystery of the subject". Brian Croke, executive director of the NSW Catholic Education Commission, emphasises the strengths of the syllabus, 'good, dynamic teachers', and the tradition of strong support from the universities running teacher and student study days.

I should like to take up Croke's emphasis on the commitment of teachers. Auditors at various public fora have heard Jennifer Lawless (NSW Board of Studies) report that principals and other bemused teachers, when quizzed about the success of Ancient History at their schools, will almost invariably put it down to "that mad fanatical Ancient History teacher" who devotes all his or her energies to promoting the subject and whipping up student interest (Lawless is herself an example of that commitment). A similar pattern can be discerned in the dedicated band who keep Latin alive in our schools. A recent article appeared in Sydney's popular press on the subject by Mark Dapin, 'Dead Language Society', *Sydney Morning Herald* October 2, 2004. One of the students from Sydney Girls (aged 14), singled out because of the "startling fervour" with which she read the part of Lucretia (from Livy) at the annual Latin Reading Competition, offered the comment: "It helps that all the teachers at Sydney High are completely mad! I chose [Latin] more as a fun subject than anything else..." Mrs Fox, for example, managed once, in Year 7, to get up on a table with this horrible robe on and start fighting off the front row, to demonstrate Horatius to us. You don't forget it after that." The teacher to whom young Olivia Hopkins referred, Helen Fox, is retiring in 2004 — but is transferring to Macquarie to assist in the management of MALS (the Macquarie Ancient Language Schools). MALS serves the growing numbers who are seeking the pleasures of discovering ancient cultures through their literature. One hundred individuals, their ages ranging from 8 to 80, have signed up for the 2005 summer courses in classical and koine Greek, hieroglyphics, Coptic, Sanskrit and Syriac (cf Brendan O'Keefe, 'Passion for old languages', *The Australian* January 12, 2005). It is now paralleled by the annual Sydney University Latin School which enjoys similar popular support. Two hundred have signed up for 2005.

In a journal such as this it is important to recognize that teachers are themselves the resource.
The current surge of interest is not, of course, without precedent. The BBC production of *I Claudius* was compulsive viewing for many of us in the 1970s. From the opening seconds, the arresting musical score of Wilfred Josephs and that deadly looking snake slithering across a Roman mosaic had us hooked. Other toga’d dramas had preceded and others followed: the twentieth century’s *fabulae togatae* (turning the original classification on its head). And *I Claudius* had already enjoyed a long history. Robert Graves’ book was originally published back in 1934 — and it had inspired the ‘Epic That Never Came To Be’, with Charles Laughton as Claudius, only fragments of which survive.

Historical novels have fleshed out the ancient world in all its corners. They have long been a source of popular satisfaction and, with regard to the better products of that genre, enlightenment. It is a pity that Tacitus’ *Annals*, on which *I Claudius* was fundamentally based, doesn’t have the same currency, but quite appropriate that the modern public should not be restricted to

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AITOW, Lea Beness, Andrew Gillett and Ian Plant (as well as those mentioned specifically in notes below) for bibliographical assistance and comment

7 *Ancient Society Resources for Teachers* (as this journal was then called) devoted two numbers to critiques of various historical novels (*Ancient Society* 3 2 (1973) 3-20, 44-46 and 4 1 (1974) 3-32.

And the ancient world has now made substantial inroads into crime fiction. Roman detectives are positively tripping over each other to expose the sordid underbelly of the grandeur *cum squalor* that was Rome. The Roman mystery collections keep flowing. Lindsay Davis published the sixteenth of her Marcus Didius Falco series (*Scandal Takes a Holiday*) in 2004. The seventeenth (*See Delphi and Die*) is due in 2005. The tenth (excluding a collection of short stories) in Steven Saylor’s Roma Sub Rosa (Gordianus the Finder) series, (*The Judgment of Caesar*) appeared in 2004. The prolific John Maddox Roberts published the eighth of his SPQR series (*The River God’s Vengeance*) in 2004; the ninth (*The Princess and the Pirates*) is due in 2005. Heroines are represented. The tenth offering in Marilyn Todd’s Claudia Seferius Mystery series (*Widow’s Pique*) appeared in 2004. It is to be followed by *Stone Cold* in 2005. A newcomer (and another heroine), the innkeeper Aurelia Marcella, has appeared in Roman York. Jane Finnis’ *Get Out or Die* (2003) is advertised as the first of a series. An investigator of a different sort appeared in 2003 in the form of engineer Marcus Attilius Primus (Robert Harris’ *Pompeii. A Novel*). Nor are Egyptian and Greek investigators and problem-solvers absent.

Some novelists have also turned to the legacy of the ancient world and its transmission; the discovery of new archaeological evidence and its attempted theft or suppression is a popular theme. In 2004, Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* was at the top of Australia’s best-selling list from August to December. More than 460,000 copies have been sold in this country (Malcolm Knox, ‘It’s code Brown as Dan rules the shelves’, *Sydney Morning Herald* December 11-12 2004, 3). Its popular impact was strong — to judge from the number of occasions my colleagues have been asked “Is it true?”, the question not just coming from students but from colleagues in other disciplines. For those few of us who have not read the book, a short critique of its plausibility and pretensions by my colleague Alan Dean (‘*The Da Vinci Code* — we love a good conspiracy’, *Macquarie University News*, Nov/Dec., 2004, 12) is highly useful.
knowing the Roman world through the eyes of a first-century senator. History is interpretation. What we need now is a recreation of Agrippina’s memoirs. I have in mind Agrippina, the mother of Nero, who is actually known to have written such a work (which has not survived). It would not be an absolute ‘first’, in the sense that her mother has already been so served. Two centuries ago, Elizabeth Hamilton composed The Memoirs of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus, published in 1804.

And mention of that Agrippina (sc. the Elder) reminds us of yet another popular medium which has been a powerful force in revisionist recreations of the ancient world: art. The influence of the Neoclassical School of painting (to take one example), an influence not simply confined to the world of art but to be seen in the political ferment of the eighteenth century, is, again, a subject too broad to be treated here. The movement was in some ways anticipated by the American Benjamin West, whose Agrippina Landing at Brundisium was commissioned by Robert Hay Drummond, the Archbishop of York, giving a reading of, and extensive commentary upon, Tacitus’ description of the same. As Martin Snyder observes, “the intense interest of the mid eighteenth century in classical antiquity and particularly in its physical remains was more than mere antiquarianism. The awakened interest in the ancient world had a distinctly pragmatic goal ...”. People sought practical moral lessons from the past; and antiquity was cast (and recast) accordingly. It was logical to turn to the ancient world for reference points. Classical antiquity, the Near East and Biblical antiquity had long provided the inspiration for many operas, to mention another medium (with different intentions) which could provide a whole essay in this regard in its own right. Opera, originating in Italy, has been characterized as a derivative of classical drama. The first real Italian opera to have survived was Iacopo Peri’s Eurydice (1600). He had already provided the music for a privately performed Dafne (1597). The attraction of antiquity is apparent. Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas (1689) is regarded as the first English opera; it was also in

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11 Snyder, p. 10, 29.
performance at the Sydney Opera House during the writing of this article. From these early moments, through Handel’s many successes to Verdi’s classic Aïda (1871), the ancient world had been (and is still) greatly reworked on the operatic stage. Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas endorsed the tradition of creative adaptation. The libretto of Nahum Tate has Aeneas driven on from Carthage by a malevolent Sorcerer (or sorcerer in some productions), aided and abetted by two witches. That puts quite a different spin on Aeneas’ famous pietas — and would have surprised Virgil. Where, however, lay the imprimatur of authority? Compare the roughly contemporaneous accounts of the wanderings of Aeneas in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and in Virgil’s Aeneid and it will be clear how Virgil has played in such an effective manner with the plot, elevating the Dido episode to do with it, in spirit, something not dissimilar to that which Purcell’s opera and its operatic predecessors were to do — concentrate on the victim.

The more immediate medium today is film. Again, it is hardly new. The ‘swords and sandal’ Epic has an established place in the history of Hollywood; indeed, the Epic, the Hollywood definition of which, according to David Franzoni, the screenplay-writer and a co-producer of Gladiator, is “one where they spend too much money” is synonymous with the place — a film genre in which grandiosity outstripped the grandeur of antiquity which it purported to convey. And, before that, there was the richer Italian cinematic tradition. The link between the ancient world and film had been established

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12 Nor was it the only representation of antiquity on the Opera House stage at the time (July/August 2004) Bellini’s Norma (set in Roman Britain) was being simultaneously performed by Opera Australia. This year also saw Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo: Favola in Musica performed excellently by Pinchgut Opera at the City Recital Hall in December, 2004. Pinchgut has announced that it will stay with the Baroque in 2005 — and, not requiring comment, with antiquity. Jean-Philippe Rameau’s Dardanus will be performed in December, 2005. Pinchgut’s advance publicity is *a propos*: “Like many early operas, Dardanus is based on a Greek myth. But only a little bit” (Pinchgut Opera, 05 Newsletter No 1).

13 Purcell’s work, by the way, although it stands out in terms of English precedence, was not without a model. In 1682, Purcell’s teacher and colleague John Blow had produced a Venus and Adonis for the private entertainment of Charles II. It drew on Ovid. I mention this to emphasise again the ubiquity of classical inspiration. (For much of the above I have drawn from the Program Notes prepared by Roger Covell for Opera Australia’s superb production of Dido and Aeneas in July 2004.)

