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Artistic Truth, Historical Truth: The "Faction" Film and the Falklands War

Truth lies in the nuances.

—Anatole France

Ever since Leopold von Ranke and other members of the Berlin School began their methodological revolution, history has generally been regarded as necessarily distinct from drama and literature. Few historians today, to be sure, would agree with Ranke in asserting that the historian can be entirely objective, can "tell it like it was"; but an essentially literary-dramatic approach to the writing of history, characteristic of those who wrote about the past from Thucydides in Ancient Greece down to Macaulay in mid-19th century England, has virtually disappeared.

Whatever school of thought has tended to dominate since the days of Ranke, great emphasis has always been laid on critical analysis of sources, and the idea of writing about the past in literary-dramatic form firmly rejected. History, though perhaps no longer on the verge of becoming one of the social sciences as it was in the 1960s and 70s, is still not viewed by its practitioners as a true art.[1] Certainly no modern historian would admit, as did Macaulay, that his or her work was most strongly influenced by the writings of a novelist (in Macaulay's case the great historical novelist, Sir Walter Scott). Many historical dramatists and other writers, moreover, even prior to the Rankean revolution, have tended to be intimidated by claims to greater factual validity made by historians, and (at least until comparatively recently)

have been apt to accept that the accurate re-creation of the past is not truly their vocation.[2]

Occasionally, however, attempts are made at what one commentator has aptly termed "border crossings,"[3] whereby the historical rules of evidence are relaxed in order to allow for greater freedom of expression. The results, however, are often subject to a good deal of uncertainty and confusion on the part of observers—not entirely surprising, given that the frames of reference for literature, poetry, and drama on the one hand, and history on the other, have become so divorced over the past century or so. My objective here is to analyze three highly controversial "faction" television plays dealing with the 1982 Falklands War as a means of understanding more clearly the nature and effectiveness of both art and history in relation to wars of the past—not least the Falklands War itself.

Written in the mid-1980s, the three television plays were all based on documented episodes: hence the "docudrama" or more common "faction" label used by the British media. *Tumbledown* was the story of a very badly wounded Scots Guards officer; *Resurrected*, the tale of a private in the same regiment who suffered from shell shock and later ostracism by his comrades; and *The Falklands Play*, a re-creation of the war at Cabinet level.[4]

The three plays, sponsored by the drama departments of the BBC and (in the case of *Resurrected*) Channel 4, were generally portrayed by the playwrights concerned as dramatic representations of wartime events rather than as precise re-creations in the documentary tradition. On the other hand, all three plays involved, to a greater or lesser extent, extensive research into the recorded events that were being represented. Quite what such a hybrid "faction" form of representation entailed in the way of adherence to historical fact in relation to dramatic license was not entirely clear to either critics or defenders of the plays; but in spite (or because) of this lack of clarity, all held strong opinions about the results.

Critics, many of whom had voiced doubts about the media's coverage of events during the Falklands War, accused the BBC of manipulating history by cancelling the pro-war *Falklands Play*

and sponsoring the anti-war *Tumbledown*. Ian Curteis, scriptwriter for *The Falklands Play*, let it be known that he had been asked to "falsify the historical record" by cutting certain scenes favorable to Mrs. Thatcher and inserting others, and when he had refused, the BBC had suddenly cancelled the entire project in 1987.[5] When *Tumbledown* was screened in May 1988, conservative critics were outraged by the depiction of Lt Robert Lawrence and those around him in the battle for Tumbledown Mountain as well as his slow, painful, and only partial recovery in England. The combat scenes, including the wounding of Lawrence himself, were quite graphic, and the story of his subsequent treatment by the medical authorities in England an indictment of how Britain treated its veterans. *Resurrected*, with its own graphic scenes of battle and bullying within the Scots Guards, was viewed in a similar light during production and when screened in September 1989.

Michael Shersby (Conservative MP for Uxbridge) argued in Parliament that the BBC and Channel 4 had mixed "fact with fiction" in aid of "putting the heroism of our troops in a bad light," a view which John Stokes (Conservative MP for Halesown and Stourbridge) shared. The day following the broadcast of *Tumbledown*, he angrily explained to the media that "I can only think that the underlying point is to undermine the sacrifices and heroism which enabled us to repossess the Falkland Islands," adding: "It is, in my view, another example of the BBC stabbing the nation in the back." Similar outrage was expressed over *Resurrected*, which was seen as more of the same anti-establishment, pseudohistorical propaganda.[6]

