

# Representations of the French Revolution in Gunpowder Fantasy

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**Petar Miočević**

**Representations of the French Revolution in Gunpowder  
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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Petar Miočević

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REVOLUTION IN GUNPOWDER FANTASY**

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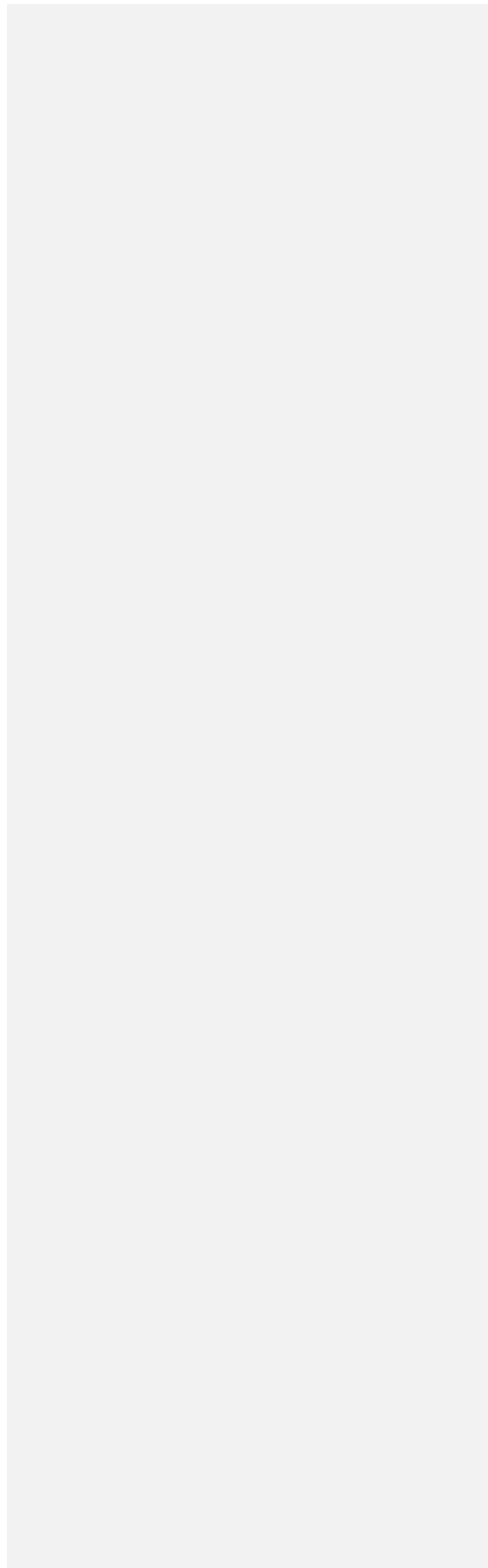
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the seminal events of modern history, the French Revolution remains a contested and debated matter in modern historiography and a popular topic of historical novels. Its causes and effects, although well-documented and analyzed, continue to spawn a multitude of historiographic works which continue to expand our understanding of that turbulent era, while the tales of heroism, sacrifice, terror and hope continue to permeate through ideologies and works of art. It can be easily claimed that, of all important events in human history, few have been as covered and (re)worked as the French Revolution.

Despite the large opus of both historiographic and literary works on the French Revolution, the possibilities for new research and new creative work are still boundless. As both postmodern historiography and literature turn their attention to matters that were of little interest in previous decades, and as new means of representing and recreating our historical knowledge emerge, so are the borders of knowledge and creativity moved, enabling historians and writers of fiction to achieve what previously may not have been possible. In terms of historiography, a greater focus on the history from below, social history, eco-history, psychohistory and intellectual history have allowed for a greater understanding of the various issues of the revolutionary period. In terms of literature, new styles of writing, new focuses in literature and new genres have broadened the scope of writers, and given them new tools to creatively express their view of this period of history.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze one of these new genres known as gunpowder fantasy, and the way several novels of the genre portray and recreate the events of the French Revolution within their own worlds. The purpose of this thesis is to prove that gunpowder fantasy, as a new genre, offers a new way of depicting this time period, as well as to analyze the ways it accomplishes that. The thesis argues that gunpowder fantasy is a highly appropriate sub-genre of historical fantasy for this kind of portrayal due to its basic tenets and premises; it also aims to connect the new genre with the tradition of historical novels and historical fantasy. This is done not just by analyzing the works of the genre, but by comparison with historical events, utilizing primary



sources and historiographic works. Finally, the thesis touches upon the relationship between literature and historiography in order to prove that, despite the fantastic elements, gunpowder fantasy is a potent genre that can help popularize history and provide a basic knowledge of historical processes behind one of the most tumultuous events in the history of the Western world.

### 1.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, this work will be grounded on methods of historiography and literary studies. One of the most important methods utilized in this thesis is comparative analysis, a method well-grounded in both historiography and literary studies. Works of gunpowder fantasy are analyzed in comparison with historic events, as well as historiographic works and other types of historical fantasy, such as steampunk. In addition to this, the thesis relies heavily on the analytical and interpretative methods, particularly in regards with matters of literary and historiographic theories. Finally, the thesis will make use of the descriptive method, particularly in regards to how historic events are transcribed and reinscribed in the works of gunpowder fantasy.

### 1.2. LITERATURE USED

The most important primary sources used in the thesis are literary works that belong to the sub-genre of gunpowder fantasy, most notably the *Shadow Campaigns* series written by Django Wexler. The series consists of five novels, the first of which, *The Thousand Names*, was published by Roc Books in 2013. Special emphasis is on Books Two and Three of the series, *The Shadow Throne* (2014) and *The Price of Valor* (2015), respectively.

In terms of literary theory, this thesis relies on the works by Gyorgy Lukacs, Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson. Lukacs's book *The Historical Novel* (first published in Russian in 1937, translated to English in 1962) is used to explain the basic tenets of historical fiction. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (first published in French in 1970, translated to English in 1973) and Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) are used as a

theoretical basis for the fantastic in general and gunpowder fantasy in particular. These theories will also be used to discuss the primary tenets of gunpowder fantasy.

In terms of historiography, various works of historiography pertaining to the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period are used. These works can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of works used by Django Wexler in his own research of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, such as Simon Schama's *Citizens* (1989) and David Chandler's *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (1966). The second category consists of other, more recent works on various aspects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, with the purpose of better explaining the historical processes and phenomena.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF GUNPOWDER FANTASY

Gunpowder fantasy is a relatively new sub-genre of historical fantasy, with works that can be placed within it being published since around 2008. The first major works that could be seen as the precedents of the genre are *His Majesty's Dragon* by Naomi Novik, published in 2006 and known in the United Kingdom under the title *Temeraire*, as well as *The Weavers of Saramyr* by Chris Wooding, published in 2007. However, 2008 and 2009 saw the publication of the first novel that can be placed within gunpowder fantasy: *Born to Empire* by Simon Brown. Simon Brown's work is important as it explores important historical notions and concepts such as colonialism, industrialization, and the changes in society brought forward by quick technological advance. In addition, he also covers the dichotomy between technology and the fantastic, and the conflict that arises between the two. Brown's novel was only the beginning, with novels penned by Brian McClellan, Django Wexler and others following soon after.

Despite its relatively recent roots, the works of gunpowder fantasy have established a certain canon and rules which distinguish them from other genres of historical fantasy, which in itself has a long and established tradition. Thus, this chapter covers the development of historical fantasy and its connection with gunpowder fantasy, but also establishes what could be termed as the primary tenets of gunpowder fantasy that distinguish it from similar sub-genres, such as steampunk and gaslamp fantasy.

M. D. Presley makes the claim that the primary feature of gunpowder fantasy is the important role played by gunpowder; although gunpowder and firearms are present in many works of fantasy, it is its importance to the plot and the world of those works that make gunpowder such an important element:

The Gunpowder Fantasy subgenre, if the name itself doesn't give it away, consists of fantasy tales incorporating the use of gunpowder as a major plot point. So while two characters might use gunpowder in, say, Rob Hayes' pirate duology *Best Laid Plans*, the use of guns does not factor as a plot point itself; the story is about pirates, some of which use guns. This is opposed to Brian McClellan's *Powder Mage Series* where

gunpowder is so important to the plot and worldbuilding that it earns a spot in the series name. (Presley 2018)

In addition, Presley states that gunpowder fantasy is an umbrella term which can include elements of various other genres. In this regard, Presley makes a distinction between flintlock fantasy and gunpowder fantasy (Presley). However, it is important to note that many authors use the two terms interchangeably, and the difference Presley points out to is not as clear cut as one may think. Presley also recognizes the fact that gunpowder/flintlock fantasy shares many elements and points with other genres of historical fantasy, such as steampunk or Weird West, but that its ultimate focus is unique and different from those of other genres:

Flintlock Fantasy, the best examples being *Powder Mage* and Django Wexler's *Shadow Campaigns*, deal with a time of transition from magic to technology. Magic certainly exists in these worlds, but technology, in the form of gunpowder, is **intruding upon the old order** to create a new one. Compare this to Weird West, which takes the American Wild West mythos and adds a Fantasy Conceit to it. ... In them, gunpowder is the norm and magic the interloper. Gunpowder, therefore, plays a major role in the plot because it is **how the characters deal with the new magical intrusion**. (Presley, bold in the original)

Gunpowder fantasy, or at least flintlock fantasy if the two terms are considered separate, can be defined as a sub-genre of historical fantasy inspired by or based on historical events of the empirical world during the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions, such as the French Revolution or the American Revolutionary War. This also includes the social, economic, political and military processes that preceded and caused these events. As such, the worlds of the works of gunpowder fantasy will be technologically and socially on a similar level of development as the Western world of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and various historical processes that impacted the empirical world will be visible in these fantastic worlds as well. The works of gunpowder fantasy have a variety of fantastic elements that can be present; however, their influence is often limited due to various social, cultural or physical limitations, allowing for a certain balance between the fantastic and the empirical to be achieved.

The next chapter will provide a discussion on the theory and development of historical fiction, based primarily on the theoretical work of Gyorgy Lukacs. Following

that is a brief overview of the theory of the fantastic, grounded in the works of Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson. These are necessary to provide a more accurate definition of the hybrid genre of gunpowder fantasy, which relies heavily on these theories.