14 Franzoni, interview for Film Genre: Epics (dir. Howard Hill and Abi Hedderwick; series prod. Alex di Martino for CREATIVITY.com, 2002) Arthur Max, a set designer for Gladiator, recalls that the Roman forum built for Cleopatra was three times bigger than the original (loc cit); cf. the boasts made for the forum built for Samuel Bronston’s The Fall of the Roman Empire (1964) — as recorded from various press releases by Maria Wyke, Projecting the Past. Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History (Routledge, New York & London, 1997), 186. Already we see the now cherished tradition of improving on reality.
even before the dawn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{15} Giovanni Pastrone's \textit{Cabiria} (1914) had an enormous impact on the budding American industry. A spectacle if ever there was one, with Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, Etna's eruption and the fall of Carthage, the Italians drew on a deeper well than the Americans could hope to. Just as opera can be seen as heir to ancient theatre, so Italian cinema could draw on the grand operatic tradition in that country. \textit{Cabiria} influenced D.W. Griffith, and Griffith passed on the baton to Cecil Blount DeMille. With the coming of sound, one could say that Epic never looked back (except that that would be a woefully inappropriate turn of phrase).\textsuperscript{16} It seemed at one time (not so long ago) that the epic in film had run

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\item \textsuperscript{15} For the first decades, see Solomon, n.16 below, 1-11.
\item \textsuperscript{16} For a catalogue (covering the sound-era only), see Gary A. Smith, \textit{Epic Films: Casts, Credits and Commentary on over 250 Historical Spectacle Movies} (Jefferson, McFarland and co., 1991). On this topic generally, see by way of introduction Jon Solomon, \textit{The Ancient World in the Cinema} (1978; revised and expanded edition, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2001); Derek Elley, \textit{The Epic Film: Myth and History} (London, Routledge, 1984); Martin W. Winkler (ed.), \textit{Classics and Cinema} (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1991); Maria Wyke, n 14; Anja Wieber-Scariot, 'Film', \textit{Der Neue Pauly} 13 (Stuttgart, 1999), cols 1133-1141 (with bibliography).
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its course. The genre seemed tired and the financial failure of Joseph Mankiewicz’s *Cleopatra* (1963) understandably discouraged emulation. Samuel Bronston’s *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) was understood as the end of the era, a farewell to all that ‘pomp and poppycock’. *Gladiator* (2000; directed by Ridley Scott) and its successors would seem to indicate that there is nothing which cannot be revived in cinema. At the beginning of the 21st century, we seem particularly ‘blessed’. Maximus has saved Rome from Commodus, mercifully dying before he came to see how short-lived was the optimistic ending penned by his script writers, Achilles has landed (with nice intertextual nods in the direction of Normandy on D-Day and Private Ryan’s nervous comrades), Alexander and Hannibal are on the way. On May 17th, 2004, the Macquarie Ancient History Association arranged a

Commander James Hay in 1909 precisely because its popular appeal was, to his way of thinking, the wrong one.) This subject requires another paper rather than a footnote.

17 It was not the first time. It seemed to have run out of steam by the end of the First World War (Solomon, n 16, 8) There was another slump in the late 1930s and early 1940s (ibid., 11)

18 ‘Poppycock’: *New York Herald Tribune* 27 March, 1964 (I owe this reference to Wyke, n 14, 188 and 211, n 12)

The end of the era seemed apparent to Wyke, writing in the 1990s: “After its commercial and critical failure, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* has since become synonymous in cinema history with the fall of the Hollywood film industry’s own empire of Roman films”, making reference here to Elley, n 16, 18 and Smith, n 16, xix.

This did not, however, signal the end of cinematic interest in antiquity. That interest was simply taken up in Europe art house cinema (French, Italian and Greek). On this development, see the brief discussion of Wyke, n 14, 188-192 And, of course, the Italian ‘swords & sandals’ industry still flourished in the 1960s. On the ‘muscle man epics’, see Solomon, n 16, 307-322.

19 I wonder if the producers of *Troy* were cannily aware of the fact that their film would be screening during the lead-up to, and concurrently with, the 60th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the grand commemorations in France

Baz Luhrmann’s *Alexander*, which was to star Leonardo diCaprio and Nicole Kidman, seems to have fallen by the wayside for the moment. Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* soldiers on, with Colin Farrel as Alexander. It has, as I write, been released in the United States and is scheduled for release in Australia in early 2005. (A monograph on the production by one of the film’s historical advisers, Oxford’s Robin Lane Fox, has, however, already been published [*The Making of Alexander* (Oxford and London, R&L, 2004)] A *Hannibal the Conqueror*, starring Vin Diesel in the title role, has been spoken of for some time. Likewise an alternative version with a more African Hannibal starring Denzel Washington

By the time this article is being read Stone’s *Alexander* will have hit the screens. I shall restrict myself, however, to the action of 2004. The film has already caused ripples. News has appeared of a consortium of Greek lawyers bringing a legal action against Oliver Stone because of the film’s depiction of Alexander’s sexuality, a spokesman Yannis Varnakos claiming the “falsification of history”. There is nothing remote about antiquity! One of my colleagues, Jim O’Neil from the University of Sydney, was interviewed on the subject on SBS World News (9.30pm, December 2, 2004; my source for this item). I have no doubt that more brouhaha will follow.
private viewing of *Troy* — and invited the membership of Sydney University’s Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation. It was very well attended. Members of the two societies left with mixed feelings; some delighted, others outraged and others thinking it was simply not a good film. I leave the last issue to film critics. (Though I don’t think it will establish itself as one of cinema’s great moments, I found it easy enough to sit through, and, if I’m being honest, I would have to say I enjoyed it.) From the beginning, it was clear that the production had the benefit of academic advisers. Mycenaean was shown, in passing, to be “rich in gold”; its ‘Lion-Gate’ turned up (if in an unexpected position), and the horse-hair plumes together with Achilles’ hoplite helmet (more reminiscent of a classical Greek vase painting) reminded us of the way in which the Homeric story swims between the traditions of a preclassical world in which it had its origins and the imagination of the classical world in which it was celebrated through various media. The impressive choreography to some of the duels gave vision to the Homeric formula “swift-footed Achilles”. Brad Pitt’s Achilles positively dances through his death-dealing.

It was also immediately clear that these afore-mentioned ‘academic advisers’ had won a few, and lost just as many. I’ve been alerted to a number of websites which list the divergences and the bloopers. The Trojan llamas seem to have tickled the fancy of many. Others seem to have been most annoyed with Brad Pitt’s vaccination scar.

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20 The ways in which Achilles is described as ‘fleet of foot’ vary according to the demands of metre, but such references remain his most common and distinctive attribute. “By far the most commonly employed of the six epithets used only for Achilles are the three that refer to his speed. He is *podas okus* (thirty-one times), *podarkes* (twenty-one times), *podakeos* (eleven times) — “swift-footed Achilles” (Katherine Callen King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* [University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987], 3, with reference to Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* [Oxford, 1971] 92)

21 “Windy Ilium”, it was not. This is an environmental aspect of the locale oft commented upon. Perhaps the film’s enormous budget did not run to wind machines large enough. No matter. The stillness of the Trojan Plain formed a suitable curtain-raiser to the mayhem which follows.

22 I subsequently learnt from my colleague, Dr Ken Sheedy, that the expert advisor was Lesley Fitzton from the British Museum.

23 Thanks to Kylie Hilton, organizer of MAHA’s Trojan night, for this information. The llamas spotted in *Troy* seem to have caused mild but widespread amusement. Crossing the Dardanelles we are in ‘The Orient’; one exotic animal is as good as another. See, e.g., ‘Movie Bloopers’ (http://www.moviebloopers.com/) for ‘visitor-submitted’ bloopers. This website is careful to designate contributions as unverified where appropriate. Other sites can be found via a search for ‘movie bloopers’.

24 So it was with the glib critique of Jon Casimir in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH May 22-23, 2004 [48 Hours, 3]) This was a critique which could at most raise the odd smirk,
But, to return to more serious reception, the main criticism seems to be either “that it’s simply not Homer” or that “it’s not a consistent picture of the Late Bronze Age”. With regard to the first, there are, indeed, some major shocks which I won’t reveal here for those of you who haven’t yet seen it. The pleasure awaits you. But my own feeling is that the purists can be a little too precious about this. The film only claims to be “inspired” by the Iliad. And so it was. The gross liberties taken were not one of them greater than the liberties that might have been taken by an ancient Greek playwright. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and their colleagues were perfectly capable of shocking (deliberately shocking) adaptations. Contemplate the possibility that Medea killed her children for the first time in 431 BC. Electrifying stuff.25 Greek myths were not sacrosanct, and the Greek audiences were entertained by clever twists.26 So ought we, perhaps, approach the retelling of mythical events.

Everyone will have his or her own special gripes.27 For me, a major disappointment was the seeming sqeamishness in a screenplay designed for a

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25 The academic world is not as one on this, but it remains to my mind a distinct possibility. For references to earlier versions of the myth which do not have Medea kill her children, see, e.g., Denys L. Page, The Plays of Euripides Medea (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1938) xxi–xxv. The argument that Medea as infanticide was the creation of Euripides goes back to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, ‘Excurs zu Euripides’ Medea’, Hermes 15 (1880), 481–523, 486. For a bibliography to that ongoing debate, see Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akrata’, in J L. Clauss and S I. Johnston (eds), Medea (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1997) 44-70, 45 n.1. (Johnston herself is inclined to believe that the fifth-century authors inherited an infanticidal Medea from myth.)