Supporters argued that none of these claims were true. *The Falklands Play* had been cancelled because of the upcoming General Election, the outcome of which might be unfairly influenced by representations of still-active politicians—not least Mrs. Thatcher herself—and also because of dramatic flaws which Curteis had refused to correct. As for *Tumbledown*, it was, in the words of Robert Corbett (Labour spokesman on broadcasting), "a drama, not a documentary," yet was at the same time—to quote a long-time critic of the war, Tam Dalyell—"a powerful indictment of the horrors of war—not least Mrs. Thatcher's war."[7]

As for *Resurrected*, it was, in the words of one film reviewer, a legitimate attempt to expose the shallowness of jingoistic patriotism and "a more general reflection on the corruption of the ignorant by the military machine and mentality."[8]

Whatever the truth concerning cancellation of *The Falklands Play*, it, like *Tumbledown* and *Resurrected*, was controversial not only because of then current political considerations, but also because neither critics nor supporters seemed entirely clear about the degree to which the scripts were history or drama, fact or fiction. To supporters, the scripts were a legitimate form of factual representation; were, in essence, representations of the truth. To critics, the scripts were—given the two final productions and the apparent attempts to manipulate the script of the cancelled play—illegitimate attempts to mix fact with fiction, the result being falsehoods.

What, then, are we to make of these "faction" films, a form of historical representation but also a form of drama? Where does "fact" end and "fiction" begin? The playwrights themselves, alas, are not much help. Ian Curteis, for instance, has insisted that his works are plays, not "dramadocumentary or historical reconstruction," yet seemingly contradicts himself when he insists that "all the *facts* I took from authoritative printed sources" and that all he does is "the interpretation and guesswork": in essence the historian's task.[9] A spokesman for Channel 4, speaking on behalf of playwright Martin Allen, insisted that "Our film [*Resurrected*] is only inspired by Philip's story. It does not retell it."[10] Comparison of the plot with Williams' own memoirs, however, reveals that, as critics assumed, *Resurrected* was "factional" rather than fictional.[11] An analysis of the content and writing of *Tumbledown*, *Resurrected*, and *The Falklands Play* may help us understand more clearly the nature of such endeavors and their relationship to both art and history.

Of the three plays, both *Tumbledown* and *The Falklands Play* were the results of extensive research: essentially historical research. Ian Curteis, author of *The Falklands Play*, read practically everything that had been written on the war, pored

over the parliamentary debates, and interviewed as many diplomats, MPs, and others as he could over the course of about sixteen months.

Charles Wood, author of *Tumbledown*, was meanwhile conducting extensive interviews with ex-Lt Robert Lawrence and members of his family, from which he was to write a screenplay that reproduced the war and postwar experiences of one disabled veteran. Many names were changed for legal reasons, but Lawrence remained the protagonist and it was his story that was being recounted. Both plays, in short, were extensively researched and written with authenticity in mind—one at the level of government, the other at the level of a single individual. Martin Allen's *Resurrected* adhered rather less closely to remembered experience than did the other plays, its subject, ex-Pvt Philip Williams having far less contact with the film than did Robert Lawrence with *Tumbledown*. It was recognized by all, however, that *Resurrected* was still very much Williams' story.[12]

All three plays, then, were adhering to a greater or lesser extent to the ground rules of historical representation accepted by the historical profession: research coupled with a degree of interpretation. As for the dramatic component, the *raison d'être* for writing the plays in the first place, each story around which a script was built contained much inherent drama.

In the case of Curteis' *The Falklands Play*, the reaffirmation of all that was great and good about Britain that he saw the war as representing was naturally dramatic. The tense debates in Cabinet, the behind-the-scenes maneuvering in the UN Security Council, the ringing speeches in the House of Commons, the symbolism of a British fleet once more being dispatched in freedom's cause, all were the stuff of High Drama. To take one example among dozens in *The Falklands Play*, there is Act One, Scene 73, recreating part of the emergency debate in the House of Commons shortly after the Argentine invasion.

> PM: [Mrs. Thatcher] " . . . The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British, their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few in number, but they have

> the right to *live in peace*, and to *choose* their way of life and their allegiance. It is the wish of the British people and—(*she smites the despatch box in emphasis*)—it is the *duty* of Her Majesty's Government to do everything we can to uphold that right!"
> *She sits, to loud agreement from all sides of the house.*[13]

Curteis could also latch on to more idiosyncratic episodes, less grand but equally evocative of Britain at its best—such as the classic understatements of the Ministry of Defence press officer (UNSEEN REPORTER: So we *won*?! We've retaken South Georgia?! IAN MACDONALD *considers this highly suspicious question for a moment. Eventually*—MACDONALD [*funereally*]: Yes.)[14]. Or the implied determination to "muddle through" inherent in the following scene (again a direct recreation of a documented episode):