## 2.1 HISTORICAL FICTION: LUKACS AND HIS COMMENTATORS

Historical fiction is a genre that is difficult to explain or define, despite its deceptively simple name. Historical fiction could, indeed, be defined simply as “fiction set in the past”, and, to a degree, such a definition would be correct. However, Sarah Johnson notes astutely that such a simplistic definition is not enough: “When you become involved with the field, you begin to learn that above all, historical fiction is a genre of controversy and contradiction” (Johnson 2002). That is also recognized by Jerome de Groot, who recognized the inherent contradiction of the phrase “historical fiction”:

Historical fictions are texts that suggest an experience of a ‘past’ that cannot and does not exist, insofar as it is fictional and the past is irretrievable. Manifestly, the term ‘historical fiction’ is not something definable and comprehensible. This paradoxical, contradictory phrase is unstable, while striving for clarity, a characteristic that might be descriptive of historical fictions themselves. The phrase ‘historical fiction’... is inherently contradictory (or a tautology, insofar as all history is fiction). (de Groot, *Remaking History* 3)

Recognizing the complexity of the debate, Johnson notes the importance of the plot as a defining feature of historical fiction. In short, while history may be only a convenient canvas used for the creation of a plot, the main feature of historical fiction is the creation of a connection between the past and the present. In other words, Johnson proposes that a definition of historical fiction could be “fiction set in the past but which emphasizes themes that pertain back to the present” (Johnson), as will be discussed anon. As things stand, this definition of historical fiction can be taken as valid and accurate, as it takes into account the changing interests and topics that inspire writers of historical fiction.

When discussing historical fiction as a whole, and thus historical fantasy as well, it is necessary to mention the theoretical ideas of Gyorgy Lukacs, a Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic. One of Lukacs’s most influential works of

literary criticism, *The Historical Novel* published in 1937 in Soviet Russia constitutes the first general overview of historical fiction as a genre, tracing its development from the works of Sir Walter Scott and its grounding in the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment. Lukacs connects the concept of the formation of modern historical consciousness with the rise of modern historical fiction, noting that modern historical consciousness started to spread in the period of the French Revolution. According to Lukacs, this was the result of two factors. The first one was the backlash against reactionary elements and their ideas on historical tradition (Lukacs 20). The second one was the mass participation of the general population in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars through the advent of mass mobilization. In Lukacs' words:

It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a mass experience, and moreover on a European scale. During the decades between 1789 and 1814 each nation of Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries. And the quick succession of these upheavals gives them a qualitatively distinct character, it makes their historical character far more visible than would be the case in isolated, individual instances: the masses no longer have the impression of a "natural occurrence". (Lukacs 23)

In short, stronger participation in politics and warfare, coupled with strong propaganda campaigns of all powers involved in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, led to a stronger sense of the human existence as one influenced by historical conditions which affected it immeasurably. With the development of bourgeois society, this acknowledgement of the influence of history on the everyday life going hand in hand with the development of the ideology of nationalism allowed for a development of what Lukacs calls modern historical fiction. According to Lukacs, this development began with the works of Sir Walter Scott, his novels being the first that introduced historicity. Lukacs claims that previous historical novels, such as the works of 17<sup>th</sup> century French authors, did not contain much historical consciousness; rather, they were a reflection of contemporary attitudes set in the past. According to Lukacs, "What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (Lukacs 19). The works of Sir Walter Scott, such as *Waverley* (1814), represent a distancing from this mode of writing allowed by the new

ideologies that appeared with the French Revolution; Scott's characters are not just contemporary figures transplanted into the past, but rather complex personas whose personalities and actions are linked with the basic conditions of their existence.

Lukacs notes that Scott sought to find a way between the extremes of his age in his artistic portrayal of historical reality. This, according to Lukacs, he accomplishes through his characters. Characters in Scott's works are not important historical actors, but rather average men and women removed from centers of decision making and conflict. Scott's hero "generally possesses a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a great cause" (Lukacs 33). This, according to Lukacs, allows him to become "a perfect instrument for Scott's way of presenting the totality of certain transitional stages of history" (Lukacs 35). In this regard, Lukacs relies on the ideas of Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky, who expounded that the hero of the epic serves as a focal point around which historical events unfold. The hero is subject to the event, not the other way around, overshadowed by the magnitude and importance of the event (Lukacs 35). This, however, is most often not the case in the works of gunpowder fantasy, which present a different way of representing the course of historical events, as it will be discussed later in the work.

The characters in the works of gunpowder fantasy are usually not just actively involved in the events that occur and develop around them, but are often their main instigators. The authors of the works of gunpowder fantasy circumvent the issue of one-sidedness by representing the events that unfold from multiple perspectives; there is not one hero, but rather a number of characters serving as focal points, providing the reader with different views on the unfolding events based on the character's personality, ideology and vested interest in the matter. The beliefs and actions of the various characters of Wexler's novels, such as Queen Raesinia of Vordan will ultimately differ from those of Johann Maurisk, the President of the Committee of National Defense; the goals of Winter Ihernglass will be different from those of Colonel Vhalnich or Jane Verity, the leader of the lower-class women of Vordan City. This approach is identical to the one used by many writers of contemporary historical fiction as well; an example that can be used is Ken Follett's *Century Trilogy* series of historical fiction (*Fall of Giants*, 2010, *Winter of the World*, 2012, and *Edge of Eternity*, 2014) which follows

the members of five families from different countries and with different ideologies and goals through the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It could be claimed that this approach gives a better overview of “the totality of certain transitional stages of history” to reuse Lukacs’s own words, as it gives an overview of the situation from a wide variety of social classes and ideologies.

The ultimate goal of a historical novel, according to Lukacs, is not the portrayal of great historical events, but rather “the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality” (Lukacs 42). In other words, the focus should not be placed on history itself, but rather its participants, their motives and their characters, and how they fit in in events greater than themselves.

In his book, Lukacs proceeds to give a damning opinion on the status of historical novels. Lukacs claims that after the revolutions of 1848 the bourgeoisie, the leading force behind historical novel, becomes stagnant and replaced by the proletariat as the vanguard class as it struggles to maintain its position of power: “during these days [1848] the bourgeoisie for the first time fights for the naked continuance of its economic and political rule” (Lukacs 171). This, according to Lukacs, changes the view of the bourgeoisie on the course of historical events, as it begins to view history as a “smooth, straightforward evolution” (Lukacs 174). Thus, the bourgeoisie according to Lukacs loses the elements of their ideology that made them question the social order of their day, leading to a stagnation not just in history, but in historical fiction as well. The end result was that the historical novel no longer played an important role in cultural or social development of the society, as it lost its “reformist/revolutionary” edge in favor of supporting the social *status quo*. As Lukacs maintains, “But the severance of the present from history creates an historical novel which drops to the level of light entertainment. Its themes are indiscriminate and unrelated and it is full of an adventurous or emptily antiquarian, an exciting or mythical exoticism” (Lukacs 183).

Lukacs’s opinion that there was stagnation in historical fiction was shared by various other authors, like Virginia Woolf. However, this stagnation of historical fiction should be placed within the context of the wider crisis of realist art, and Lukacs’s notion of the end of the historical novel today seems a bit exaggerated, even if his ideological



beliefs are taken into account. In fact, de Groot notes that historical novel is in “robust health”, having experienced a boom in popularity and sales in the recent decades. (de Groot, *The Historical Novel* 1). More recently, *New York Times* essayist Megan O’Grady proclaims that we are living in the Golden Age of historical fiction, noting how new themes and new focuses in historical fiction not only keep the genre blossoming, but also help bring light on that which has previously been overlooked and disregarded (O’Grady 2019). From Hilary Mantel and Richard Flanagan to Svetlana Alexievich, writers of historical fiction have been lauded for their new approaches to the genre, and works such as Gina Apostol’s *Insurrecto* (2018) show not only the difficulty of portraying the past of the oppressed, but also (in)directly make commentaries on the (re)production of history. It could be stated that the goals of the writers of historical fiction have changed; rather than making statements on social affairs and politics, historical fiction may have become its own purpose, its aim to describe the totality of human existence in a historical setting. This will however be covered in more details in Chapter 4.1.

In his article outlining a brief history of historical fiction, British historian Matthew J. Phillpott notes the question of the beginning of historical novels is not as straightforward as it may seem. Though Gyorgy Lukacs, one the first and foremost theorists of historical novels, places the beginning of historical fiction with Sir Walter Scott and his novel *Waverley*, Phillpott notes that there was a strong tradition of historical novels in France stemming from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The works of Madame de Lafayette and Cesar de Saint-Real are, or at least strive to be, historical novels, and they represent a different approach to universal history: “French historiography in seventeenth and early eighteenth century discourse focused on two competing strands other than the well-established universal history; *Particular* history and *Secret* history” (Phillpott 5, emphasis in the original). According to Phillpott, particular history deals with the history of a particular area, nation or distinguished individual with the purpose of understanding large scale events; meanwhile, secret history deals with the psychology and personal motives of historical actors and their role in historical causality (Phillpott 5).

Even though early examples of historical novels did originate in France, Scott’s novels represent the first of what could be considered modern historical novels. It is important to note that in English literary tradition, Scott’s novels are classified as

historical romances, rather than novels. It could be claimed that the difference between the two would be the way the works of each genre use historical elements. Helen Hughes notes that a romance invokes the past, and is usually set in an idealized aristocratic world. The setting, though remote from the point of view of the reader, is described in detail, as are emotions and relationships between the characters. The major themes of such works are adventure and sexual love (Hughes 2). On the other hand, historical novels are not content with simply using the past as a mere background; rather, as Markus Bernauer relates from Gyorgy Lukacs, a historical novel “presents an image of the uniqueness of the age, from which it derives ‘the particular way in which persons act’” (Bernauer 289).