26 They would have had no trouble with Kevin Kostner’s Robin Hood being given a Mauretanian companion who could be played appropriately by an Afro-American. There frequently comes a time when a legendary hero must speak to the needs of his or her contemporaries. And his/her contemporaries are the audience.

27 My colleague, Dr Blanche Menadier, who has considerable experience on the site and has fond memories of its sunsets, the sun sinking as it does into the sea, was one of those disturbed by the sun rising on the wrong side of the Greek tents. Just so, many patrons leapt from their theatre seats during the early scenes of Rudolph Maté’s The 300 Spartans (1962)
mass market that apparently is judged to thrive on violence (albeit being invited to question its value) but which, it seems, can’t be expected to entertain too many social challenges. This does indeed rob Achilles of much of the requisite characterization. The famous ‘wrath of Achilles’, nicely depicted in Brad Pitt’s challenge outside the walls of Troy, lacks much of its substance without more emphasis on the bond between the hero and Patrokles, the latter played here as a somewhat gormless but petulant and over-eager teenager. The Iliad does indeed have Briseis in Achilles’ bed at the time of Priam’s mission to ransom the body of Hector (Iliad 24.676), but that has nothing to do with what the Iliad portrays as the love of Achilles’ earthly life. (And let me be quite clear on this. As far as the text of the Iliad goes, I mean ‘love’ and nothing more — or less. The ancient audience could have coped with nuances which, it is apparently assumed, the target audience of this Hollywood blockbuster can not.)

The striking decision, of course, which removes the current production from the spirit of Homeric epic is the euhemerist approach. The narrative is rationalized, and made very much ‘of this earth’. The gods are present as statues and as figures to whom the characters choose to pray and on whom they pin false hopes. Gone are the deities who appear to mortals in various ways.

28 The film is rated R for “graphic violence and some sexuality/nudity.”

29 The fact that a Graeco-Roman readership/audience could accept the fact of a passionate bond between two men, such as Scipio Aemilianus and C. Laelius, bound as they were by “chains of love” (Valerius Maximus Memorable Deeds and Sayings 8.8.1), and not read into that what the 20th-century western European mind immediately would, is one of those things which stymies the attempts of those who would impose on other cultures their contemporary expectations and definitions. See, on this, David Halperin, ‘How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality’ GLQ A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 6.1 (2000), 87-123 (repackaged in How to Do the History of Homosexuality (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002).

I have said, in the text above, “this Hollywood blockbuster” because it seems to me that the direction of Touchstone Pictures’ King Arthur allows the affection between Arthur and Lancelot to act as a counterpoint to the burgeoning relationship between Arthur and Guinevere. And from all the advance hubbub (see above, note 19), it seems that the forthcoming Alexander will dwell on the affection between the king and Hephaestion.

30 And what an inspired rationalization of [the myth of] Achilles’ heel! Again, I leave for those of you yet to see the film to be brought up to scratch.

31 This is not the mark of a shallow production. The reverential recreation of Euripides’ Troades by Michael Cacoyannis (1971) similarly dispensed with the crucial prologue delivered by Poseidon and Athene, consigning their lines to an anonymous (almost journalistic) voice-over during the film’s opening scenes Cacoyannis presumably felt that the film had more impact if its characters had their feet planted firmly on the ground and the audience was unable to seek escape from the unpalatable judgments on humankind in the thought of divine intervention.
guises to accelerate the action when required, who slap warriors around the head or who receive the odd nick from a hero’s weapon. Absent are those gods who can ensure that a hero’s time has come or who can whisk a defeated favourite to safety. A hero worsted in battle in this film must rely on human assistance. This ‘grounding’ of the drama prompts the archaeologically-minded to hope for some verisimilitude in the material setting of the story; and they want to see it set in the thirteenth century. They are disappointed. The ships seem to be based on those one might have seen in the Aegean in the eighth century; coins that had not yet been invented are put onto the eyes of dead heroes and sixth- or fifth-century-inspired kouroi appear as statues in the halls of Troy. Again, I cannot confess to getting too worked up about this. Or even being particularly concerned. Laying aside the possible historicity of the Trojan war, the legend (which inspired the film) is a palimpsest of imagination(s). From traditions that were carried in oral performance, the

This is not, then, shallow. It simply avoids a challenge. Perhaps it was thought that the cinematic Lord of the Rings trilogy had too recently scooped the pool on supernatural interventions. Tolkien would probably have been the last to take satisfaction in the thought that his legacy had led to the removal of the gods from the Plain of Troy.

It might also be observed that the tastes of a given generation rule. Even in the ancient world there were times when people preferred their epic mundane. The Trojan War ‘diaries’ of Dares and Dictys Cretensis neglected the gods.

32 Again, I leave it for those who have not yet seen the film to discover how Paris escapes his encounter with Menelaus.

33 I refer here to the interesting article by Mark Rose (‘Troy’s Fallen!’ Archaeology Online (July/August 2004): http://www.archaeology.org/online/reviews/troy/index.html): “Troy is a violent film. Homer’s great poem the Iliad is cut and hacked mercilessly in it, while the evidence of the archaeological record is helpless before its onslaught.”

34 A ceramic depiction of an 8th-century Greek ship, together with a still from the film showing its influence, is helpfully given in the article cited above.

35 “[Instead of] some unity in the archaeological setting, with things matching what we know about material culture in the Aegean world ca. 1200 B.C., ... we get a chronological trainwreck.” (Rose, n.33)

36 On the possible historicity of the war, the bibliography is long. And not only in print. Another sign of popular interest in the ancient world has been the success of television documentaries. On this subject, the BBC series, In Search of the Trojan War, hosted by Michael Wood, was one of the most popular. (Wood’s work was published in book format, under the same title, in 1985. Its date, of course, means that it has been overtaken in many ways by the spectacular finds of the more recent archaeological work on the site.) Its impact might have been responsible for the insertion of a reference to the Hittites into the dialogue of Troy. The popular appetite for such fare is obviously judged to be still strong — and the more recent contributions have had the benefit of the insights generated by the international team of archaeologists working at Troy since 1988. The principal discovery, to my mind, was the discernment through magnetic imaging of a Late Bronze Age ditch indicating that Troy VI had a lower town which might have housed as many 8,000 people. The History Channel put to air in May 2004 a documentary “The True Story of Troy” which features amongst other things interviews with Troy’s current director of excavations Manfred Korfmann (who defends the historicity of the war). National Geographic released,
epic itself took shape in the eighth century.\textsuperscript{37} Anachronisms occur within it.\textsuperscript{38} And so many of the indelible images we carry of Achilles and Hector, of Ajax and Odysseus, Andromache and Helen, are the products of classical-era art. The legend, as I remarked above, does not seem to me to belong to a single era.

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in April 2004, a DVD \textit{Beyond the Movie: Troy} which features an interview with, \textit{inter alia}, C. Brian Rose (a co-director of current excavations at Troy) who elaborates on the archaeological evidence for two destruction levels at the site in the Late Bronze Age, the second indicative of an attack. For a critique of these two documentaries, see the above-mentioned article by Mark Rose. There is also a commentary by C. Brian Rose, \textquote{Assessing the Evidence for the Trojan Wars} on the Archaeological Institute of America\textquote{s website. For glimpses of the bardic tradition, see the portrait of Demodocus in \textit{Odyssey} Bk. VIII (or Phemius in Bk. I [and his unhappy fate in Bk. XXII]). The role that this oral tradition may have played in the composition of the epics has taken on a (controversial) life of its own since the contributions of Milman Parry and his son, Adam. Again, no space for all that here; but, for a response to Adam Parry, see G.S. Kirk, \textit{Homer and the Oral Tradition} (Cambridge, 1976), especially chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{37} The hunt for \textquote{post-Mycenaean} elements in the Homeric text has been an academic staple. Not all of the resulting \textquote{finds} have stood the test of time or archaeological discoveries. The \textquote{Homerian Problem} (or \textquote{Homerian Question}, that long debate between the \textquote{unitarians} who subscribe the argument of a singular \textquote{Homerian} composition and those who argue for multiple authorships) is too vast a topic to be dealt with here. An exploration of that \textquote{question} will take us back \textquote{beyond} Ulrich von Wilamowitz, whom we met above in note 25 (and who, by the way, thought of the \textit{Iliad} itself as a \textquote{wretched patchwork} \textquote{[ein ible Flickwerk]} of C.G. Thomas (ed.), \textit{Homer\textquote{s} History: Mycenaean or Dark Age?} (New York \textit{et al.}, 1970), 3. For a standard list of \textquote{late elements} in the epics, discounting those that can be dismissed as even later interpolations (but which are just as important to our reception of the legend) — that is to say, \textquote{late} elements which bring us down to the eighth century, see T.B.L. Webster, \textit{From Mycenae to Homer} (London, 1958), 208-223. This is enough to establish the patchwork nature of the epic tradition.