ACT I, Scene 51. EXT. WHITEHALL

> ADMIRAL LEACH [Chief of the Defence Staff], *in full admiral's uniform, papers in hand, dashes along the pavement from the Ministry of Defence to the House of Commons, half-scamper, half-run, narrowly missing traffic. Tourists are entranced by this Gilbertian spectacle.*[15]

There was much, therefore, in the historical record on which Curteis could draw for dramatic impact, both in terms of dialogue and also in terms of visual imagery, such as footage of the sailing of the main units of the fleet from Portsmouth amid cheering, flag-waving crowds.

The subject material of Charles Wood was equally laden with dramatic potential, though with a rather different kind of drama in mind—tragedy. Robert Lawrence and the rest of 2Bn, Scots Guards, had been pulled off the symbolically loaded task of guarding the Tower of London and sent off to fight in one of the more inhospitable parts of the planet—two rocky, cold, rain-sodden, virtually treeless islands in the South Atlantic. The

sheer barrenness of the Falkland Islands, the inescapable backdrop to the Scots Guards' assault on Tumbledown Mountain, served to emphasize the futility of the fight for control.

As for the actions of Lawrence himself, there was even greater dramatic potential. Bloody hand-to-hand grappling in the dark; the bayonetting of an Argentine soldier who repeatedly called out, "please, please!"; disorienting noise and flashes; a younger, shell-shocked officer with tears streaming down his face calling out, "Don't go on. It's too horrific"; all climaxing with Lawrence reaching the summit of the mountain in full blood lust and shouting out "Isn't this fun?", only to be struck down moments later, as if for hubris, by an Argentine sniper's bullet. The bullet removes a quarter of his brain and leaves him paralyzed down one side (but fully awake through the ordeal of being cleared from the battlefield and operated on in an abandoned meatpacking plant).

Sophocles himself could hardly have asked for better material. The very name of the mountain itself—Tumbledown—was evocative. The actor Colin Firth, who played Robert Lawrence, later recounted how during filming of the battle sequences "Robert stopped having nightmares and I started having them."[16]

Moreover, once the scene shifted to England, it was easy to juxtapose the jingoistic, flag-waving public celebrations of victory with Lawrence's personal agony and difficulties with Army bureaucracy. All in all, the personal history of Robert Lawrence was ideally suited to dramatic reconstruction.

Martin Allen, in writing *Resurrected*, could draw on many of the same scenes of battlefield horror. Guardsman Williams had served as a stretcher bearer before being knocked unconscious by a shell blast, and had witnessed much blood and pain. The hazing Williams received once reunited with his regiment in England after his comrades had suspected him of cowardice was, moreover, naturally evocative of the worst sides of British military and class culture: both tried and true dramatic themes.

Thus far, then, it would seem that the requirements of drama—or, more accurately, theatrical drama—did not conflict with an accurate historical representation: the subject matter contained the basic elements required. Yet on closer inspection

this apparently natural and fruitful relationship between theatre and historical fact is not all that initially meets the eye.

The playwrights concerned were not unaware that their own outlook inevitably affected their work; that, at some level, they were interpreting other people's experiences through the prism of their own values and prejudices. Curteis, who had written several other historical television plays which took a nationalistic approach to war, was quite candid in the preface to the published version of *The Falklands Play* about his support for the government's actions.

> Nothing had prepared me for the sheer galvanizing absorption of the subject. I couldn't wait to get to my desk each morning. Just as the crisis itself touched a central nerve in the nation's psyche in 1982, so it electrified me. This was not shallow jingoism, but the dramatic rising to the surface once more of the values and issues that we on these islands have cared most proudly about down the centuries, and on which our civilized freedom rests.[17]

Charles Wood, in writing *Tumbledown*, had an equally strong, but rather different perspective. His earlier plays had also dealt with war as a theme, but from a highly critical stance. A newspaper interview he gave at the time of the controversy suggests that as with Curteis, his screenplay was in part an expression of his own fundamental beliefs.

> It [Wood is reported to have said of *Tumbledown*] has a deeply political message that war is futile. The subversive message is think twice before you elect to serve in an army. . . . Is it right to ask people to die, particularly for something like the Falklands? It didn't seem right to me . . . I want people to start questioning what it is we did.[18]

And much the same was true of Martin Allen's script for *Resurrected*.[19]

In and of itself the fact that three playwrights imposed themselves to some extent on their subject matter is not damning. Few historians would argue that complete impartiality is practicable. Consciously or unconsciously, bias is always present in the necessary act of interpreting evidence. Like the playwright, or indeed the historical novelist, filmmaker, or poet, the historian is part of what he or she writes, and to a greater or lesser extent is commenting on the present as much as on the past.