Although British literary tradition makes a distinction between the two genres, continental literary tradition does not, and Jerome de Groot, a Dutch expert on public history, considers Scott’s novels to be the second wave of historical fiction. Expanding upon Lukacs’s ideas on historical fiction, Phillpott relates de Groot’s claim that the rise of second wave of historical fiction allowed readers to “gain a sense of their own historical specificity” by engaging with historical individuals (Phillpott 7). Historical fiction was not just to entertain, but also to engage and educate, and allow its readers to better understand past events, customs and processes. Phillpott notes that second wave historical fiction relied on the professionalization of history as a science, the rise of nationalism, and “the growing sense of historical change and *otherness* to the past” (Phillpott 8). These processes were, ultimately, some of the products of the Age of Enlightenment, and British historian Simon Schama notes that it is only appropriate that the historical novel saw its rise during a time of revolutionary upheaval of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “For it is not in the least fortuitous that the creation of the modern political world coincided precisely with the birth of the modern novel” (Schama 30).

While history became more established and professional through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historical novels as a genre began to stagnate by the end of the century, attracting a smaller number of readers and becoming more marginal. This trend was not isolated; rather, it was a part of the general stagnation of realist art, and the rise of new artistic movements that began to appear in the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which formed the basis of modernism. This trend, according to de Groot, was recognized by Virginia Woolf, who stated in 1925 that the genre needed “shaking up”, as it focused

on the trivial while ignoring the important matters of human experience. According to de Groot, Woolf argued for an interest in interiority, in contrast with the previous interest in otherness. Claiming that “everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss” (Woolf qtd. in de Groot, *Historical Novel* 42), she expresses a need to describe all the complicated nuances of life. In de Groot’s words, “this desire to adumbrate the detailed complications of life, allied to a clear interest in representing the psychological and in breaking formal conventions, forms the outline of what is often defined as literary modernism” (de Groot, *Historical Novel* 42). According to Phillpott, Woolf accomplishes this in her 1928 novel *Orlando*, which follows a man who lives from the Tudor era up to the twentieth century. By breaking up historicity and destroying the realism of historical fiction, Phillpott claims that Woolf attempted to show how “historical fiction need not always attempt true depictions of historical events but instead to find a greater truth about what it means to be human” (Phillpott 9). However, while Phillpott considers it to be a historical novel, it must be noted that *Orlando* is primarily a work of fantasy, not history, which uses its historical setting primarily as a fictionalized backdrop for the work.

The rift between historical novel and historiography was however reduced by the advent of postmodernism (as a historical movement, and not a literary style) and various cultural movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Phillpott notes that the advent of postmodernism fit historical fiction well, and helped to reinvigorate it, providing a creative outlet for historians wishing to explore history in a manner that may not necessarily be welcome in traditional academia. In this regard, Phillpott quotes the example of Simon Schama and his 1991 work *Dead Certainties* (Phillpott 12), while de Groot gives the example of Philippa Gregory, author of a large number of novels set in the Plantagenet and Tudor era (de Groot, *Consuming History* 231). In addition, the corpus of historical fiction was further enriched by the appearance of new genres and methods of writing, such as graphic novels. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is a work of historical fiction framed in the form of animal fantasy, as it deals with the Holocaust based on the experiences of Spiegelman’s father.

Historical fiction has a large variety of sub-genres, such as fictional autobiographies, historical mysteries, historiographic metafiction, alternate history and historical fantasy among others. Due to the topic of this thesis, the emphasis of analysis

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in this section will be placed on historical fantasy, a hybrid genre borrowing from two types of genre fiction: historical fiction and fantasy. According to Veronica Schanoes, historical fantasy can be defined as a genre of historical fiction that combines fantastic elements with more “realistic” narratives based in history or set in fictional worlds whose history can be closely related to historical events in the empirical world (Schanoes 236).

## 2.2 THE FANTASTIC AS A STRUCTURAL GENRE

One of the most important and earliest theorists of the fantastic was Tzvetan Todorov, Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic and historian. In 1970, Todorov published his book *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, translated into English in 1973 as *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, in which he defines the underlying grammar or structure of the fantastic based on the late 19th-century and early 20th-century European and American literary texts, resulting in the definition of three subgenres of the fantastic. In this section, a brief overview of Todorov’s theory of the fantastic will be given, and a deduction made as to which category of the fantastic would works of historical fantasy in general and gunpowder fantasy in particular could belong.

Todorov defines the fantastic as “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25). Some events that happen in our world, which follows the laws of nature, cannot be explained at first by those very laws. In that case, according to Todorov, the reader of those events must make a decision: whether the event is an illusion or a figment of imagination, in which case the laws of nature remain as they are; or the events have happened, in which case the reality is controlled by forces unknown and laws previously not observed. Once the decision is made, the fantastic is abandoned and replaced by one of the neighbouring genres, the uncanny or the marvelous (Todorov 25). If a supernatural explanation is the only possible answer to the conundrum, the text in question according to Todorov belongs in the category of the marvelous; if a solution in accordance with the laws of nature is given, the text would be placed within the genre of the uncanny (Todorov 41). It is important to note that these genres are strictly

delineated, and this presents certain limitations. As such, Todorov later on introduces two hybrid genres, fantastic-uncanny and fantastic-marvelous:

We find that in each case, a transitory sub-genre appears: between the fantastic and the uncanny on the one hand, between the fantastic and the marvelous on the other. These sub-genres include works that sustain the hesitation characteristic of the true fantastic for a long period, but that ultimately end in the marvelous or the uncanny. [...] The fantastic in its pure state is represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvelous. This line corresponds perfectly to the nature of the fantastic, a frontier between two adjacent realms. (Todorov 44)

In short, Todorov presents the three main conditions of what constitutes the fantastic:

1. "The text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described" (Todorov 33).
2. Optionally, this hesitation may be experienced not just by the readers, but by the character(s) involved; the readers role is entrusted to the character(s), with whom the reader may identify (Todorov 33).
3. The reader must reject any allegorical or poetic/metaphorical readings of the text (Todorov 33).

With this in mind, it is necessary to establish how they can be used to define the works of gunpowder fantasy, and perhaps even historical fantasy in general. The example of the *Shadow Campaigns* series can be used to illustrate this. In the first novel of the series, *The Thousand Names*, the characters are engaged in a counter-insurgency campaign with the goal of propping up the ruler of Khandar, an exotic land south of their homeland of Vordan. After suppressing a rebellion in the capital city of Ashe-Katarion and the death of their erstwhile commander, the colonial forces are placed under the command of an unknown colonel, Janus bet Vhalnich Mieran. Despite being severely outnumbered, Vhalnich decides to go on the offensive and take the fight to the rebel's bases in the desert, while attempting to fulfill his own agenda at the same time. As they advance into the desert, the colonial forces fall victim to a number of events which are described by them as highly unlikely at best to absolutely unexplainable at worst. The peak of this crescendo happens during the final showdown at an abandoned

temple, where the main characters witness outright the happening of the supernatural which was, to them, unexplainable.

Some of these events are eventually explained rationally; the constant ambushes to which the Vordani colonial forces are exposed are explained to be the result of use of an ingenious long-distance communication system by the indigenous population. This system allowed them to communicate the location of the Vordani forces in order to engage in hit-and-run attacks (Wexler, *Thousand Names* 426). The supernatural events at the temple, however, are ultimately explained to be the result of magical capabilities of their opponents, who had the ability to raise the forces of undead: “The corpse’s eyes snapped open. They were green from edge to edge and glowed with an inner light that threw Winter’s shadow wide across the tunnel ceiling. Its hands came up and locked around her wrist, dragging her off balance” (Wexler, *Thousand Names* 454).

The whole point of the expedition to the temple was, from Colonel Vhalnich’s perspective, to secure the Thousand Names, a series of large steel plates bearing inscriptions which, when read in a proper fashion, could endow the reader with magical abilities. Thus, it could be claimed that *The Thousand Names* would fall within the category of the fantastic-marvelous, as the nature of supernatural elements encountered by the characters are explained not to be a figment of their own imagination, but only at the very end of the novel.

Another example that can be taken from historical fantasy is Naomi Novik’s *Temeraire* series (published 2006-2016), set in the Napoleonic wars and featuring fantastic creatures such as dragons, as well as Brian McClellan’s *Powder Mage* trilogy (published 2013-2015), which sees an important role played by powerful sorcerers and powder mages which can utilize their powers by consuming gunpowder. Unlike *The Thousand Names*, where the fantastic suspense is kept almost until the end, Novik and McClellan make plain the supernatural nature of their worlds; as such, these works could be seen as examples of pure marvelous.

There are, of course, some issues regarding Todorov’s theories. For example, Todorov does not include any works of popular literature, limiting himself to the analysis of E. A. Poe, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky and several other “high-brow” authors belonging to the literary canon. Specifically, Todorov concludes his analysis

with works written up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thus omitting the subsequent development of the genre. In addition, Todorov claims that the fantastic as a genre appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that the last “aesthetically satisfying examples of the genre” can be found in Guy de Maupassant’s *oeuvre* (Todorov 166). If this Todorov’s claim is a result of his model and theories, then they themselves leave something to be desired. In Todorov’s defense, it could be claimed that popular works of the fantastic did not see any attention from the academia until the 1980s, and that the lack of translations of the works of the fantastic to French must have hampered his efforts. Despite their shortcomings, however, Todorov’s theories have established the fantastic as a literary genre, and as such remain among the central tenets of its theoretical basis.

### **2.3 ROSEMARY JACKSON - FANTASY AS LITERATURE OF SOCIO-HISTORICAL TABOOS**

In 1981, Rosemary Jackson published *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. Expanding upon Todorov’s theories, Jackson furthers the theoretical basis of the genre and answers some questions and uncertainties not addressed by Tzvetan Todorov, most notably by utilizing Marxist and psychoanalytical approaches.

At the very beginning of her work, Jackson recognizes the fact that literary fantasy is determined by its social context just like any other text. This social context, in Jackson’s opinion, can be influenced by historical, political, economic, social and sexual determinants, and as such, a work of fantasy cannot be placed “outside” of time (Jackson 2). This recognition is an important one, for it provides a basis for further claims made by Jackson regarding the nature of literary fantasy as subversive literature. Furthermore, Jackson recognizes that fantasy is “a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (Jackson 2). In expressing desire, literary fantasy can either tell of or expel desire, though Jackson notes that in many cases fantastic literature can perform both functions at once. Thus fantastic literature can suggest the main tenets of social order, and identify “the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (Jackson 2).