The debate has moved on. Scholars can recognize the Homeric epics \textquote{as the products of a creative mind}, while acknowledging the foundation base of epic tales \textquote{told and retold for audiences in the Aegean world in the period which followed the collapse of the Mycenaean world of the Late Bronze Age ... passed from generation to generation by singers, or bards.} The \textquote{period which followed} extended for centuries. And the grand product was the depiction of \textquote{a largely imagined heroic world}. For an example of a more recent reading of the material, see Elizabeth Minchin, \textit{Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory in the Iliad and the Odyssey} (Oxford University Press, 2001) — and for the context of the above quotations, see 1-8 (Therein will also be found a useful bibliography of relevant scholarship.)
One aspect of these popular adaptations which intrigue me is the fear that the attention span of a modern audience (even one committed to a three-hour movie) will fail if the action takes place over an extended period of time.\textsuperscript{39} “My how ten years fly ...”, said one member of the MAHA audience. Similarly after *Gladiator*, patrons would leave with the impression that the 12-year reign of the emperor Commodus was over in a matter of months.\textsuperscript{40} Longer, at least, than this Trojan war. Is the illusion more reprehensible in the coverage of an historical period? Perhaps. But *Gladiator* had different aims.

\textsuperscript{39} *Troy* actually runs for only 163 minutes.

\textsuperscript{40} The idea is entrenched. If *Gladiator* had a particular source (i.e., for its historical narrative) it would seem to have been Samuel Bronston’s *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) — though Jon Solomon (n 16, 93) points to other sources — *Cleopatra, Demetrius and the Gladiators, Fellini’s Satyricon, Spartacus* (plus others) Solomon and I are being ironic here (just in case you wondered). Franzoni himself speaks of his initial inspiration being Daniel P. Mannix’s *Those About to Die* which he traded, back in the 1970s, with an Australian backpacker whilst they were staying in a palm-frond hut on the banks of the Tigris. And amongst the works used while brainstorming *Gladiator* in Rome in 1995, he cites the *Historia Augusta* (John Soriano, WGA.ORG’s Exclusive Interview with David Franzoni (http://www.wga.org/craft/interviews/franzoni2001.html) It is best not to be glib, as I was being above, about the research undertaken for this enterprise. In many ways, *The Fall* served for those who created *Gladiator* as a negative model — for the reasons outlined above in note 18 (though it is interesting to note in this context that it has been said in the industry that “Anthony Mann’s intelligent film was lost on most sixties audiences” [Landau, n 16, 21]); it is to be hoped that intelligence is not to be equated with commercial ineptitude. The inspiration for *Gladiator* was as wide-ranging as its creative team was varied. The director, Ridley Scott, was first ‘hooked’ on the project by a copy of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s painting *Pollice Verso* (1872), a both learned and imaginative evocation of the arena. Scott sought historicist verisimilitude: “with history [i.e., as opposed to science fiction], your challenge, really, is to see how accurate you can be. It’s to do with research and choosing the right people: the right production designer, the right costume designer, the right armor, and so on. And of course you have to do massive research.” (Landau, n 16, 28)

It is clear that the accuracy sought was with regard to some form of cultural reality (Scott’s principal concern was with what is was like to be a gladiator [ibid, 34]); the team was not concerned with the finicky details of *histoire événementielle*. Indeed, in one version of the history of the script, the story’s placement in the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus seems almost to have been an afterthought (ibid., 31–32).

Yet the adaptation of material is infectious. Even the academic Solomon refers to the focus of Bronston’s film as “the brief reign of the demented Commodus” (83). To be fair, Solomon is making a comparison with the vast sweep of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* — though it underlines the seduction of both films’ swift coverage of events. Commodus’ reign followed a succession of particularly long principates. Trajan’s was nineteen years; Hadrian’s twenty-one; Antoninus’ twenty-three; and Aurelius’ nineteen Still, Commodus was no flash-in-the-pan.

For teachers seeking more background on the film, I have received notice of Martin M. Winkler (ed.), *Gladiator: Film and History* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), of which I have not yet seen a copy. The book comprises ten essays by a number of authors, including a chapter on the role of an academic consultant by the academic consultant herself, Kathleen Coleman.
And is the image of Rome which the audience takes away seriously misleading? I do not think so.

The collapsing of time is even more pronounced in Touchstone Pictures’ King Arthur (directed by Antoine Fuqua, 2004) where the kaleidoscopic images (which, it is announced at the beginning of the film, draw on “recently discovered archeological evidence”[!]) suggest a world that comprises items from the first decade of the fifth century through to the first two decades of the sixth. The film is set in the mid-fifth century. It opens with a Sarmatian prelude dated to AD 452, whilst the main action purports to take place “fifteen years later”. All the same, the final product reproduces a world of uncertainties such as might have existed while Roman imperial authority was in retreat and new forces, both social and national, were appearing. Enough academic uncertainty surrounds the date(s) of the Roman pullout from Britain and the advent(s) of the Saxons, not to mention the dates that might be assigned to an historical Arthur (for those who would persist in the quest for this man), to excite and sanction artistic license. There are a number of nuances which the writer, David Franzoni again, must have included for sheer self-satisfaction rather than in the expectation that they would be picked up by the majority of film-goers. Having Arthur a follower of Pelagius’ doctrine of free will suited well the atmosphere of proud, embattled and doggedly defiant morality under stress in a frontier province. And Britain, of course, lays special claim to Pelagius. This was something built into the script. Franzoni envisaged Arthur as “a tragic Roman mercenary with a weakness for humanist philosophy, whose lot it was to be stuck in Britain while his empire fell around him.” But having Bishop Germanus of Auxerre turn up as the legate

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41 We shall not dwell on the Saxon use of armour-piercing cross-bows, and pass in silence over the Xena-like warrior women of the Britons, Guinevere to the fore. Late Antiquity has been omitted from the recently released NSW HSC Syllabus. The final Historical Period closes in AD 352 and even in the Preliminary Course the ‘Ancient Societies’ option of Roman Britain lowers the curtain in AD410. Yet teachers are likely to be asked questions by students about the background to this film. In fact, the Romans left, returned and left again The chronology is unclear. (A selection of sources in translation can be found in S. Ireland’s Roman Britain. A Sourcebook [Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1986] 152–174.) But as late as 446 (possibly later), the Britons were appealing — unsuccessfully, as it turned out — to Aëtius, Rome’s generalissimo in the West. And the enemy at that time seem to be “the loathsome hordes of Scots and Picts” (Gildas, De Excidio Britanniae [On the Destruction of Britain], 19–26) Saxon depredations had been felt earlier, but the late 440s are generally accepted as the time for a significant Saxon arrival My colleague Dr Andrew Gillett, to whom I defer in these matters (and upon whose knowledge I have lent for much of the above), points out to me that a useful survey of sources (and the contradictory evidence) can be found in Michael E. Jones’ The End of Roman Britain (1996) and Christopher Snyder’s The Age of Tyrants (1998).

from ‘Rome’ was a nice touch, which is playful and provocative for those in
the know and satisfying for some.\footnote{It is a vision that would have disturbed Germanus' hagiographer Constantius but a vision in keeping with the darkness of this interpretation. Dr Gillett points out to me that Germanus is important in St Patrick hagiography; thus his name is likely to be more familiar to a Celtic audience than to other theatre-goers.} Again, that is presuming we lay to one
side quibbles about the strict chronology.\footnote{One of the few fixed dates in this period is that of Germanus’ anti-Pelagian mission to
Britain. It was 429 (Prosper’s Chronicle ad ann 429 [Patrologia Latina L1 594-45 (= Epitoma chronicon, Th Mommsen [ed.], Chronica minora I, MGH AA 9 [Berlin 1892], c. 1301 [s a 429]]). Of course, Germanus, according to his biographer Constantius, made another later trip to Britain — and this trip (which has been dated by some c. 446) was also
directed against Pelagianism, a renewed spread of the ‘perversity’ (Constantius, de vita
Germani, 25). And just to complicate matters chronologically, Constantius, for what his
evidence is worth, has Germanus on his first trip assisting with resistance to the Picts and Saxons (ibid, 17-18)} And, again, that is not an allusion which Franzoni could have expected the mass audience to appreciate. It is
there because he was either aiming at some sort of credible picture of late
antique Britain or because he was engaging in a form of dialogue with
cadme. Having Arthur addressed by Germanus as Artorius Castus (the
epigraphically-attested name of an officer who served in Britain in the third
century) is a wink at desperate academic attempts to seek out a Roman
historicity for Arthur. Franzoni professes a certain contempt for (some)
academics\footnote{“Historians — they’re just drunk idiots in tweed” (n 47). The film credits give John
Matthews as a consultant. That’s John Matthews, the author (based in Oxford), Celtacist and
enthusiast for the Arthurian legend, not John Matthews, who has published widely on
Roman late antiquity, formerly Oxonian and currently the Chair of Classics at Yale.} — though in the context it is clear he’s talking about critics rather
than collaborators and that pronouncement may be part and parcel of the brash
and breezy Malibu manner he seems to like to effect in interviews.\footnote{Franzoni’s initial inspiration for his portrayal of Arthur, which must date back almost three
decades, was indeed academically-based. (“He spent whole days in the library”, gasps his
interviewer [n 42].) He chanced upon “a graduate student dissertation that set out to prove
the Roman origins of the Arthur legend.” Viewing the creative mélange which emerged, the work that sprang to my mind was Jack
Lindsay’s Arthur and His Times (London, Frederick Muller Ltd., 1958), a work still worth
citing because of the way in which it stands apart from the foibles of the Arthur-industry
which followed in subsequent decades (and because it was so little cited in the scholarship
which followed). Here was a book that set out in great earnest to retrieve in a relentlessly
empiricist way the harsh ‘feel’ of those times. For an excellent appraisal of Lindsay’s
contribution, see Stephen Knight, ‘Jack Lindsay, medievalist’, in Bernard Smith (ed.),
Culture & History. Essays presented to Jack Lindsay (Sydney, Hale & Ironmonger, 1984)
269-281, esp 269-273. And Lindsay had ferreted out Pelagius (and devoted considerable
space to Germanus) For Knight on Lindsay on Pelagius and Arthur, see the work cited
(272-73): “This much forgotten early Briton (c. 400 AD) fathered a heresy and stood up to
figures no less than St Jerome and St Augustine. An ascetic, hating riches above all,
Pelagius held that man could perfect himself through good works and indomitable will. By
His reliance on Germanus, he anticipated the Arthurian vision.”} What is
clear is that the writer’s mind is focussed on the sombre present (Vietnam, Iraq and the decline of America) which he sees echoed in the past. Gadamer would have understood Franzoni. A theme emerges. Stripping away medieval accretions and subsequent romanticism allows the portrayal of perceived harsh realities, and antiquity becomes a place not for retreat but reflection.