Yet there are still indications that in writing their screenplays Curteis, Wood, and Allen approached their subject matter from an essentially dramatic, rather than historical, perspective; something which fundamentally changes each play's relationship to the past in comparison to an historian's product. Two points, I would suggest, generally distinguish the writing of historical drama by playwrights from the writing of history by historians; points of divergence which when applied to the Falklands 'faction' films help place them in proper context. The key issues, closely related, are the differing conventions of drama and history, and even more important, differing philosophical perceptions between historians and dramatists as to the nature of the historical world.

One of the central differences between drama and historical writing is the time factor. Drama, whether on stage or on film, is constrained by time limits in a way that an historical monograph is not. Both forms of historical representation involve temporal compression; the conveying of sometimes quite complex attitudes and events through a few illustrative sentences or scene changes to keep within the parameters of convention—convention which in both instances involves holding the attention of the audience through change and flow, and avoiding stasis. What differentiates film drama is the degree to which this is so. What can be conveyed, say, in a 100,000 word monograph, which may take days to read, has to be imparted on the stage or on film in a matter of hours. Even when one takes into account the added impact of surrounding visual stimuli (which have to be laboriously re-created in "word pictures" in monographs), there is less room for maneuver in drama. The main themes of the play, its

underlying messages, have to be conveyed clearly and (comparatively) quickly. Hence, to take one recent example, the complex attitudes and policies of President Kennedy toward black people are reduced in Oliver Stone's film *JFK* to a single sentence.[20]

Temporal limitation, however, forms only part of the way in which differences in convention produce different results. To a greater or lesser degree, historical drama since its beginnings in Ancient Greece has tended to fall into one of a variety of shifting literary-dramatic forms: the tragic, the panoramic, or the ceremonial, for instance, plus variations; all infused with what Herbert Lindenberger has identified as "heroic magnitude." Like limits on time, the forms historical drama takes (forms which, incidentally, have loose counterparts in the historical novel[21]), can curtail the degree to which it reflects the ambiguities and complexities of the historical record. Even the contemporary documentary dramas of 1960s experimental theatre, whose authors claimed were able to apprehend reality directly, were so constrained.[22]

To take a more recent example, an attempt by Canadian filmmaker Brian McKenna to tell the story of RCAF bomber crews in World War II was widely criticized for the way in which actors were sometimes used to portray historical figures (some of whom were still alive). To heighten the impact of a story which McKenna saw as a tragedy, a combination of direction and editing of historically accurate dialogue was used to reduce the sometimes quite subtle and complex attitudes of aircrew and air staff to the level of, respectively, innocence and evil incarnate.[23] Like the Falklands authors, McKenna was propelled by the needs and conventions of drama to manipulate the historical record, to bend, trim, and cut, in order to make events of the recent past fit the literary-dramatic mold.

This is not to suggest that the Falklands plays are one-dimensional, or lacking in subtlety (as is unfortunately the case with the *Death by Moonlight* episode of McKenna's

three-part drama-documentary series for the CBC, *The Valour and the Horror*). For instance, *Tumbledown* carefully reflects the rather ambiguous attitude of both Wood and his subject, Robert Lawrence, towards heroism and British military culture. Ian Curteis also sought balance through stressing that there were those both inside and outside the Cabinet who did not agree with the policies of Mrs. Thatcher.

At the same time, however, for all playwrights, there remained a need to manipulate events to some degree to make points within the constraints of the dramatic medium. In *The Falklands Play*, which took on a 'ceremonial' form reminiscent of *Henry V*, nobody, not even the heroic Prime Minister, could be allowed to be long-winded, while the verbal and physical mannerisms of hostile or neutral characters such as junta leader General Leopoldo Galtieri or Alexander Haig (the US Secretary of State), were deliberately exaggerated to the point of near parody.