Jackson recognizes the importance of Todorov's work, but also points out the omissions in his book. Jackson states that Todorov, in line with structuralist criticism, fails to consider social, political and other implications of literary forms, nor does Todorov try to connect literary fantasy to its cultural background. In Jackson's own words:

For, in common with much structuralist criticism, Todorov's *The Fantastic* fails to consider the social and political implications of literary forms. Its attention is confined to the effects of the text and the means of its operation. It does not move outwards again to relate the forms of literary texts to their cultural formation. (Jackson 3)

Another major issue Jackson takes with Todorov's approach is his rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis, even though in Jackson's words "fantasy in literature deals so blatantly and repeatedly with unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts" (Jackson 3). As such, according to Jackson, literary fantasy is a subject in which psychoanalytical readings are essential in order to show this relationship between the laws of human society and "the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws" (Jackson 4).

One of Jackson's most important additions to Todorov's theory is that a fantastic text is inherently subversive, and questions our relationship with reality and society. According to Jackson, fantasy is an expression of desires and drives that society deems unwanted, and thus represses them. This is in connection with the themes of the self and the themes of the other, introduced by Todorov and referred to by Jackson as "themes of I" and "themes of not-I", as well as psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Helene Cixous. By exposing the unconscious, fantasy exposes absences in our society and culture, and undermines the institutions of society by constantly reminding of the "other". In Jackson's words, "Un-doing those unifying structures and significations upon which social order depends, fantasy functions to subvert and undermine social stability. [...] [Fantasy] is opposed to institutional order" (Jackson 40). This institutional order relies on repression of the unconscious, for example through taboos. It seeks to represent transgressions against social order through language and ultimately represents a desire to "push the 'human' beyond itself" (Jackson 44). It seeks to attack the concept of a unified character, and thus the unities of "self". As Jackson states, "The



fragmentation of 'character' in fantasy deforms a 'realistic' language of unified, rational selves. The subject becomes ex-centric, heterogeneous, spreading into every contradiction and (im)possibility" (Jackson 52). Jackson notes that literary fantasy is ultimately driven by restless dissatisfaction, and a longing for the imaginary which is not confined by social order, setting up possibilities for radical cultural transformations (Jackson 53).

Wexler's *Shadow Campaigns* series provide a number of examples of this questioning of social norms, as well as strong displays of desires and the limitations placed upon them by social structures and traditions. In terms of desire, which both Todorov and Jackson recognize is usually of sexual nature, the novels of the *Shadow Campaigns* series pay great attention to the question of homosexuality, its acceptance or rejection, as well as its politics. The novels portray the existence of same-sex relationship and related politics. In addition, the series deals openly with the question of the participation of women in the armed forces, and the limitations placed upon them in their service.

Few official examples of women's service in the armed forces in all roles, including combat ones, can be found in Western history, with the trend changing only in recent years. Women have usually been relegated to supporting roles; the participation of women in combat roles have often been met with contempt and derision at best, and outright harassment and sexual violence at worst. The major exception in this regard was the Soviet Union during the Second World War. With the need for manpower after the massive losses incurred during 1941, the Soviet Union was the first country to allow women to serve in combat roles during war. However, German propaganda was quickly put to work against them claiming that these women were destroying the traditional social order. The Soviet "witches" were portrayed as social heretics in comparison with the good and obedient German woman, which was to obey the tenets of the ideology of 3 Ks: *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church). As such, Soviet women who became prisoners of war were often subject to even worse treatment than their male counterparts. American historian Steven Merritt Miner makes the following claim: "Aside from the threat of death or mutilation at the front, female soldiers most feared being captured by the enemy. The Germans routinely treated Soviet POWs barbarically, but in several instances German commanders issued explicit orders to mistreat female captives" (Merritt Miner 52).

In the *Shadow Campaigns* series, this matter is portrayed in two ways. The first one is through the perspective of Winter Ihernglass, one of the major characters of the series. As a woman who has fled an abusive orphanage, Ihernglass resorts to cross-dressing in order to join the colonial forces of Vordan (Wexler, *Thousand Names* 27). The novels portray the difficulties of a person in such a situation, and the need to maintain secrecy. The second way in which this matter is addressed is the formation of all-women units following the revolution in Vordan. As in the example of the Soviet Union mentioned above, the Kingdom of Vordan found itself at a want for manpower, and colonel Vhalnich allowed the recruitment of women into the military (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 386). The novels show the difficulties of enforcing such a decision in an institution which is inherently conservative and not prone to change, showing the problems faced by Vordani women who decided to serve in the ranks. An example which can be taken is the treatment of women in the ranks by a certain lieutenant Novus; a scion of an old aristocratic family, Novus considers the enlistment of women to be an absolute abomination:

“I find the sight of Lieutenant Malloy [a woman] offensive, sir,” Novus spit. “It’s fucking unnatural and makes me want to vomit. It’s like someone put a wedding dress on a sow, or gloves on a horse. It’s absurd.” (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 165)

Novus did not stop at making his contempt towards his newfound colleagues known, and is sent back to Vordan City in disgrace after assaulting one of the soldiers of the Girls’ Own Battalion (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 196). In addition, women in the Vordani Army have the habit of carrying daggers to be used in case of capture, in order to avoid torture or worse (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 27). Thus, it can be stated that the novels portray fully the difficulty of integration of women in a conservative institution previously limited to men, from such mundane problems like ill-fitting equipment to drastic issues such as harassment and incidents of sexual violence.

On the basis of the theory of historical fiction and the fantastic covered earlier, this thesis has shown that the works of Django Wexler are grounded in both modes, and as such can be safely placed within the genre of historical fantasy. The following chapter will thus establish gunpowder fantasy as a subgenre of historical fantasy most appropriate to describe the works contained in the *Shadow Campaigns* series.

## 2.4 GUNPOWDER FANTASY AS A SEPARATE SUB-GENRE OF HISTORICAL FANTASY

With the grounding of historical fantasy as a whole and the theoretical basis of the fantastic completed, it is possible to determine the basic tenets of gunpowder fantasy and what distinguishes it from other sub-genres of historical fantasy. These tenets can be divided into three major categories: the reliance on technology, the portrayal of wider socio-political and socio-economic factors, and the relationship between the fantastic and the empirical.

### 2.4.1 LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

As the name of the genre implies, gunpowder fantasy prominently features the use of gunpowder and firearms in all their shapes, from the smallest pistols to large siege guns. This, however, is a broad term, and in terms of technological development can encompass the period of almost 800 years of gunpowder usage in Europe, from the early bombards of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present-day armaments. The term flintlock fantasy offers a more limited and accurate scope, though as noted before, it is unclear whether the terms flintlock fantasy and gunpowder fantasy can be interchangeable (as used by various authors and fans), or whether flintlock fantasy should be considered a sub-genre of gunpowder fantasy, as earlier stated.

The term flintlock fantasy is based on the flintlock mechanism, and the term “flintlock” itself can be used to refer to any firearm that utilizes the mechanism. Although various forms of the flintlock mechanism existed since the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Swedish historian Torsten Lenk notes that the first true flintlock mechanism is considered to be the one invented by French gunsmith Marin le Bourgeois around 1610 for the French king Louis XIII (Lenk 31). By the end of the Thirty Years’ War, the flintlock became widely popular and used due to its simplicity and reliability in comparison with previous mechanisms, such as the matchlock or the wheellock. The flintlock remained the primary method of firearm operation for over two centuries, being replaced first with the percussion cap system, and later on by cartridge-based systems in the early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century; weapons expert Stuart Reid notes that many flintlocks were still carried by Confederate soldiers in the American Civil War, while at the same time many French soldiers used converted flintlocks (Reid 76).

The level of technological advance in the works of gunpowder fantasy is visible not just through the use of flintlock-based firearms as primary weapons, but also in the industrial development portrayed in many of the works. The utilization of steam engine, and in some cases its refinement to the point of allowing the development of fully operational railroad systems, implies a level of technological development that extends far beyond purely military technology. However, the technology involved is not completely refined, and is in some cases described to be in its nascent stages.

This is one of the aspects that distinguish the works of gunpowder fantasy from those of steampunk, which depict highly-developed pieces of Victorian and Edwardian-era technology and machinery, often assisted in their work by fantastic elements. Peter Nicholls defines steampunk as a modern subgenre which bases its science-fiction elements in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century setting, and which ranges from pure science-fiction to rationalized fantasy (Nicholls 1161). Rebecca Onion notes the importance of the mechanical aspect of machinery and aesthetics in steampunk, and makes the following observation:

The steampunk ideology prizes brass, copper, wood, leather, and papier-mâché – the construction materials of this bygone time. Steampunks fetishise cogs, springs, sprockets, wheels, and hydraulic motion. They love the sight of the clouds of steam that arise during the operation of steam-powered technology. (Onion 139)

Finally, Jeff VanderMeer attempts to identify other defining features of steampunk. VanderMeer claims that steampunk is “simultaneously retro and forward-looking in nature... it evokes a sense of adventure and discovery... it embraces divergent and extinct technologies as a way of talking about the future” (VanderMeer 9).

Technology features prominently in the works of steampunk, and is an important aspect of the genre; such is not the case in gunpowder fantasy, where a more important role is given to the transition from the traditional means of production to modern ones, and from reliance on magic to reliance on technology. As such, it can be stated that the works of gunpowder fantasy portray a relatively advanced and modern world, however not one as advanced as would be the case in steampunk. Coupled with the limited time period of the proliferation of flintlock-based firearms, it can be claimed

that the works of gunpowder fantasy can be compared in terms of technology to the level of development in Europe between the early 18<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 2.4.2 PORTRAYAL OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS

The proliferation of gunpowder-based weapons was a revolutionary process in European history, and one that changed the face of warfare globally. Though the use of gunpowder itself did not start the process of military reform and change, it drastically increased the rate at which that change occurred from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This process was analyzed by historian Michael Roberts, who named it “the Military Revolution” in 1955; this theory was further refined by Geoffrey Parker in the 1990s.

The theory of the Military Revolution is a fairly controversial one, as it does not fully explain certain developments in European countries. In addition, it is questionable whether a process that takes centuries to complete can be termed a revolution rather than evolution, and the point of the beginning and the end of this period of rapid military change is hotly debated even today.<sup>1</sup> After all, the first major change in this period was not connected to gunpowder at all: rather, according to British military historian Michael Howard, it was the proliferation of well-trained and disciplined pike infantry that began to endanger the domination of cavalry on the battlefields of Europe (Howard 21-22). However, Parker notes that the Military Revolution was revolutionary in its impact even if it took decades or centuries to fully develop, and that it was exactly because of these military and social changes that European countries managed to form first overseas empires between 1500 and 1750 (Parker 3-4).