Some readers will already feel that I am too undemanding in my expectations of the popular media. I realise that reactions are likely to be highly personal but I am actually more rattled by novels, particularly when written by novelists whose intention, like that of the historian, is ‘to get it right’. This tradition has in the past been represented by the likes of Robert Graves, Mary

themselves humans close the gap between sinfulness and salvation, the gap that orthodoxy could only bridge through God’s authoritarian grace. Just as Arthur symbolizes the military self-defence of a community, Pelagius represents a spiritual self-fulfilment Lindsay presents both men essentially as Lukácsian ‘world-historical individuals’, ideal types of a supra-individual movement, tokens of a struggle of humans in history against their limiting conditions.”

That is not to say that Lindsay wasted much time on or was obsessed by ‘the historical Arthur’. His focus was broader. For the title of the book, he can be forgiven, as can Touchstone and Franzoni. Fewer patrons would have forked out the money for *Ambrosius Aurelianus*. On the latter, whom we find in Gildas, see Lindsay, 68, 186, 195, 211-16, 229 et al. It takes a great strength of will to write on this place and epoch without mentioning Arthur. For an example of such restraint, see Peter Brown’s thumbnail sketch of Britain at the time in *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1996, 2nd edition 2003) 125–29 (‘An Age of Tyrants: The End of Roman Britain’)

By the way, in the discussion above, I have written as if Franzoni was responsible for all that we see on the screen. This, it hardly needs to be said, creates the wrong impression. As Franzoni himself acknowledges, insists and regrets, cinema is a collaborative venture. The parallel, as traced in the production of *Gladiator*, is instructive: “Story and script development for *Gladiator* was a fluid and dynamic process that went on for several years, right up until the last frames were edited. This was in part because of Ridley Scott’s highly visual approach to movie-making. Nothing in the script is set in stone, and what finally ends up on the screen is wholly dependent on what he sees – first in the story-boarding process and later through his camera. The final screen image is a product of many factors that evolve along the way: locations, production design, casting choices, weather conditions, and a thousand other variables.” (Landau, n 16, 30)

Read both interviews cited above (notes 40 and 42). In the Soriano interview, Franzoni said of *Gladiator*, “the movie is about us. It’s not just about ancient Rome, it’s about America, maybe not today exactly, but 100 years from now.”

‘Rattled’? Is that the right word? I have thought long and hard over the sensation I’m wanting to convey and am dissatisfied with all the phrases that have come to me. ‘Unmanned’ has a nice Homeric ring – but isn’t suitable for the 21st-century. Still, I like it. It catches the sense in which I feel, when confronted by the historical novel, an awareness of my own inadequacies (on many levels) and of the inadequacies of the historical discipline. The confrontation calls forth uncomfortably the need for self- and professional-definition. (I refer back to note 1.)
Renault and Gore Vidal, to name but three (with no particular critical assessment intended in the names I’ve omitted here).\(^{49}\) Chief amongst our contemporaries is Colleen McCullough (to whom allusion was made above), a major benefactor of Roman studies and one with a formidable grasp of the source material. Her work on Roman history is a labour of love (“I love what I do with an abiding passion”); it is carried out despite her publishers.\(^{50}\) Again,

\(^{49}\) I include these three here because of my recollection of their statements on ‘getting it right’. Robert Graves opened his \textit{I Claudius} (1934; Penguin edition, 1941) with a note discussing the values of Roman coinage alluded to, and “military, legal, and other technical terms” used. A recognition of the research undertaken was important to all three. Stung by criticism of \textit{I Claudius} to the effect that he had merely pasted together the accounts of Tacitus and Suetonius and expanded the result with his own ‘vigorous fancy’, Graves opened \textit{Claudius the God and his wife Messalina} (1934; Penguin edition, 1943) with a list of the twenty-plus classical authors of whose works he had availed himself: “Few incidents here given are wholly unsupported by historical authority of some sort or other and I hope none are historically incredible. No character is invented.” (7-8).

Gore Vidal, in his \textit{Julian} (1964; Panther edition, 1972), alluded to Graves’ “somewhat irritable preface”. Vidal was more inclined to be flippant. “Unfortunately, I have not read as much as all that”. But he refers his readers, who might otherwise be inclined to think that he has read only Ammianus Marcellinus, or even Gibbon, to a ‘Partial Bibliography’ (in which he meticulously separates ancient authors from modern). He also supplies a brief discussion of late antique currency — and lets it be known, by way of gratitude expressed, that he worked in the libraries of the American Academy at Rome and the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (ix-x) Vidal clearly wanted it to be known that he had striven for accuracy, though he was characteristically willing to be confrontingly playful. “Though I have written a novel, not a history, I have tried to stay with the facts, only occasionally shifting things around. For instance, it is unlikely that Priscus joined Julian in Gaul, but it is useful to the narrative to have him there.” (It is the attraction of the latter option which interests us here.)

Mary Renault also customarily supplied ‘Author’s Notes’. Late in life, in 1981, being interviewed for a BBC television documentary, she was asked how she responded to the suggestion that her ability to look into Ancient Greece was evidence of some sort of psychic power: “No, I don’t feel that; I think it is mostly hard work.” She admitted, however, to be open to the idea of telepathy with the past. “And you know sometimes I have guessed that something was so, and found the evidence later which proved it.” In December, 1983, on her deathbed, she received a letter from a friend telling her that he had overheard a dinner-table report of a man “of merely scientific education” being advised by the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford that he could best gain insight into the Hellenic world by reading Renault: “perfect for historical accuracy, perfect for atmosphere.” She is said to have lain back on her pillows, saying “That really bucks me up.” It was, it is reported, the last thing she ever read; David Sweetman, \textit{Mary Renault A Biography} (Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, San Diego and London, 1993) 297-98; 303. For Renault’s views on writing history in novels, see ‘The Fiction of History’, \textit{London Magazine} (London, 1979).


On ‘getting it right’: “Unless like Thorton Wilder one is prepared (brilliantly, I hasten to add) to assassinate history by having Julius Caesar married to Pompeia at the time of his...
the public impact is strong. As mentioned above, a dialogue between the novelist and the Premier of NSW, before a crowded Sydney Town Hall, formed something of a climactic finale to this year’s Sydney Writers Week (23/5/04).\footnote{fig:1.1} This, and the accompanying press interest, has to be a good thing for the public appreciation of our subject. Why, then, am I rattled by the genre? Is that the two media are just too close?\footnote{fig:1.2} The texture of the book is, to my mind, richer than that of film. The reader can linger on items which spark interest, and can revisit with relative ease.\footnote{fig:1.3} But by the closeness of the two media I don’t simply mean the printed word and book format. I mean that the historical novelist who aims for veracity is exploring the past in a way not all dissimilar to the way in which an historian might interrogate it.\footnote{fig:1.4}

There are those who say that all History is myth — and there’s more that can be argued in favour of that proposition than I’m comfortable with.\footnote{fig:1.5} But I

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dead, one cannot as a writer get one’s teeth into an historical subject and remain faithful to history itself without telling a grand tale at groaning length.” (\textit{loc. cit.}) “[\textit{The}] period of pure research was enormously exhilarating. All research if properly tackled is at base nothing more nor less than detective work; with extreme care and caution one assembles the facts, then one proceeds to make deductions. At the same time one must meticulously preserve one’s detachment, one’s intellectual flexibility; it is fatal to the truth and virtue of what one is researching if one allows oneself to be swayed or skewed by treasured hypotheses which fly in the face of facts” (\textit{ibid.}, 2-3). Could one ask more of an historian?

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Bob Carr, always an enthusiast of history (and with a special interest in Marcus Aurelius), is also a major fan of Colleen McCullough. On April 4th, 2004, he wrote to the American Senator (and former Republican speaker of the US House of Representatives), Newt Gingrich, to encourage the latter to urge McCullough to continue her Roman enterprises and focus her talents on the High Empire, the period of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines (\textit{SMH} n 50, ‘Empire Building’). At around the same time, we might note the high success of a number of Continuing Education programs run by both the University of Sydney and Macquarie University. On August 1st, 2004, the Australian National Maritime Museum in conjunction with the Macquarie Ancient History Association, the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation, and the Society of Mediterranean Archaeology ran a symposium open to the public on the Maritime World of Antiquity/Ancient Fleets of the Mediterranean, to a capacity crowd, turning away disappointed late-comers at the door. The Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens (Sydney University) and the other associations mentioned above run regular, well-attended public lectures; and at the University of New South Wales on April 1st, 2004 a public lecture on the “Elgin Marbles”, presenting a case for their return was attended by (literally) hundreds and opened by a former Prime Minister.