As for *Tumbledown*, despite the close collaboration between Robert Lawrence and Charles Wood, there were episodes in the film which departed significantly from Lawrence's own record of events to save time or, more significantly, to avoid watering down the Sophoclean tragedy of the story. Perhaps the most telling example was a conversation between Robert Lawrence and his parents in hospital shortly after his return to England. In their joint memoir, Robert and his father made it clear that when Robert began to cry that "It wasn't worth it," he was referring to his standing up on Tumbledown Mountain and—so he thought at the time—getting not only himself but many other members of his platoon needlessly shot. In the script, and to an even greater extent in the film, these words are presented as meaning that he, and his parents, now thought that the war had not been worth the sacrifices it entailed (which was not the case, at least at that point).[24]

In addition, if Lawrence's version of events "played" better than the recollections of other soldiers and civilians involved in his story, then it was always his version which took precedence in Wood's script. To emphasize the returning veteran's ostracism at the hands of an uncaring society, for example, it was useful to

portray Robert's girlfriend in his own terms: that is, as a typical empty-headed, shallow Sloane Ranger. This portrayal deeply upset both the young woman and her mother, who thought, with some justice, that it was a travesty of the truth. Similarly, it was only the threat of a libel suit which got the BBC to cut the emotionally compelling scene of another young officer crying—an episode which others present believed Robert had got quite wrong.[25]

The way in which dramatic convention led to a degree of manipulation of the historical record was most blatantly apparent in the third film, *Resurrected*, which Philip Williams, the film's "inspiration," found greatly distorted his experiences. As he put it in his own memoir,

> I think they were . . . hoping their film would get the same publicity *Tumbledown* did, having a right go at the Army, and the Scots Guards in particular, without bothering about the truth too much. They didn't seem to think that what I *had* been through was bad enough. I could just picture them sitting around a table saying, 'Shit, is that all they did to him? *That* won't make anyone talk about our film. Let's make this and that happen. Really give the Army some stick.'[26]

Such dramatic license, however, did not affect the value of the final product in the minds of the playwrights' concerned, or indeed most drama critics. The reason, closely linked to the playwrights' own willingness to manipulate the known facts, was a conception of the past and its reconstruction which differed in certain fundamental respects from that of most contemporary historians.

As already noted, historians are aware that they inevitably impose their own values and prejudices on the subjects they study, and that a completely objective account of the past is impossible. There still exist, however, rules of evidence, and while theoretical speculation as to the nature of the past and the historical enterprise continues—to a point where an objective

past and its recovery become more and more problematic and the border between history and fiction increasingly blurry[27]—the history writing profession, in practice, generally still holds to the idea that there exists a real distinction between acceptable and unacceptable manipulation of evidence.[28]

Attempts to apply Freudian theory to the lives of figures from the past in the 1960s and 70s, for instance, have tended to consign full-blown "psychohistory" to the realm of speculative psychology rather than history, precisely because the rules of evidence and interpretation employed in psychoanalysis are not those of history.[29] That a recent attempt at the blending of an historical and literary-dramatic approach to the past by the historian Simon Schama should be subtitled "Unwarranted Speculations" indicates the prevailing attitude that the representation of "fact" (the province of the historian) must be distinguished from the creation of "fiction" (the realm of novelists, poets, playwrights, and non-documentary filmmakers).[30]

Such a distinction, however, is not fully recognized in contemporary historical drama and literature. In response to the implicit claim that post-Rankean, source-oriented history possesses a greater degree of reality in relation to the past than the older, literary-dramatic tradition, writers of historical drama and their supporters (including some historical novelists, filmmakers and post-structuralists) have maintained that the value of their own efforts lie in how they, through a mixture of direct evidence, metaphor, and imaginative reconstruction, can illuminate the true nature of what the author of another controversial "faction" film, David Edgar, has characterized as "the human soul" in a way that conventional history ultimately cannot.

Since the past is never entirely recoverable, and representing the past is necessarily a subjective process, such an approach is both legitimate and, furthermore, not shackled to unduly rigid rules of evidence in seeking to apprehend the reality of human thought and behavior (either past or present).[31] The biographical fantasies of composers' lives created by Ken Russell on film can perhaps be seen as an extreme manifestation of this attitude to historical re-creation; an attitude perfectly expressed by the

drama critic Bevereley Baxter when he criticized the writer of an historical play dealing with the life of Mary Queen of Scots in the following terms: "As a student of history he has a deep respect for accuracy, but as a playwright he should know that accuracy is the very death of [artistic] self expression."[32]

Viewed in terms of this distinction, the three Falklands plays, despite the time devoted to historical research by the playwrights concerned, fit more easily into the literary dramatic mold than the historical in terms of a priori assumptions about the past. A raid into the historian's territory from the literary side of the border; in short, something which the playwrights seemed subconsciously aware of in their statements disavowing any claim to be practicing the historian's craft as would an historian.

