

The Journal of Historical Fictions

published by the Historical Fictions Research Network



Volume 5, Issue 1: "Introduction" by Stephanie Russo, pp. 1-2

DOI to be confirmed

Welcome to the relaunch issue of *The Journal of Historical Fictions*! I am delighted to launch this first issue as editor of the Journal. It is an honour to take on this task, and I have been thrilled by the rich diversity of material I've already encountered.

Historical fiction is a thriving genre. Two of what are arguably the most popular trends in the historical novel at the moment centre on the representation of women: retellings of classical myths, and novels about witches. In the wake of Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, every week seems to see a new book about a—frequently female—figure of mythology hit the shelves. Likewise, witches seem to be having something of a moment. Perhaps in the wake of the perceived failures of the #MeToo movement to effect lasting change, novelists are increasingly turned to the figure of the witch to express rage and, perhaps, seek catharsis. In times of crisis and anxiety, we always look towards the past, and historical fiction provides us with a unique forum to think through these fears and frustrations.

Historical fiction on the small screen is having a particularly interesting moment. The new style of historical television programming is deliberately anachronistic, modern, frequently discordant, comedic and overt. The recent Amazon series *My Lady Jane*, based on a Young Adult novel, reimagines the story of the tragic Lady Jane Grey as a shapeshifting love story, complete with a counterfactual happy ending. The historical drama series remains a prestige property, too: the FX series *Shogun*, set in seventeenth-century Japan, recently became the first Japanese-language series to win an Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series.

Historical fiction is increasingly expanding as a scholarly field, with rich interdisciplinary connections to a number of fields. Game studies has been a particularly interesting new avenue for thinking about public history. I am also particularly fascinated with the proliferation of historical memes across the internet; Sylvia Plath, it seems, is having a brat summer.

Appropriately, this issue showcases the diversity of historical fiction scholarship. Nicole Gilmour's article "Boabdil and the Fall of Granada: Historical Novels as a Narrative Template for Modern Spain's National Identity" reads a number of historical novels about the fall of Granada through the lens of debates around modern Spanish identity. Focusing especially on how these novels reiterate two competing national myths—the 'Christian Purity Triumphant' myth and the 'Spain of the Three Cultures' myth—Gilmour reminds of historical fiction's deep implication in upholding and/or challenging national identities.

Lucy Arnold's "They buried him at Worcester: Heritage sites, historical fiction and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*" explores the intersection between heritage sites and their representation in historical fiction, taking as its focus Arthur Tudor's chantry chapel in the novel and its counterpart in material reality. Arnold reminds us that our interactions with heritage sites can be shaped and challenged by their representation in historical fictions, and that such fictions have the potential to reshape narratives about these spaces.

Hamish Williams's "The Collapse of Minoan Crete in Mary Renault's *The King Must Die*: Creative Sensemaking" reads Renault's classic historical fictions about the collapse of Crete in light of the phenomenon of 'Minoanism'—a complex set of myths that ascribe meaning to Bronze Age Cretan civilisation. As Williams shows, Renault's novels also provide "creative insights for scholars into how and why Minoan civilisation might have collapsed". Historical fiction can provide, to use Williams's term, a form of historical "sensemaking" that complements and potentially enhances the insights of historians.

The Journal of Historical Fictions welcomes new submissions on any area of historical fiction. We would love to hear your ideas about potential special issues, so please do get in touch. We aim to publish issues twice per year going forward, and have plans for a reviews section to be launched in the near future.