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Fear of the “proximate Other”!

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My colleague Associate Professor Alanna Nobbs disagrees, feeling that the visual media leave the more entrenched images in the popular mind — so I guess this is a very subjective response.

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And, for McCullough’s views on that, see below

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The definition of Myth is in itself a slippery exercise. I guess I have in mind the tendency to historical revisionism which can be seen as ‘appropriate’ to its time, the re-fashioning of the past to suit the present. There are other ways of approaching ‘mythification’. Nicola
have no doubt that Colleen McCullough would strongly disagree. Novelists, however, seek a different kind of truth. Where there are gaps in the evidence they have to fill them (though often, as in Colleen McCullough’s case, with informed speculation); they can’t admit to ignorance. The novelist is more often than not omniscient. Historians, of course, often do the same, but more


And then there is the well-established suspicion that History is the construction of those with the wherewithal to control the past; see the delightful pronouncement on the subject by Catherine Morland in Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey (chapter 14) “But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in... I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me... it is very tiresome; and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention.”

McCullough is concerned to convey the reality of the ancient world. She speaks of her “obsessive-compulsive, anal-retentive perfectionism”. Her study is not confined to the library. In this regard, she refers to 17,700 km drive she and her husband made through Turkey following the path of L. Licinius Lucullus.

Let’s take an historically-pivotal moment as covered by an historian. Summing up the historical impact of Julius Caesar, H.H Scullard (From the Gracchi to Nero ([5th edition, London, 1982], 158) suggests that “Caesar must have realized that the Republic could not be revivified in its old form... Caesar’s mind must have been moving towards some form of monarchy as the only practical solution of the constitutional problem...” In those words, Scullard, in as grudging a manner as he can (and papering over the fact as much as an historian can), acknowledges that we have no evidence for what was in Caesar’s mind “But an outraged group of nobles... prevented Caesar from revealing to the world the solution that he would have decided to apply...”. With his application of the word ‘must’ (twice), Scullard has indicated, as he is obliged as an historian to do, that we do not know. (And for a strong counter, suggesting that Scullard’s guess might not be the correct one, see Dexter Hoyos’ article in this journal (“‘Imperial Caesar?’ in Ancient Society. Resources for Teachers [now Ancient History. Resources for Teachers] 93 (1979) 134-157).

Of course, a novel need not be omniscient with regard to major ‘historical’ developments, if it chooses protagonists other than the main ‘historical’ players. In Steven Saylor’s Catilina’s Riddle (New York, Ivy Books, 1993), a novel in the ‘Roma Sub Rosa’ series, although L. Sergius Catilina is a major character, the novel’s consciousness is of that of a totally fictitious character, Gordianus One is left, like Gordianus and many modern historians, myself included, not being entirely sure what happened. Colleen McCullough did not have that luxury — though one person’s burden might be another’s luxury (see below, next note).

But herein lies the great divide. It is the omniscience of a novelist that is antithetical to the necessity of an historian’s acknowledged uncertainties. For the historian, the past (or its record) is a text which can be read in many ways; and the ‘text’ is incomplete. And any single item is the site of a multiplicity of possible interpretations. Postmodernity is uncertainty, however vigorously asserted! (Or should I say, “however assertively ex/pressed”? Or is that “ex/pressed”?) I should also acknowledge that during the composition of this paper, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) died.
subtly (read deceptively). And if they get caught out (for not being subtle enough?), they are castigated. But let’s take one step back from the irony. I do solemnly believe that if historians do not play by the rules of evidence, the intellectual discipline of History is compromised.

This is a distinction of which Colleen McCullough is very much aware and with regard to which she is very much in sympathy with the hamstrung historian. But if I read the elaborations which her artistic licence allows her

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It is interesting that, when Colleen McCullough temporarily abandoned history for myth, in the acclaimed Song of Troy (1998), she abandoned omniscience for multiple voices. The polyphonic presentation of that tale wonderfully captured the world(s) of perspective, allowing a polysemous past. It is hard not only for the historical novelist but the historian to do the same. Some postmodern histories have attempted it, reducing the voice of the narrator to that of one among many or dispensing with it (or seeming to dispense with it) altogether, but they exude the character of experiment and will, I suspect, fail to satisfy a readership eager for the unifying overlay of the historian’s judgement, which the latter must, if s/he is honest, continue to frustrate by frequent demurrals. For examples, see Richard Price’s Alabi’s World (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), in which four voices — the author’s prose, materials taken from Moravian writings, materials from Dutch, and words spoken by Saramukas (sometimes with the original language juxtaposed with a translation) — are constantly interspersed (indicated by different typefaces); and Paul Carter’s Lost Subjects (Sydney, Historic Houses Trust, 1999). (These were drawn to my attention by my colleague, Dr Marnie Hughes-Warrington.) The former of these (i.e. Price’s work) might be said not to differ very markedly from any history wherein substantial segments from the source material is injected into the ‘narrative’, allowing the ancient sources to speak for themselves, the same editorial control being exercised in the process of selection. In this case, however, it is the use of different typefaces which shatters the reader’s sense of harmony.

Cinema, more than the novel, has the opportunity to escape into a contrived ignorance with regard to an historical character’s thoughts because it so often casts the audience as observers. It is an opportunity of which cinema, by tradition, rarely avails itself. Clues to motivation are expected and customarily provided; cf. Robin Lane Fox’s forecast [in 19] 157–169) of the film Alexander’s exploration of its protagonist’s psychology: “Whatever did Alexander feel? A film-script has to invent, but it reminds historians of what is missing when their texts are such matter-of-fact statements and proper nouns” (169). A film (and, of course, novel) can, however, as it seems Alexander will, leave questions hanging.

“the novel is an excellent way to explore a different time. It permits the writer to climb inside the characters’ heads and wander the maze of their thoughts and emotions: a luxury not permitted to professional historians, but one that can render understandable events that are otherwise inexplicable, mysterious or incongruous.” (The October Horse [Century, London, 2002] 789).

But McCullough also casts a sly and knowing side-glance at those in academe: “It is a mistake to think that the historical novelist is alone in fleshing out his or her characters to the dimensions of living human beings; the professional historian, constrained as he or she must be by those cautionary phrases “It is thought that” and “We must hypothesize that” and “Very possibly” and “Fairly improbably”, also succumbs to the lure of flesh and blood, tooth and talon,” (Reflections, 3–4).
to weave into her creations, they are often so close to something one would read in one of Plutarch’s Lives, that you have difficulty in remembering which was which.\(^{59}\)

Does it matter? I think it does. It distinguishes the historian’s craft (or am I allowed to say mission?) from that of the creative artist.

There is another side to this. The trade might run two ways. The learned novelist can often offer hypotheses with possible solutions to riddles left unsolved by the academics. Colleen McCullough’s vast reading is often employed in ways that she does not advertise. She is closely familiar not just with the major authors one associates with the Roman Republic, but with those less visited. From that base, she draws interpretations that will often serve as useful speculation for the historians to consider. Let me take one small example. The late first century AD teacher of rhetoric, Quintilian, preserves a fragment of a speech made by Marcus Caecilius Rufus in 58 BC at a time when Caelius was threatened with prosecution for a number of alleged crimes, amongst them, the attempted murder of Clodia, one of the prominent Claudii Pulchri Caelius called Clodia a quadrantaria Clytaenmestra (a Clytaemnestræ worth a quadrans), in the dining room a Coan, in the bedroom, Nola (Quintil. 8.6.52). The bronze quadrans was base currency. The allusion is to Clodia’s (alleged) meretriciousness and lack of worth. The cruel epithet stuck (Plutarch, Cicer. 29) The allusion to Clytaenmestra was to a murderous wife. (Clodia’s husband, Q Metellus Celer, had died unexpectedly.) The Greek island of Cos was synonymous with silk and its diaphanous garments synonymous with titillation. Nola was a Campanian town famously resistant to siege. The suggestion is that Clodia was a ‘tease’ Quintilian registered these figures of speech as allegoria He tantalizes us, however, by saying that these examples have such obscure elements that they can be labelled aenigma, that is to say, they work at one (obvious) level but have an extra twist which needs to be explained to those not in-the-know. I have myself essayed a possible explanation of Nola reference. It was an allusion to a military failing of Clodia’s father who had been once commissioned with the siege of Nola in which rôle he had been unsuccessful (in triclinio Coam, in cubiculo Nolam: Lesbia and the other Clodia, Liverpool Classical Monthly 6.6 [1981], 149-154). It was a slap-in-the-face to her whole family. But that still leaves quadrantaria Clytaenmestra. The reference to Clytaemnestræ’s homicide was obvious; there is nothing enigmatic about it (Quintilian has clearly signalled both parts of Caecilius’ attack on Clodia as ‘enigmatic’). McCullough has Metellus Celer die in his bath. That could well be the answer. Colleen, of course, knowing the source material as well as she does, will not supply an impossible or even implausible augmentation. This makes her creations all the more seductive. (See the following note.)

Similarly, a thoughtfully produced film can suggest to the historian ideas worth pondering (Robin Lane Fox, n 19, 157, 168).