Whether this kind of border crossing is legitimate, whether one accepts the literary-dramatic interpretation or rejects it is in the end a matter of philosophical taste: either an affinity for the artist's perception of the truth, or that of the (orthodox) historian. One person's border crossing is another's breaching of an inviolable frontier. Truth perhaps lies in the eye of the beholder. On the other hand, it may well be that it is the degree to which a certain way of looking at past events, a certain frame of reference, achieves resonance in contemporary society which is the ultimate test of history.

Of the three plays here considered, *Tumbledown* has already achieved the status of a minor war classic—it has been hailed as "the central dramatic text of the Falklands campaign"[33]—and it may quite possibly take its place beside those essentially literary works, including stage plays such as *Journey's End* and *Oh! What a Lovely War*, which have done so much to shape popular perceptions of the First World War : perceptions which revolve around the futility and waste of human life and have proven immensely resistant to the efforts of military historians to project a more "balanced" view of events.[34]

Tumbledown was re-broadcast on the tenth anniversary of the battle, and much of what was published commemorating the war in May 1992 carried an equally bitter message. The Falklands War, despite the fact that land engagements lasted only a few days at most and casualties on the ground for both sides were

remarkably light (at Tumbledown, for instance, the Scots Guards suffered no fatal casualties and only three wounded), had clearly been set in a popular frame of reference which emphasized the sordid and horrific over the valorous and patriotic. "Home to nightmares, anxiety attacks, tranquillisers and sleeping pills," as Ian Stewart, for example, formerly a rear-echelon officer in 45 Commando, wrote in far from atypical fashion in *The Scotsman* on the tenth anniversary; adding, somewhat revealingly, "And I hadn't had that hard a time."[35]

It is even possible that the cancellation of *The Falklands Play* had less to do with political considerations than with the fact that Curteis' patriotic themes were out of step with the prevailing tendency to represent war as inherently pointless. Like *Tumbledown*, his play had its antecedents, such as the script for the 1942 film *In Which We Serve*, a thinly-disguised portrayal by Noel Coward of the career of Lord Louis Mountbatten—who was indirectly involved in the production—aboard the destroyer HMS *Kelly*.[36] But these were works set in the Second World War—a conflict which has generally been viewed, even by those usually opposed to war as an instrument of policy, as morally justified.[37] The Falklands War was another matter entirely.

The BBC, interestingly, let it be known off the record that senior drama executives had simply thought *The Falklands Play* "a bad play,"[38] despite the fact that it differed little in terms of theme and approach from Curteis' earlier *Churchill and the Generals*. In the preface to the published version of the latter play, Curteis explained that he had sought to portray Churchill as "a magnificent, rounded human figure, the greatest Englishman of the century," a view to which the BBC took no exception in the context of the Second World War, but which when transferred to Mrs. Thatcher and the Falklands War seemed artistically inappropriate. Despite the fact that the BBC had sponsored the writing of the play in the first place, what Curteis produced—a patriotic celebration—appeared out of step with the more pervasive literary-dramatic tendency to portray war as sordid rather than noble. Hence the attempts to force Curteis to take a more cynical line in interpreting British government motives. *Tumbledown*, in short, had a stronger literary-philosophical

heritage outside the parameters of World War II than *The Falklands Play* (which, if production had been completed, could well have been savaged by the critics).

Artistic truth, in summary, may in the end be more powerful in shaping our collective memory of the Falklands War than "mere" history, which in its more highly evolved forms becomes increasingly obscure to the uninitiated. Something which engages the emotions, allows the audience to identify with the protagonists, is often more compelling than an account which is based on distanced, "objective" reasoning alone; and a good dramatic representation can shape popular perceptions far more successfully than any impartial assessment, however true to the known facts the latter may be.

Few would argue, for instance, that the combined efforts of academic scholarship have been able to effectively compete with Shakespeare's hugely engaging but factually inaccurate portrayal of Richard III as evil incarnate;[39] and it is worth noting that the immense success of the historical epics produced by Hollywood in earlier decades of this century was in large measure due to the way in which the writers and directors concerned were willing to manipulate the historical record in order to pander to the audience's wish for emotional identification.[40] As Lord Rees-Mogg gloomily concluded in surveying the power of television, "language appeals to reason, images appeal to emotion."[41]

The same can usually be said concerning the public impact of portrayals of war—not least the Falklands War— by dramatists as against the work of historians over the last fifty or so years. It is a sign of the power of theatre that Brian McKenna decided to use actors instead of on-camera interviews in his recent film on Canadians in the RCAF in order to heighten the impact on the audience. He did not want, in his own rather dismissive phrase, "a bunch of old guys talking," but dramatic figures with whom a television audience could empathize.[42]

Of course, one might legitimately counter-argue that what the majority accept as real through "suspension of disbelief" is anything but prima facie evidence of truth: indeed, if one were to take this line of argument to its logical conclusion, then figures as

zealously narrow-minded as Robespierre and Henry Ford were expressing profundities when they respectively characterized history as "fiction" and "bunk." And yet, mythical though it may be in certain respects, the power of sophisticated historical drama—not least on film in "faction" form—should not be underestimated. Marshall MacLuhan has taught us that the aims and effectiveness of the medium are what, in the end, determines the power of the message. □

Notes

1. See Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (3rd ed., Chicago: Lyceum Books, 1989), chs. 2-3. Within the last ten or so years this has begun to change in some circles, especially in relation to intellectual and microhistory. See n. 24.