The importance of the theory of the Military Revolution lies in its explanation of various processes and events not related solely to the sphere of the military. While advances in military thinking, tactics and doctrine were important, they were not isolated advances that occurred independent of various social changes. Parker notes that, while various military methods of the age, such as linear battle tactics and reliance on mercenary forces have long since been abandoned, the social by-products of the Military Revolution are still present to this day (Parker 4). Indeed, the most major

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this discussion, see: Rogers, Clifford J., ed. *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

consequence of the Military Revolution, the rise of the modern state and institutions, was far more encompassing than the name of the theory may imply.

In short, proponents of the theory of the Military Revolution state that the changes in warfare, such as the formation of larger armies, introduction of standing armies, linear battle tactics, formation of permanent national navies and so forth forced through various changes in economics and politics, whose influence reached far beyond the spheres of the military. As Geoffrey Parker claims:

[Michael] Robert's military revolution dramatically accentuated the impact of war on society: the greater costs incurred, the greater damage inflicted, and the greater administrative challenges posed by the augmented armies made waging war far more of a burden and far more of a problem than ever previously, both for the civilian population and for their rulers. (Parker 2)

The need to finance the new military structures supporting the enlarged apparatus of war enticed the development of the modern banking system, introduced the concept of national debt, enabled financing by speculation and established economic institutions of national and international importance (Parker 62-63). The development of stock markets was fueled by development of the merchant marine, enabled and guarded by newly established naval institutions and permanent navies (Parker 100-102). The enlarged armies of the age required more manpower than ever, and the need to determine the number of men capable of military service enticed the beginnings of modern census taking, particularly in Sweden and Prussia (Parker 52-53). Modern systems of taxation were introduced as well, replacing in many parts of Europe old feudal levies. The need for greater production of armaments, as well as their standardization, led to first undertakings that would result in the unification of measurements, as well as standardization of consumer goods.

In terms of politics, this period saw the rise of modern institutions of control and oversight, such as ministries and various boards. This, in turn, led to the growth of bureaucracy and the centralization of European states. In most European states, this centralization and concentration of power in the person of the sovereign led to the rise of absolutism (Parker 147). The development of political and philosophical thought that spawned from the technological progress and political and economic development of

the age led to the beginning of the Enlightenment, which would see its final result in the American and French Revolutions.

Finally, Parker notes that this process of political and economic change went hand in hand with the military developments, and that the development of both the civil and the martial spheres of the state relied heavily on each other. As Parker maintains:

The emergence of the “Renaissance State”, with its more efficient bureaucratic structure and its improved methods of raising money, constituted an essential precondition for the important military changes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; while, conversely, the need to mobilize resources for war could enhance governments’ power over their subjects. [...] In the broad sense, however, [Charles] Tilly was right: military activity and state formation have always been inextricably linked, and periods of rapid military change have usually coincided with major political innovations. (Parker 159)

The notions brought forward by proponents of the Military Revolution theory are important, as they help explain some causes of historical development of Western civilization. This is important for the notion of historical fiction in general, and historical fantasy in particular, as historical fiction by definition has to be grounded in historical events of the empirical world. With this in mind, it can be said that a work of gunpowder fantasy should not just cover the military aspect of the history of the period described in the previous section; rather, it should also describe the social, economic, political and cultural advances in its own alternative world which should reference events from the empirical world. The rise of commerce and industry in opposition to agricultural dominance, republican uprisings and revolutionary politics, changes in the military brought forth by the collapse of the *Ancien Regime*, or any of the aforementioned developments in politics, economy and social structures should necessarily be in the background as an important aspect behind the events described in the works of gunpowder fantasy.

### 2.4.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FANTASTIC AND THE EMPIRICAL

As mentioned above, one of the main issues in the works of historical fantasy is combining the fantastic with historical fiction, grounded in realism and historically

accurate events. Though previous sections have mentioned how this can be made possible, it is necessary to discuss one more aspect: the relationship between the fantastic and the empirical in the works of gunpowder fantasy; that is, the question of the potential of the fantastic to impact the world of the works in question.

It can be noted in general that many of the works of fantasy do not feature any strong technological development, at least in the way a person living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might perceive it. In addition, it could be stated that any work focusing on technological development and science would fall within the purview of science fiction, rather than fantasy. Instead of technology, the dwellers of the worlds of fantasy rely on magic, a rare but omnipotent element capable of drastically influencing the universe of the work in question.

However, technological and scientific progress similar to the one experienced by the Western world during the Age of Enlightenment is one of the mainstays of the worlds of gunpowder fantasy, as earlier noted. While Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law establishes that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, magic itself does not play as large a role as it does in the works of high fantasy. That is not to say that magic and other fantastic elements are not present in the works of gunpowder fantasy; rather, they are limited either in their scope or possibilities. An example of this can be found in Wexler's *Shadow Campaigns* series, where the use of magic is extremely limited due to religious reasons.

In the *Shadow Campaigns* universe, a person can either be born with what is called a Name, essentially one of a myriad of magical abilities, or can gain access to its powers by performing the ritual of "reading a Name." These Names vary in character and power; some can allow instant communication over long distances, some allow for fast travel, but a few can also influence weather or, ultimately, allow for control over other men (Wexler, *Thousand Names* 504). This last one, the most potent and dangerous of all, received the moniker of the Beast of Judgement and was banished by Karis the Savior and Saint Elleusis Ligamenti (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 16). This is the basis of the theology of the Sworn Church, the most powerful religious organization in the *Shadow Campaigns* world, with world-wide presence and sponsored by the country of Murnsk.



While it is obvious that the Names can hold immense power, they are extremely rare, to the point that the average person does not believe in the existence of magic and thinks of the stories of the Beast of Judgement as purely metaphorical. This is due to the standing policy of the Sworn Church to hunt down any person that they suspect is born with magical abilities. In addition, it is revealed in the course of the novels that the Sworn Church has resorted to kidnapping of innocent people considered to be physically and mentally strong enough to bear a Name, forcing them to take on magical powers. This is done in order to deny the possibility of people being born with that Name, as a Name can be carried by only one person at a time (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 23-24). In addition, the Sworn Church has a secret branch known as the Penitent Damned; these are secret agents of sorts who willfully took on the burden of carrying a Name, thus – according to the Church philosophy – condemning themselves to eternal damnation (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 22). With these measures in place, the possibility of a person being born with magical abilities is low, while the chances of it remaining free long enough to become aware of its powers is even lower. As such, it is fairly obvious how, despite all its potential power, magic does not play a major role in the world of *Shadow Campaigns* – or, at least, how it is perceived not to play a major role.

The fantastic elements are revealed unto the characters, some of whom have been aware of them before, some of whom consider them to be nothing more than figments of imagination, and the relationship towards the fantastic and the Sworn Church forms one of the main plot lines in the works of the *Shadow Campaigns* series. However, while acting as a plot device in the form of *deus ex machina* and as a general driver of one of the plot lines, and despite the immense potential of magical elements, they do not impact the world as much as they could due to their relative obscurity and availability to only a handful of people. From the point of view of characters, this is explained by the mysticism of the world, as the dominant religion dictates that the unchecked spread of magical abilities would eventually lead to the second coming of the Beast of Judgement.

Even though a person bearing a powerful Name can greatly impact the course of events, the main drivers of historical events are still large-scale wars, political intrigues, diplomatic overtures and technological progress. In the *Shadow Campaigns* series, the revolution in Vordan succeeds even though opponents of the revolution are assisted by the Sworn Church and their magical capabilities, while armies in the field

fight a conventional war. The playing ground changes in books four and five of the series, as magic starts to impact events more directly. However, even as the advancing armies of Vordan are caught up in a terrible blizzard in the middle of May, the majority of the men and women involved still believe it to be a freak accident of nature rather than the influence of magic (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 312-313). Similarly, when the Beast of Judgement is once again unleashed upon the world, it still has to rely on conventional warfare and the superior quantity of its ever-growing forces in conjunction with its magical abilities. However, while a victory against the armies marching against Vordan can be achieved by conventional means, the Beast of Judgement itself is undone by magical means.

As such, it can be said that, while fantastic elements in general and magic in particular will be present in the works of gunpowder fantasy, their influence is relatively limited in order to allow for the portrayal of events in a manner that would make their empirical historical context visible and more understandable to the reader. This is not to say that magic itself will not influence these events, or even have a role in determining their outcome. This way, a certain balance between historical and fantastic influences can be achieved in the works of gunpowder fantasy.

### 3. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN DJANGO WEXLER'S *SHADOW CAMPAIGNS SERIES*

*For all the hardworking historians from whom I swipe my ideas. – dedication, Django Wexler: Guns of Empire (2016)*

As previously said, historical fantasy heavily draws on historical events and processes. This chapter will focus on gunpowder fantasy's special focus on the representation of the French Revolution. While these events are represented differently than they have happened historically due to artistic license, it is easy to recognize these events or at least their elements as an inspiration behind the events of various gunpowder fantasy novels. As such, these historical elements will be analyzed in comparison with the events described in the novels. This chapter is divided into three sections: historical events, historical geography and historical figures.

#### 3.1 HISTORICAL EVENTS AND PROCESSES

The most important event in the works of Django Wexler analyzed in this thesis is the revolution in Vordan, an important power that has seen a series of military and economic setbacks in the years prior to the events of the novels. The situation in Vordan is represented from several distinctive points of view, such as those of Queen Raesinia Orboan, Duke Mallus Kengire Orlanko, Colonel (later General) Janus bet Vhalnich Mieran and others, whose actions ultimately shape the fate of a nation.