\(^{59}\) Robert Graves’ decision to have Agrippa Postumus escape execution upon the death of Augustus (and to reappear later where the ancient accounts have his freedman Clemens impersonate him) is so inventive as to remain memorable as an intriguing hypothesis. (You’ll find it in I Claudius, chapter 18. For the ancient sources, see Tacitus Annals 2.39-40; Suetonius Tiberius 25 and Cassius Dio 57.16.3f.) But what about the report that, upon Caligula’s death, Claudius “found the poison chest which had belonged to Livia” and had it dumped a mile off the coast from Ostia: “a minute or two later thousands of dead fish came floating up” It sounds like something you might have read in Suetonius, doesn’t it? Did you? No. You read it in Robert Graves, Claudius the God (London 1934) chapter 6.

We might return here to the contrary opinions of my colleague Professor Nobbs (see above, note 53). Her own view is that the audience at the cinema are left with the image presented to them by the producers, directors, actors and set-designers. Readers of the better historical
Right on cue (whilst I was composing this piece), with a timing as impeccable as any novelist could supply, two tutorial papers arrived on my desk in which an item of Colleen McCullough's has for the first time (that I've picked up) entered the historical record. In an exercise on the wives of Pompey the Great and on the way in which these unions illustrate Pompey's shifting political alliances, it was reported to me that Pompey's third wife, Mucia, mother of his only three surviving children, had been previously married to Marius jnr. (cos. 82). Subsequently, three more student papers turned up bearing this interesting prosopographical 'fact'. Two of the latter students cited their sources: two different web-sites which, on investigation, both supply this factoid and augment the family background of Mucia in other ways found in Fortune's Favourite — without reference to the novel or its author. It is a small blessing that the website did not have Pompey's fifth wife, Cornelia, being forced to endure a sojourn in Egypt and being courted by a Ptolemy (as in Handel's Julius Caesar). Presumably an ignorance of opera rather than sense of source criticism prevailed here.

Does this matter? I think, yes; others might say "Get a life!!" I hasten to add that I do not regard quibbles over prosopographical minutiae (important as

novels can turn to the writer's notes at the back of the book and see for themselves what is based directly on the evidence, and where the novelist has expanded, augmented or imagined. The notes provided by Colleen McCullough are legendary. In the first volume, the Author's Note and Glossary ran to 104 pages. By the third volume, with a number of notes excised (as read) and a few others added, the addenda still ran to 73 pages And they are signalled at the front of the book. Many of Colleen McCullough's readers are passionate enthusiasts. They will draw much from these aids. How many of the readership will, however, I wonder, treat the Glossary as a scholarly apparatus, when they are not specifically directed item by item "Rather than append a long scholarly dissertation in defence of my hypotheses, I have chosen to incorporate a minimum of this within the Glossary" (The First Man in Rome [Century, London, 1990] 707).

She has offered as much as any novelist could. Even with as learned a guide as Colleen McCullough, however, there is only so much space that can legitimately be provided in a novel for education. See, for example, her allusion to the imaginative way in which she treats Spartacus: "The reader will find a rather different Spartacus than the celluloid one. I have neither the room nor the inclination to argue why I have chosen to portray Spartacus in the way I have; scholars will be able to see the why — and the how — of my argument in the text." (Fortune's Favourites (New York, William Morrow and Co., 1993) 805.

My own belief is that most readers are left with the more powerful images of the novel's text — and trust them all the more because they trust, in the light of so much manifest research, the author's judgement and guidance.

I'm not too proud to admit that recently, on the eve of delivering a public lecture on Marius and Sulla, which I wished to enliven with colourful detail, I found that I had to go back and check whether a vivid image which I had lodged in my brain, had come from Colleen McCullough or from the sources. It came from Colleen.
they are to me), any more than I think of details of a ship’s rigging, a chariot yoke or an architectural feature, as necessarily impacting on the worth of an artistic recreation in film or novel. But there is a distinction between the two crafts (that of the historian and the creative artist) that is to be constantly to be borne in mind. The popular media have a valuable role to play in broadening and stimulating the public mind. But an intelligent public must be made as aware as is the creative artist of the divide. Those present at the MAHA conference (to which allusion was made at the beginning of this essay) were generally in agreement. A debt of gratitude is owed to those who stimulate interest in the ancient world. The concerns which I raised above were not to be held to the account of the artists, but to those authors of the unregulated websites who carelessly, ignorantly or wilfully blur the distinction.

Before wrapping up, two other media might be registered. At the beginning of the paper we spoke of Ancient History being currently centre-stage. So it is literally. On the stage at the time I was writing, the Sydney Theatre Company was presenting Seneca’s Thyestes (August 2004), and the Ensemble Theatre (in association with Christine Dunstan Productions) had launched the world premiere production of David Williamson’s Flatfoot. A Roman Comedy of Bad Manners (incorporating Plautus’ Miles Gloriosus) (June-August 2004). I was unable to see the former, but enjoyed the latter, a clever adaptation of Plautus’ Miles Gloriosus, seemingly envisaged as a way in which the actor Drew Forsythe might reveal his considerable talents by playing numerous Plautine parts and building in a modern commentary by having ‘Plautus’ on

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60 And some would dismiss the academic pursuit more callously. Prosopographical interpretations of history draw upon the mass of raw material diligently collected throughout the 18th, 19th and early-20th centuries, an enterprise which flowered in England’s Dictionary of National Biography, followed by the similar products for other countries. In his classic study of the subject, Lawrence Stone (‘Prosopography’, Daedalus 100 (1971), 46-58) looked askance at the amassing of biographia prior to the invention of prosopography as a method: “In terms of psychological motivation, these obsessive collectors of biographical information belong to the same category of anal-erotic males as the collectors of butterflies, postage stamps, or cigarette cards; all are by-products of the Protestant Ethic” (49) Apart from the throwaway line, I believe that Stone has missed, or underplays, the spirit of the exercise (or, at the very least, draws up too short of seeking one). But that’s another paper.

61 Colleen McCullough, for instance, has in mind a broad readership from commuters to those in hospital beds. Commuters: Sybil Steinberg, ‘Colleen McCullough: The Indefatigable Australian Author Has Embarked on a Five-volume Series Set in Ancient Rome’, Publishers Weekly 14 September 1990, 109-110, 109; the bed-ridden: Reflections, 2.

62 Adapted by Brendan Cowell, directed by Benjamin Winspear.
stage (also played by Forsythe) explaining his ideas for awaited next play to his patron, the impatient ‘Crassus Dives’. This conceit allows a modern audience to be introduced to the tensions inherent in the interpretation of Roman comedy. How was it that the militaristic society that we know second-century BC Rome to have been laughed at Plautus — his braggart soldiers, his easily-duped Roman heads of households and successfully scheming slaves? This is the conundrum that forms the basis of many modern discussions.\(^{63}\)

Williamson places his characters, as were Plautus’ contemporaries, in a post-Hannibalic-War world, in a Rome under increasing Greek influence and with social mores under challenge. It was the era of Cato, the lex Oppia (a wartime austerity measure which limited female display) and the \textit{repeal} of that law.\(^{64}\) The interpretation to which this play gives its allegiance is that the comedies were socially and politically subversive, using their ‘Greek’ settings as a cover, skating on thin ice between, on the one hand, the purely laughable and, on the other, dangerous social commentary.

In the final address of ‘Plautus’ to the audience (bemoaning the compromises that he made in order to get his play on the boards), we might have been hearing Williamson himself, asking why it is that theatre can have such an immediate impact on an audience but, so often, leave only a limited mark on society:

“The play was still a huge hit, my biggest, and the slaves down the front actually got up and cheered when my character made it to freedom. And they laughed so hard at the conceited General that you’d’ve thought that no Roman soldier would ever be able to hold his head up again. The best comedy, inoffensive as it might appear, is always, always, a weapon of attack. But anyone who thinks theatre can totally change society take note. The Roman Empire lasted another six hundred years, and the Roman Soldier went on to slaughter millions more. But on that day when the play was performed it made so many people feel better about their lives. At least for a while. ...” \textit{(Flatfoot, Current Theatre Series, Currency Press, Sydney, 2004, 49)}

\(^{63}\) See, e.g., Erich Segal’s \textit{Roman Laughter: the Comedy of Plautus} (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987) and William Anderson’s \textit{Barbarian Play: Plautus’ Roman Comedy} (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993).

\(^{64}\) To all of which features allusion is made in Williamson’s play.
This seems to me a valid placement, amongst other possible hypotheses, of Plautine comedy. (As long as we don’t think that slaves sat at the front of Roman theatre audiences!) It’s a legitimate interpretation — one of many possible.\footnote{The company’s attention, by the way, was on the adaptation of the material to the extent that the program notes handed out at the performance I attended (on the last night of the Sydney season) contained a loose insert announcing “The play ‘The Swaggering Soldier’ featured in tonight’s performance of Flatfoot was written by Titus Maccius Plautus.” The name Plautus did not otherwise appear on those program notes other than as the name of a character played by Drew Forsythe (I hasten to add that the initial oversight was innocent. The play, as will have been seen by the above extract, is an act of homage to Plautus, and the published script [Current Theatre Series, Currency Press, Sydney, 2004] features the Roman’s name on the title page.)}

Finally, a relatively new medium demands attention: the docu-drama, encapsulating the pay-offs and the dangers. Dramatized documentaries or documentaries with dramatized segments are proving both popular and a highly effective teaching tool (where reliable). An outstanding recent example was the BBC production *Pompeii: The Last Day* (created by Dr Michael Mosley), bound, I suspect, for much airplay with the current HSC focus on Pompeii. Here a team of expert consultants ranging from social historians, archaeologists to volcanologists, recreated the last hours of a group of individuals, meticulously based on the surviving evidence. The images are memorable and instructive. A highly useful exercise for students would be the registration of what the program has revealed about Pompeii’s last hours and all the items which the recreationists cannot have known. This would offer an excellent way of teaching student to distinguish evidence from speculation (and various forms of speculation). And they should at all cost be steered away from the websites that may spring up purporting to provide biographies of the fuller Stephanus, his wife Fortunata and the slave girl. Pliny the Younger’s letter to Tacitus (*Letters* 6.16) should be essential reading before the exercise begins. Next step perhaps should be the recent stratigraphic interpretation of the volcano’s impact on the related sites. They could then turn to the graffiti evidence of Stephanus and Julius Polybius, and go from there.\footnote{This inscriptive evidence will be found in the new source collection by Alison E. Cooley and M.G.L. Cooley, *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (London, Routledge, 2004). There too will be found the gladiator Celadus.} The material seems tailor-made to an exercise in reading the evidence and its imaginative elaboration.