2. Matthew H. Wikander, *The Play of Truth & State: Historical Drama from Shakespeare to Brecht* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1986), introduction.

3. See Cushing Strout, "Border Crossings: History, Fiction, and Dead Certainties," *History and Theory* 31 (1992): 153 .

4. *Tumbledown* and *The Falklands Play* were both published: Charles Wood, *Tumbledown: A Screenplay* (London: BBC, 1987); Ian Curteis, *The Falklands Play* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

5. Curteis, *Falklands*, introduction; *Times* 30 Sep. 1986: 6.

6. *Times* 1 June 1988: 24; House of Commons Debates, Sixth Series, vol. 134, 1987-88, 7 June 1988: 716.

7. *Times* 1 June 1988: 24.

8. *Times* 28 Sep. 1989: 20.

9. Curteis, *Falklands*, 16; *Suez 1956* (London: BBC, 1979), preface; *Churchill and the Generals: A Television Play* (London: BBC, 1979), preface.

10. *Times*, 6 June 1988: 3.

11. Philip Williams with Michael Power, *Summer Soldier: The True Story of the Missing Falklands Guardsman* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990).

12. Ibid.; Curteis, *Falklands*, introduction; Wood, *Tumbledown*, preface.

13. Curteis, *Falklands*, 104.

14. Curteis, *Falklands*, 164.

15. Curteis, *Falklands*, 88-89.

16. Colin Firth qtd. in Tony Gould, Rev. of *Tumbledown*, by John Lawrence and Charles Wood, *London Review of Books*, 23 June 1988: 10.

17. Curteis, *Falklands*, 15; see note 7.

18. Curteis, *Falklands*, 43; see also Charles Wood, *Dingo: A Play* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); *H* (London: Metheum Press, 1969).

19. *Times* 28 Sep. 1989: 20; *Times* 6 June 1988: 3.

20. "He did so much for this country, for colored people," qtd. in Robert A. Rosenstone, *"JFK: Historical Fact/Historical Film," American Historical Review*, 97 (1992): 509.

21. See Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1962).

22. Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 20.

23. See Canada, Senate, *Proceedings of the Standing Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs: The Report on the Inquiry: The Valour and the Horror* (Feb. 1993), esp. 10:33-34.

24. Wood, *Tumbledown*, 35-36; John Lawrence and Robert Lawrence, *When the Fighting is Over: Tumbledown, a Personal Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 57-58.

25. *Times* 30 May 1988: 1; *Times* 1 June 1988: 1, 24; *Times* 2 June 1988: 24; *Times* 4 June 1988: 1, 11; *Times* 6 June 1988: 3 .

26. Williams, 186.

27. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Some Reflections on the New History," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 662, 665 ff, for a rather apocalyptic interpretation of this trend, and on a more positive note Jacques le Goff's *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992). The journal *History & Theory* is a central forum for such theoretical discussion, while microhistory —with its emphasis on the daily life of individuals—as well as intellectual history are fields in which a literary approach to the past is being ressurrected to some degree. See, e .g., "AHR Forum: Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 581-653; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1 983). It is suggestive that this last

work, which the author herself suggests can be placed somewhere between history and fiction—Davis, "On the Lame," *American Historical Review* 93 (1988): 572 ff—was turned into a French film drama with Davis serving as historical consultant.

28. Even among those in the vanguard of theoretical speculation who spurn the quest for objectivity in history as a positivist chimera, there seems to be a sense that, for better or worse, for most historians there are in practice still basic rules—albeit subject to debate and interpretation—by which the game is played. See Peter Novick, "My Correct Views on Everything," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 700; Carlo Ginzburg, "Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1991: 83, 84. The sheer volume of conventional history still being published suggests that at a basic level a "non-fiction" approach to history still dominates—perhaps in part because taken to its logical conclusion post-structuralist analysis produces a situation in which history as both discipline and past simply vanish. See, e.g., R. J. B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War 1945-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993), 29. The fact that most post-structuralists reside in departments of literature rather than history is perhaps suggestive (Strout, 161).