Vordan is described as being in a state of severe economic crisis, brought about by disastrous defeats during the War of the Princes, which saw the defeat of Vordan's armies and the death of Crown Prince Dominic. The Kingdom of Vordan was forced to accept peace with its enemies at harsh terms; it was forced to pay severe indemnities, and its financial sector was, for all intents and purposes, taken over by bankers of the rival nation of Borel (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 39). In order to extract the money for the reparations, the towns and cities of Vordan are scoured by tax farmers, which are described from the Vordanai point of view as ruthless and cruel (Wexler, *Shadow*

*Throne* 32, 160). The financial breakdown led to inflation, causing a drop in quality of life and standard of living in the Kingdom humiliated by the treaty.

In Vordan City, the capital of the Kingdom, grumbling students influenced by the writings of philosopher Voulenne, discontented middle-class and desperate working-class begin demanding change louder with each passing day, under the slogan of “one eagle and the Deputies-General”. The one eagle refers to the traditional price of a loaf of bread, which quadrupled during the crisis, bringing many poor families to the brink of starvation, while the reference to the Deputies-General is a call for an assembly of all estates of the nation called up by kings of Vordan in times of national crisis (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 88). Even before the Deputies-General are called up, there are instances of attacks on tax farmers and government officials trying to enforce their work (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 167).

This is, in essence, reminiscent of the situation in France prior to the Revolution. Its military interventions in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which were for the most part unsuccessful, brought a proud nation to the brink of economic collapse, the brunt of which was borne by workers and peasants. The French nobility was not taxed, and in order to repay the debts, the monarchy resorted to extortionist methods, employing tax farmers in order to raise funds necessary for the functioning of state. The situation became even worse in the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War. Military historian Gregory Fremont-Barnes notes that, although successful, the war was a pyrrhic victory for France at best, and as the United States refused to repay French debt incurred during the war, the country was left almost bankrupt (Fremont-Barnes 15). This view is shared by Schama, who notes the following:

The best estimates of the costs of the American alliance in both its surreptitious and openly military forms – from 1776 to 1783 – come to 1.3 billion livres, exclusive of interest payments on the new debts incurred by the government as a result. So that, without much exaggeration, it can be said that the costs of Vergennes’ global strategy policy brought on the terminal crisis of the French monarchy. (Schama 80)

In such a situation, King Louis XVI was forced to call up the Estates-General, where the Third Estate, dominated by middle-class lawyers and merchants influenced by political thinking of the Enlightenment and the American republic, demanded reform. Social scientist Andrew J. Waskey notes this importance of the convergence of

financial difficulties, desire for reform and the dissatisfaction of the lower classes, stating that the French Revolution was not merely a product of ideas, but rather an “unfolding of events in which numerous ideas played a role” (Waskey 29). This is also in line with Schama’s view on the beginning of the French Revolution. In Schama’s words: “Nor does the Revolution seem any longer to conform to a grand historical design, preordained by inexorable forces of social change. Instead it seems a thing of contingencies and unforeseen consequences (not least the summoning of the Estates-General itself)” (Schama 17). In fact, Schama goes even further to claim that the Revolution was not so much the result of the famines or social inequality, but primarily of the (in)action of the state (Schama 80).

One of the most dramatic events of the revolution in Vordan is the storming of the prison fortress of Vendre. A triangular castle built centuries before the revolution, the Vendre becomes hopelessly obsolete in military terms, but it serves as an ever-present reminder of the power of state, particularly the ruthless brutality of the Vordanai secret service known as the Concordat. The Vendre has been used by the Concordat as a prison for criminals considered to be the most dangerous, and the imprisonment of influential and popular orator Danton Aurenne and dozens of his supporters enticed the people of Vordan City to besiege the Vendre, ultimately capturing it (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 175, 206-257). This is similar to the events of the fall of Bastille, though it is important to note a difference in the reasoning behind the two events. The Vendre is captured for the sole purpose of liberating prisoners, while the Bastille was primarily taken for its gunpowder stores. Schama notes that the mob which stormed the Bastille faced an anticlimactic reality of liberating only seven prisoners, including two lunatics, four forgers, and marquis de Sade and one of his accomplices (Schama 456). More important, however, was the symbolic message. As Schama argues, by storming the Bastille, the revolutionary mob took control of the place which served as a physical reminder of the state’s authority:

If the monarchy was to be depicted (not completely without justice) as arbitrary, obsessed with secrecy and vested with capricious powers over the life and death of its citizens, the Bastille was the perfect symbol of those vices. If it had not existed, it is safe to say, it would have had to be invented. (Schama 456)

It is important to note that the political scene in Vordan is extremely fractured, and that the people who participate in the revolution do not do so as a single, united force. There is a large number of political factions, though they could be put together within three groups: the Monarchists, the Reformists and the Radicals:

The largest group, closest to the bar, was easy to identify by their expensive, fashionable costumes. These were the Monarchists and their allies, the guardians of the old order, in their natural habitat here in the Sovereign and plainly resenting the newcomers. [...]

Maurisk's presence at the head of the second group identified them as the Reformers and associated sects, who wanted to tinker with the social order but not smash it entirely to pieces. [...]

The third group, by process of elimination, was the Radicals, including the Republicans, the Individualists, and any number of other flavors of wild-eyed freethinkers and devotees of Voulenne. They were the most varied collection, by far, looking almost like an artist's depiction of a cross section of Vordanai society - everything from noble finery to mendicant's rags seemed to be represented. There were women among them, too, mostly the rare female University students whose dress Raesinia had affected. (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 194)

The ideologies and political stances of these groups would shift and bend in pursuit of power, but also due to legitimate changes of opinion followed the fall of the Vendre and the calling of the Deputies-General, which put many previously illegal political factions into a position of legitimate authority. The factions primarily represented in the Deputies-General were the Monarchists, the Radicals and the Center (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 338-339). This is reminiscent of the political layout in the French Revolution, where different political factions arose and disappeared with clockwork regularity, particularly as violence ramped up. The Monarchists in Wexler's novel represent the easiest challenge, as they can be seen as the direct counterparts of French Royalists. The remaining political factions in Vordan present a greater challenge in their analysis. The Radicals can be seen as a representation of the most extreme left-wing elements of the French Revolution, such as Jacobins, Montagnards, or Hebertistes. The Center, given its moderate views while recognizing the need for reform, could be likened to the Plain faction of the French National Convention;

however, it was not a unified party, and some of its members displayed opinions that are reminiscent of the French Girondins.

It is important to note that many initially just want to transform the state into a constitutional monarchy, but as events take place, the position of the Queen becomes endangered, first by the Directory of National Defense, and then by the Consulate of general Vhalnich. This is similar to how political positions in regard to the organization of the state changed during the French Revolution. Schama notes that initially the majority of revolutionaries wanted to reform the system, not outright destroy it, but that this goal became impossible to achieve due to the contradictions inherent in the French Revolution and the conflicting interests of its participants (Schama 572).

One of the forces behind the Vordani Revolution were newspapers, both legal and illegal, printed in large numbers and representing all political options in the Vordani society. The advent of newspapers allowed the realization among the wider masses that discontent was widespread, and allowed for the appearance of several important figures who through their charisma swayed the opinions of the Vordani masses (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 94). Many of the papers were radical and anti-establishment, fighting against the political and religious establishment even before the beginning of the revolution:

Raesinia recognized several of her own broadsheets, along with quite a few others that had picked up the banner. *ONE EAGLE AND THE DEPUTIES-GENERAL!* blazed in huge type across half the papers she saw, along with *DOWN WITH THE SWORN!, NO OATHS TO ELYSIUM!, NO MORE FOREIGN BLOODSUCKERS!* and a great deal of anti-Borelgai raving. (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 130)

This is highly reminiscent of the role newspapers and pamphlets played in the French Revolution; as the Estates-General assembled and debated the measures necessary to ensure the financial well-being of the state, newspapers and pamphlets became breeding ground for new political ideas. Schama notes that, while newspapers and other printed media became more popular during the 1780s as a whole, it was during the French Revolution that they received their political character and became representative of the whole society (Schama 212, 603). Political thinkers such as Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyes, more commonly known as *abbe* Sieyes, found new audience for their political theories through the new media, which allowed the appearance of new

political figures; at the same time, journalists such as Jean-Paul Marat spurred the masses into action and often incited violence against the enemies of the revolution. Schama notes this role the newspapers had in the radicalization of the French public, particularly in the popularization of violence as a means of expression of dissent, stating the following:

It was not just the spontaneous nature of popular retribution that alarmed [the moderates], but the verbal and journalistic violence that seemed to egg such demonstrations on. And there is no doubt that some of the most pungent and widely read of the many newspapers that began publication at this time discovered the shock appeal of abuse. Marat's *L'Ami du Peuple* (*The Friend of the People*), for example, routinely criminalized politicians of whom it disapproved as not just mistaken but as inhumanly vampirical – “blood-sucking” was a favorite term – and requiring speedy excision from the body politic. (Schama 514)

Following the fall of the Concordat, Duke Orlanko is forced into exile where he starts to assemble an army to bring back Vordan under his control, vowing revenge against all those who stood against him (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 336). His forces, assembled at the town of Midvale, are met by Colonel Vhalnich; although Vhalnich's force consists mostly of raw recruits and volunteers without proper equipment with a core of professional soldiers, his superior tactics and the superior morale of his forces allow him to defeat Orlanko and carry the day (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 418-430). The public sees this clash as the battle which saved the revolution and victory propels Vhalnich into fame as the saviour of the nation. This battle is reminiscent of the battle of Valmy in 1792, where the Prussian forces led by the Duke of Brunswick took a heavy blow from the revolutionary army under general Kellermann. Military historian Gregory Fremont-Barnes notes that although the Prussian forces were better equipped and had a larger artillery force, the superior gunmanship of French crews, as well as the high elan of the French forces made the Duke of Brunswick reconsider his position. Even before the French counterattack, the Duke of Brunswick decided to withdraw, thus abandoning his march to Paris (Fremont-Barnes 26). Kellermann was celebrated as the saviour of the Revolution. Historian Peter Hofschröer notes that in 1804 he was made a Marshal of France by Napoleon, and in 1808 received the title of the Duke of Valmy (Hofschröer 526). The battle, despite being a fairly small skirmish, particularly in comparison with the battles that followed, has been described as one of the most



important events not just of the French Revolution, but of entire Western history. As Fremont-Barnes notes,

Seldom have wars *begun* with battles so decisive not only for the immediate conflict itself, but for history in general. Valmy did just that. A few hours' cannonade brought a halt to the carefully dressed ranks of Prussian infantry, that great legacy of Frederick the Great. This exchange itself illustrates the emergence of the new citizen-soldier and the decline of the 'walking muskets' of absolutism. (Fremont Barnes 8-9, emphasis in the original)

Following the battle of Midvale, newly-promoted general Vhalnich takes control of the Vordanai Army of the East, a motley force around 40.000 men strong, consisting of both regulars and revolutionary volunteers. It is this force that he leads into action against the League Cities, a confederation of trade cities led by the city of Hamvelt. This campaign sees several large clashes, culminating in the capture of the fortress city of Antova, the key part of League Cities' defense system. The fortifications of Antova are described as a "year fortress", that is a fortress that is capable of sustaining itself under siege for a year, and is considered to be the most modern and extensive fortification works on the continent (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 109). While Vhalnich is relieved of his command at the outset of the siege, a clever ruse by his subordinates forces the surrender of the city, forcing the capitulation of the League Cities and the end of the war in the eastern theater.