Seriously intentioned and well-informed recreations of the ancient world take their place in a long tradition of thought-provoking adaptations and artistic renderings of the past. This piece might have been subtitled ‘Living with
Popular Interest’. And there’s the point. The professionals face no (real) choice. Teachers cannot live without, nor should contemplate living without, public interest. An age wherein crusty dons reading in their studies, arguing in their common-rooms and pontificating in lecture-halls to an elite audience might have been regarded as a sufficiently legitimate exercise has gone. The aim now is surely to acquaint the widest possible audience with the dazzling range of human activity in the past, the varied response of humankind to its landscape and to crises. Relatively few will read the 401 pages of close argument in Geoffrey de Ste. Croix’s *Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972) with its 47 appendices — or the 524 pages of Sir Ronald Syme’s *Roman Revolution* (1933) which roll over the reader like a prosopographical tsunami. Many, with the most laudable purpose, will want to cover as wide a range of topics and periods as possible (requiring accessible media, with accessibility defined in the broadest possible way). The crux is the distinction between the evidence and its reading — and that applies as much to the interpretations of scholars as it does to creative artists. It is to be hoped that the injection of historiography into the NSW HSC History Extension meets this challenge and achieves that aim — although it reaches a limited candidature. (It seems to me that the traditional study of Ancient History with its focus on ancient authors has always attempted to function in this way — and has had the advantage of being encountered by a wider candidature.) Some regard historiography as so much navel-gazing, a distraction from the main game.\(^67\) Others decry the capitulation to a postmodernist lack of certitude.\(^68\) At its best, an historiographical awareness will lead students to distrust, or at least question, assertions — but not to distrust (and perhaps it will indeed encourage a new respect for) the endeavour of trying to understand (the past and the present).\(^69\)

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67 The complaint is an old one. See, for example, G.R. Elton’s *The Practice of History* (Sydney University Press, 1967; London and Glasgow, Fontana Press, 1969) vii–viii.

68 If I was to start providing a commentary here on the postmodern assault on history and the defensive response, I would fill this page and the next with a footnote. Teachers of the HSC History Extension will be familiar with the material.

69 My colleague, Dr Lea Beness, having read the foregoing paragraph, has challenged me to say directly what I mean to say. Am I for or against the multiple challenges posed by the popular media? She has put her finger, of course, on my mixed feelings (see note 1). I am afraid the latterprevail. They clearly do for many. I recommend the final chapter of Robin Lane Fox’s monograph (n.19) on the filming of *Alexander* chapter 16 ‘History and Fiction’). Overall, this is a creation which wins the satisfaction of the historian, but with reservations. Oliver Stone listened to historians — and, to Fox’s knowledge, never diverged from history ignorantly. But when the chips were down, drama prevailed ‘Few’ events are ‘created’ independently of the source evidence — though at least one of those will lead to the characterization of Alexander’s motivation. Chronology is toyed with in order to create ‘turning points’. Whatever this is, it is not history — yet it commands the historian’s (i.e., Fox’s) respect. That brings us back to the question of what it is that History attempts.
Some of the early great cinematographers thought they were producing History. At the film’s conclusion, the 1914 audience of *Cabiria* was on its feet with joy and enthusiasm: “*Cabiria* is something that will last. It will last because at that instant the vulgar art of cinema ceases and history succeeds, true history” cried a review in the Neapolitan journal *Film* (23/4/1914). Today such a sanguine view of capturing History may not prevail, but the question of who best can present its images remains. Frederico Fellini was not diffident. The fragmentary nature of his *Satyricon* might present, in Wyke’s gloss of Fellini’s sentiments, something “truer to the present fragmented condition of classical antiquity than more conventional historical scholarship.” And the omniscience of the historical novelist is not for him. Fellini was not interested in “evoking this world ... through the fruit of bookish, scholastic documentation, a literal fidelity to the text, but rather in the way an archaeologist reconstructs something alluding to the form of an amphora or a statue from a few pot-sherds. Our film, through the fragmentary recurrence of its episodes, should restore the image of a vanished world without completing it, as if those characters, those habits, those milieux were summoned for us in a trance, recalled from their silence by the mystic ritual of a séance.” The director was not interested in “the complacently erudite anecdote”; he wanted vivid images which would live. The result and the truth would be that we would recognize ourselves. Wyke is content to close her study of Rome, Cinema and History with a gloss of Fellini’s challenge: “The question, for Fellini, would not be whether cinema should have a place in the

Let me, by way of a short but relevant digression, refer to Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Mépris* (Contempt). Filmed in 1963 (when the Epic might have been regarded as on the way out — but while the ‘sword & sandals’ industry still flourished), it provided a critique of filmmaking which took antiquity as its base. It took as its setting the attempt to produce a version of the *Odyssey* — and attacked the crass commercialism then prevailing in the industry (the latter represented by an American producer with pretensions to Olympian power and arbitrary wilfulness). The question posed by the film, however, is not whether cinema should or should not play with the ancient world (in the sense of scholarly fidelity to ‘originals’). It is only a question of which force should prevail. It is a struggle between commercially-enticing vulgar spectacle and creative artistry with philosophical depth. Antiquity as fair game is taken for granted (For an interesting discussion of this film, see Wyke, n 14, 183-84.) So it has always been.

70 As quoted in Vittorio Matinelli, ‘Il cinema muto italiano: 1914’, *Bianco e Nero* 1-2 (1992), 75. (I owe this reference and the translation to n 14, 9)

71 Wyke, n 14, 192


73 “Man never changes, and today we can recognize all the principal characters in the drama” (Fellini, n 72). Therein lies another debate; but another one that will have to be left to another paper.
classical tradition but what else could best capture the mysterious, obscure and ethereal quality of the ancient world today.”74 The question might be asked of and by all the genres surveyed above. If Historians have a sure riposte, they had better make their voices heard.

74 Wyke, n.14, 192.
Fellini’s confronting attitude prompts a final look at two more popularizers and the consideration of the boundaries between fact, fiction, speculation and suggestion. In Tom Holland’s Attis (London, Allison and Busby, 1995), the world of Catullus, Clodia, Clodius and “His Excellency, Gnaeus Pompeius, President of the Republic” collides with the modern world in an immediately mesmerizing way. As the wide-eyed northerner, Catullus arrives in Rome to be met by his knowing friend Caelius — at the railway station. We are swept back into the world we might have inhabited when first learning Latin — and meeting Rome. Whatever world that was, it is not of this world, but it is fundamentally part of us By the time we reach the conclusion, coaches rattle down tracks, coachmen cracking their whips, and planes scream overhead. (It only mesmerizes if you don’t resist, but keep your senses alert to every suggestion.) Concluding his review for the Times Literary Supplement, a reviewer suggested provocatively: “Attis perhaps contains more truth than history would care to admit.” (Joe Holden, ‘Hi-tech on the Tiber’, TLS January 26, 1996, 21.

Holland is another interesting retailer of the ancient world. Apart from his ingenious novel (and another on Byron as a vampire), he has adapted Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides and Virgil for BBC Radio and more recently turned to the relatively straight narrative of Roman history in Rubicon. The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic (Little, Brown, London, 2003). Its appearance in ‘general’ bookstores for Christmas, usually in the window display, also qualifies it for inclusion in our survey of recent popularization. Holland’s range inevitably reminds one of the multiple contributions of the prolific Peter Green, who moved from academic publications (both specialist articles and detailed monographs), to popular essays, popular histories (i.e., written for the general public and dramatized for interest), novels, modern translations (e.g. for the Penguin press) and discussion papers intended for the academic community. He rounded off that career with a monumental study of the Hellenistic world, comprehensive and replete with an impressive scholarly apparatus. Holland’s opening chapter of Rubicon, a dramatized recreation of Caesar’s edgy soldiers awaiting the command to move forward on January 10th 49 BC (pp. xv-xvii), might remind those with long memories of Green’s evocation of the silent Spartans awaiting the Persian onslaught at Thermopylae (The Year of Salamis [also published as Xerxes at Salamis, 1970]). I see that the work has been republished as The Greco-Persian Wars (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996); in this later edition, the scene I had in mind will be found on p.141. Now, there are examples of the genres of historical narrative and historical novel being well and truly mixed.

In an introduction to the later edition of his monograph, Green reflects upon his youthful work and revisits the reviews he received at the time. One of the reviewers, Eduoard Will quibbled, as retold by Green himself, with his “fiction-writing alter ego … having improperly meddled in professional historiography, first, by romanticising [his] characters (i.e., making them too real) and second, more importantly, by revealing a historical novelist’s distaste for lacunae.”