29. See Jacques Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History, and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 6, for full-blown critques of psychohistory. A more sympathetic explanation for the problems of psychohistory is contained in Thomas A. Kohut, "Psychohistory as History," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 336-54.

30. Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (New York: Knopf, 1991); see also Strout, 153-62. The Canadian historian Brian Loring Villa, whose book on the Dieppe Raid, *Unauthorized Action* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), was recently adapted for television by the CBC, emphasized this distinction when he stated that "the whole thing works damn well, I think, as drama," while carefully adding: "But drama has priority over historical detail." Darryl Wiggers, "The CBC Goes to War," *Globe and Mail Broadcast Week*, 1-7 Jan. 1994: 7. Even historical documentaries have serious problems as a form of historical representation. See, e.g., Paula Rabinowitz, "Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary, and the Ruins of Memory," *History & Theory*, 32 (1993): 119-37.

31. David Edgar, "In defence of drama-documentaries," *Listener*, 1 Jan. 1981: 11; see Edgar, "Faction Plan." *Listener*, 1 June 1990: 13-14; Jenny Spencer, "Edward Bond's Bingo: history, politics, and subjectivity," *Historical Drama* ed. James Redmond, Themes in Drama 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 213; Rosenstone, 509; Daniel Leab, "The Moving Image as Interpreter of History—Telling the Dancer from the Dance," *Image as Artifact: The*

Historical Analysis of Film and Television, ed. John E. O'Conner (Malabar: Krieger, 1990), 79-80; *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989).

32. *Dipped in Vitriol*, ed. Nicholas Parsons (London: Pan Books, 1981), 159. The play was *The Golden Eagle*, by Clifford Bax. See Joseph A. Gomez, *Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator* (London: Muller, 1976), chs. 5-6. Russell: " . . . do it in a totally unreal way, and thus make it more real than ever . . . " Gomez, 69. See also Vivian Sobchak, " 'Surge and Splendour': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic," *Representations* 29 (1990): 28-29.

33. Jeffrey Walsh, " 'There'll Always Be An England': The Falklands Conflict on Film." *Framing the Falklands War: Nationhood, Culture and Identity*, ed. James Aulich (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1992), 38; see also *Times*, 1 June 1988: 16.

34. The mythology of the Western Front, formed by the literature of the late 20s and early 1930s, was revived in the 1960s (in part through the success of *Oh! What a Lovely War*) and despite the efforts of John Terraine and other pro-Haig critics, remains deeply embedded in Western consciousness. See Alex Danchev, " 'Bunking' and Debunking: The Controversies of the 1960s," *The First World War and British Military History*, ed. Brian Bond (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) ch. 10; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico Books, 1991), chs. 20-21; Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), ch. 9; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), ch. 9. In August 1986, the BBC had got itself into difficulties with another "faction" film entitled *The Monocled Mutineer*, the "true life story" of a renegade private in the First World War. Characteristic of the literary-dramatic approach to the past, a senior BBC spokesman defended the factual distortions in the play (which the BBC's historical consultant had publicly characterized as "a tissue of lies") by saying that it revealed "the *greater* truth . . . about the First World War. I stand by its integrity." Curteis, *Falklands*, 35-36.

35. Ian Stewart, "Falklands Fields of Fire." *The Scotsman*, 21 May 1992: 15.

36. See Clive Fisher, *Noel Coward* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1992), 155-6; Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, eds. *The Noel Coward Diaries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 198 2), 7 ff; Walsh, 34-36.

37. It is interesting to note that R. C. Sheriff, author of the immensely successful anti-war play *Journey's End*, set in the First World War, also wrote the script for the patriotic 1954 film *The Dambusters*, which recounted a raid by RAF bombers on two German dams in 1943. Only very recently has the view that World War II ought to be treated differently than, say, World War I on a moral level been seriously challenged (see Paul Fussell, *Wartime:*

Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War [New York: Oxford UP, 1989]); a challenge which, if successful, would only add to the sense that *The Falklands Play* simply does not have a place in modern drama.

38. Curteis, *Falklands*, introduction, 44.

39. Significantly, the most effective effort at altering public perceptions of Richard III has been in the form of a a novel—*The Daughter of Time*, by Josephine Tey (New York: Macmillan, 1952)—rather than a work of history.

40. See Sobchak, 29.

41. *Daily Mail*, 16 Oct. 1993: 9.

42. Anne Collins, "The Battle over 'The Valour and the Horror,'" *Saturday Night*, May 1993: 48.