This campaign is highly reminiscent of Napoleon's Italian campaign of 1797 in tactics, strategy and its final outcome. Relying on the superior morale and maneuverability of the Army of Italy, Napoleon regularly outmaneuvered Austrian forces, as well as armies of various Italian states. According to Englund, Napoleon's strategy of concentration of forces in time and space allowed him to defeat his enemies in detail, destroying one army at a time and evening out the odds despite being severely outnumbered and suffering from logistical problems (Englund 109). As Englund notes, at the time of Napoleon taking command of the Army of Italy, it numbered only around 38.000 demoralized men, and was greatly outnumbered by the forces of the Habsburg Empire and various Italian states, primarily the Kingdom of Piedmont. Napoleon's greatest accomplishment, according to Englund, was that he took this morally and materially depleted force and within the course of a single month turned it into one of the finest instruments of war in history (Englund 107, 112). This strategy of

concentration of forces was similarly employed by general Vhalnich, who regularly managed to establish tactical and operational superiority despite strategic obstacles. In addition, the fall of the fortress of Antova and its morale-shattering effect is reminiscent of the surrender of the fortress of Mantua in northern Italy. Although Mantua held much longer under siege than Antova did, the subsequent surrender of the fortress made Austrian position in northern Italy untenable, as Napoleon was able to move unhindered either east or north into the heartlands of the Habsburg Empire. As Fremont-Barnes notes, the defeat of several Austrian armies followed by the capture of Mantua left the Habsburgs unable to continue the fight against the French (Fremont-Barnes 40). As such, Emperor Francis II requested a cease-fire, which was formalized as the treaty of Campo Formio in 1797.

On the home front, the fall of Duke Orlando and the success of the revolution are followed by the creation of a new governing body, the Directory of National Defense, headed by president Johann Maurisk (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 55). The body itself is under Maurisk's complete control, and is, for the most part, ineffective. Concerning itself mostly with internal affairs, Maurisk places most of his attention in prosecuting enemies of the state, whether real or perceived, having them executed on a machine called the Spike (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 60, 121). Invented at the beginning of the Directory's administration by Doctor-Professor Sarton, the Spike is described as a humane way of inducing instant death by driving a large metal spike through the heart of the condemned (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 56-57). Plagued by military defeats in all other theaters of war other than the eastern front, as well as defections and desertions, Maurisk's campaign of terror grows in scale with each passing day with the support of the Patriot Guard, and sees the execution of several of his political opponents on charges of treason (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 174, 261). In addition, Maurisk undertakes a massive censorship campaign, cracking down on the newspaper printers and allowing only pro-government papers to be published (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 60). In Maurisk's view, all the crimes committed during the Reign of Terror are necessary for the victory of the revolution: "A true revolution required a purge, as Farus IV had understood over a hundred years before. It needed a man willing to do what was necessary, without restraint" (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 266).

With the return of general Vhalnich, who once again assumes command of the Army of the East and marches with it to the capital, Maurisk falls from power. Forced

to declare the Directory dissolved, he is imprisoned and later killed; following these events, Queen Raesinia gives power to general Vhalnich, who is proclaimed the First Consul (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 745).

These events are reminiscent of the events that happened in France following the formation of the Committee of Public Safety. Dominated by Maximilien Robespierre, a radical Jacobin, the Committee of Public Safety was given sweeping powers over military affairs, juridical matters and legislature in light of the opposition revolutionary France found against itself. Schama notes that, while the Committee in its early days did not have as much power as it is popularly believed, it did grow to become the most concentrated apparatus of state in French history (Schama 856). Having found himself in position of power, Robespierre, known as “the Incorruptible”, attempted to improve France’s political and military situation and saw some initial successes. However, facing revolts in the Vendee and with foreign armies posing a looming threat to the Revolution, Robespierre embarked on a series of purges, known as the Reign of Terror – particularly after the important military port of Toulon fell to the British. As Schama notes, it was after this particular event that Robespierre proclaimed that “terror will be the order of the day” (Schama 860). The Reign of Terror saw the downfall of many important revolutionary leaders, such as Georges Danton, as well as the death of around 30.000 French men and women. Schama notes that the Terror was particularly brutal during the winter of Year II/1793, particularly with the pacification of the Vendee which was extremely brutal to the point it disgusted even some of its proponents (Schama 892-893). The media were under strong pressure, and the previously vibrant Parisian newspaper culture was almost extinguished as Robespierre’s censorship of the press outgrew even that of the *Ancien Regime*. Schama notes that opposition writers or perceived opponents of the Committee, such as Jacques Pierre Brissot or Jean Louis Carra were executed as well, and their printing presses were destroyed (Schama 811). In addition, the Church was severely prosecuted, with its properties nationalized and many priests executed or forced to become ordained in the State Church. Schama notes that this policy was primarily the result of anti-clericalism, a backlash against the perceived parasites of the First Estate: “In practice, however, dechristianization owed less to these high-flown principles and more to the anticlericalism, especially violent in Paris and the Midi, that had played a crucial role in radicalizing the politics of the Revolution” (Schama 875). As the Reign of Terror

grew in scale, Robespierre lost support even among Jacobins. The last straw was a speech held by Robespierre in the National Convent, whereby he practically announced a new series of arrests aimed against the members of the Convent. This enraged the opposition into action; arrested on 9 Thermidor of Year II (26 July, 1794),<sup>2</sup> Robespierre was executed on the guillotine the next day, one of the most famous victims of the “national razor” whose use he propagated so viciously.

Following his death, the Committee started losing its importance, and was replaced by a five-member Directory. The Directory itself saw only limited success; while it presided over several important victories in Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands, it failed to find peace with European powers and was unable to stabilize the French economy. Englund remarks that, despite the major victories in the field and the reparations it was paid by defeated states, the Directory was still forced to declare a partial bankruptcy in 1797 (Englund 122). As the standard of living continued to fall, and political support for the Directory waned, general Bonaparte – having just returned from Egypt - led the coup of 18 Brumaire of Year VIII (9 November, 1799). Having crushed the opposition from the legislative bodies, the formation of the French Consulate was declared, with Napoleon as the First Consul of the Republic. Just like Vhalnich’s rise to power, Napoleon’s rise to power was fraught with difficulties. Englund notes that Napoleon was met by genuine, if disorganized, resistance from members of the French legislative bodies; Napoleon truly established control only after his brother Lucien Bonaparte, the president of the Council of Five Hundred, invited Napoleon’s troops to disperse the Council. (Englund 178-180)

The formation of the Consulate and Napoleon’s rise to power saw a gradual end of political instability of the Revolution, and Napoleon’s rise to consulship is often considered to be the end of the French Revolution.

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<sup>2</sup> Following the abolishment of the monarchy, the new Republican authorities sought to institute a new decimal calendar. Each year was divided into twelve 30-day months, each month being divided into three ten-day *decades*. The remaining five (or six days in leap-years) were national holidays celebrating the virtues of the new Republic, such as talent, labour, honour etc. The French Republican calendar went into effect on October 24, 1793, and was extended proleptically to have begun on September 22, 1792, the date of the declaration of the Republic. It was abolished on January 1, 1806 by Napoleon’s decree. As historiography usually refers to the important events of the French Revolution by the Republican calendar while noting its Gregorian counterpart, this kind of formatting will be used here as well.

### 3.2 HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

While the geography of the world of the *Shadow Campaigns* is not directly the same as the one of Europe of the French Revolution, various similarities can be found between the two, both in physical and political landscape. These similarities will be analyzed and explained here.

The Kingdom of Vordan, the home of the revolution, is the novel world's counterpart of France. Described as a major power that came upon hardships in the recent decades, its capital is Vordan City, settled on the river Vor. Vordan City is one of the great cities of the continent, and by far the largest and most important center of politics, economy, and culture. The importance of Vordan City, both in real terms and its symbolism, is equal to the importance of Paris in France, with both Vordan and France being highly centralized. Even physically, the two cities bear a certain amount of similarity, as can be seen in the maps provided.

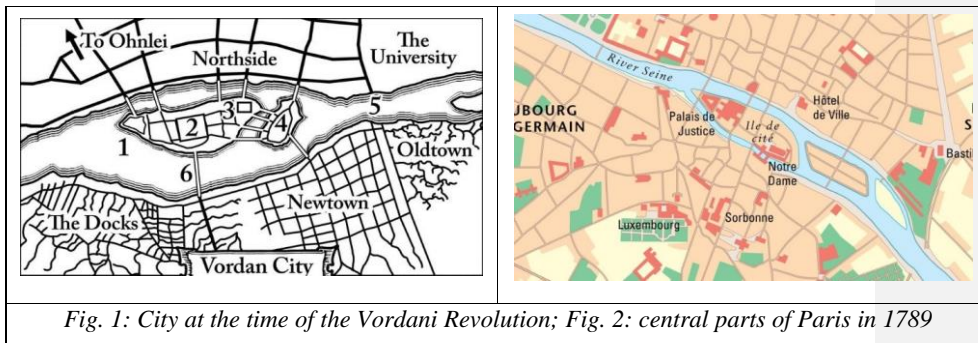


Fig. 1: City at the time of the Vordani Revolution; Fig. 2: central parts of Paris in 1789

Outside Vordan City is the royal palace of Ohnlei. Built by king Farus V, the palace is described as a magnificent complex of buildings and gardens, housing not just the royal family, but also the most important institutions of state and a number of members of the aristocracy. Filled with mirrored halls and resplendent with gardens and pieces of art, the palace is the center of power in Vordan (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 16, 22). This is highly reminiscent of Versailles and its importance for the French royalty. The palace of Versailles, also located outside of the capital, served not just as the seat of power of the house of Bourbon, but also housed various national institutions

and was the home of important French nobles, whom the kings of France wanted close to them to prevent them from conspiring and building up their own power bases.

The valley of the river Velt, located to the east of Vordan and divided from it by the Keth Range, is reminiscent of northern Italy and the valley of the river Po. Divided into a number of semi-independent city states commonly known as the League Cities, these states are loosely brought together in a confederation known as the League, dominated by the city-state of Hamvelt (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 15). Despite Hamvelt's powerful position, its efforts in the field are hampered by a multitude of languages used in the League, as well as the nature of their commanders, who are described as old and incapable:

“Someday this army will go up against a real commander,” Janus went on. “I know there are a few out there. The Duke of Brookspring, for one, and there must be others. Even a stiff-necked geriatric cabal like Hamveltai High Council can't rid themselves of every man of talent. When that day comes, we need to be ready.” (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 43)

This is reminiscent of the disdain the French revolutionaries felt for the government of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was dominated by old and inflexible politicians and military commanders, with a few notable exceptions such as Archduke Charles. In addition, the language barriers faced by the League Cities is similar to ones faced by the armies of the Habsburg Monarchy, whose soldiers spoke at least 13 different languages.

The valley of the Velt is described as a rich area, blessed with fine lands suitable for agriculture, as well as good commerce and strong manufactory output (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 80, 274-275). While most cities are fortified to a degree, the most important defensive works are those of the city of Antova, mentioned earlier. The political and geographical situation is thus similar to that of northern Italy, which was divided into a large number of mostly small states in the period of the French Revolution. Chandler notes that, at the beginning of Napoleon's campaign in Italy, there were twelve major principalities on the Italian peninsula and countless smaller states, presenting a “patchwork quilt” of disunited states” whose sole unifying factor was fear of the Revolution (Chandler 60). The Habsburg Monarchy, as the dominant power in the region, held a significant amount of influence, exercising it from a region known as

“the Quadrilateral”. Chandler defined the Quadrilateral as the area enclosed by several rivers and four major forts of Mantua, Peschiera, Verona and Legnano (Chandler 60). The fall of Mantua to French forces in 1797 made the Austrian position in the region temporarily untenable, and placed the region for a short time under French control.

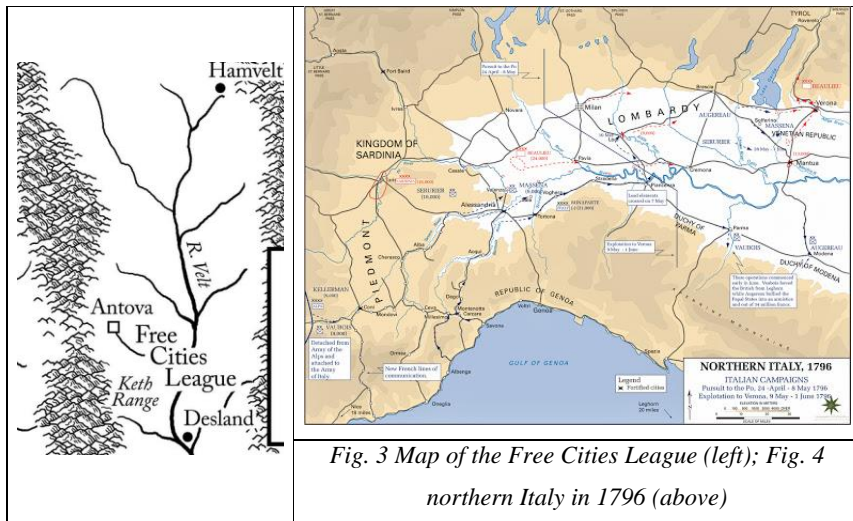


Fig. 3 Map of the Free Cities League (left); Fig. 4 northern Italy in 1796 (above)

Other major powers involved in the conflict against Vordan are also mentioned, though their importance lies primarily in the last two novels of the series which are not covered in this thesis. Their presence, however, remains an important factor in Vordanai politics, and they are described to a certain degree even in *The Shadow Throne* and *The Price of Valor*. The most important of these are the Kingdom of Borel and the Holy Empire of Murnsk.

Borel is described as the industrial and commercial powerhouse of the world; an island nation whose primary defense is the finest navy to sail the seas (Wexler, *Infernal Battalion* 118), it is considered to be the traditional rival of Vordan. Its capital, Viadre, is the home of the Great Market, the largest and most important stock exchange in the world, and its banks hold sway over most nations on the continent (Wexler, *Infernal Battalion* 113). This is particularly true in regards to Vordan, with the Vordanai Crown heavily indebted to Borelgai banks following the disastrous War of the Princes (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 57). As such, Borel is the counterpart of Great Britain, its control of the seas reminiscent of the power of the Royal Navy, and its financial support

of Vordanai enemies resembling the large subsidies paid out by the British to the members of the anti-revolutionary Coalition, often referred to as “the Golden Cavalry of St. George.” The importance of commerce and banking in Borel, often ridiculed in Vordan, is reminiscent of the commercial and banking power of the United Kingdom; as Englund concludes, the commercial and naval superiority over the French was one of the main British boasts used in propaganda, stating that France could never defeat “the Queen of the Seas” (Englund 321).

The Holy Empire of Murnsk is described as an autocratic absolute monarchy, dominated by the Holy Emperor whose power derives not just from political and military power, but also support from the Sworn Church, whose main protector is the Emperor himself (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 19, 49). Murnsk is described as a massive, but backwards nation; dominated by tundra and forests, it is economically underdeveloped, suffers from a lack of infrastructure such as proper roads, and has only a small number of important demographic centers, with the great majority of its population living in the country (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 120, 134). Its main military strength lies in its seemingly inexhaustible reserve of manpower. However, due to the poor state of its roads, which are often turned to mud by autumn and spring torrents, as well as an insufficient logistical capability, it is often unable to raise its forces in time, requiring months to mobilize its army (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 110). As such, Murnsk is said to rely heavily on its best defensive strategists: general January and general February (Wexler, *Guns of Empire* 131). As such, Murnsk is reminiscent of the Imperial Russia in its special connection with the Orthodox Church, the sheer size and geography of the country, its infrastructural problems and lack of roads compounded by *rasputitsa*,<sup>3</sup> as well as the harshness of the weather.

Finally, even though it plays only a side-role in the events of the novels covered, the lands of Khandar warrant a mention. Khandar, a desolate land located south of the major powers, is a Vordanai client state with few demographic centers and covered mostly by the arid desert known as the Great Desol. Colonel Vhalnich sees the

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<sup>3</sup> A term that can be loosely translated from Russian as “season of bad roads”, denoting a phenomenon where unpaved roads in Eastern Europe turn into mud during spring and autumn. *Rasputitsa* gravely affected the ability of all Western attackers to invade Russia throughout history. Military historian Robert Kirchubel notes that it had a terrible effect on German operations in the Soviet Union in late 1941, bringing logistical efforts of the *Wehrmacht* to a complete standstill (Kirchubel 352); with this in mind, it can be seen how devastating an effect *rasputitsa* would have on Napoleon’s forces in Russia, which relied on horse-drawn carts for their logistics.



beginnings of his meteoric rise to power as the new commanding officer of outnumbered Vordanai forces in Khandar, following a rebellion against Vordanai influences in the capital of Ashe-Katarion (Wexle, *Price of Valor* 13). Khandar is highly reminiscent of Egypt, particularly in regards to the role it played to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. Although his campaign in Egypt was ultimately unsuccessful, Napoleon rose to greater fame as his outnumbered forces managed to fight off the Mamelukes and inflict several harsh defeats upon the Ottoman Empire, while bringing back to France large numbers of important historical and artistic artifacts (Englund 149). In addition, Napoleon's propaganda machine made excellent use of the invasion to show the qualities of the young leader to the French public, particularly through literary and visual arts.

### 3.3 HISTORICAL FIGURES

Various historical figures who left their mark on the course of the French Revolution are mirrored in Wexler's novels.

One of the most important recurring characters in the *Shadow Campaigns* series is Count Janus bet Vhalnich Mieran, ruler of a rural and isolated county located in northern Vordan. Most often described as an eccentric military genius with a penchant for natural sciences, Vhalnich is the most secretive of the recurring characters, and the motives behind his actions are subjects of constant suspicion and questioning. Taking command for the first time during the rebellion in Khandar, Vhalnich, then a colonel, distinguishes himself through his innovative tactics and capability, managing to subdue the rebellion with a force only several thousand men strong (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 29). Following his return to Vordan, Vhalnich is named the Minister of Justice by the dying king Farus VIII in order to reduce the influence of duke Orlanko (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 34). With the return of his forces from Khandar and the downfall of duke Orlanko, Vhalnich is named a general and placed in command of the Army of the East (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 40). At the end of *Price of Valor*, Vhalnich is proclaimed the First Consul of Vordan. With his authority enforced by the newly formed and organized Grand Army, Vhalnich becomes the most powerful man in Vordan, if not on the entire continent (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 745). His intentions, however, remain unclear; although all his moves point towards him desiring an end to the monarchy and proclaiming himself a dictator, he makes no overt moves in that direction, and remains loyal to the queen in public.

This, of course, is reminiscent of Napoleon's meteoric rise to power, which saw the young Corsican rise from colonel of artillery to the foremost position of power in France in a mere five years. This started with his role at the siege of Toulon, where, according to Englund, he was stationed through the good graces of one of his first benefactors, Christophe Salicetti (Englund 67). The son of a minor aristocrat from the underdeveloped island of Corsica, Napoleon was often mocked for his perceived rural roots. For example, Englund states that many documents from Napoleon's time at the military school in Brienne note his heavy, sometimes even aggressive demeanor towards his mainland colleagues (Englund 20). However, his talents and skills, as well as political connections, ensured his continued survival, as well as advancement. Through his friendship with Robespierre's younger brother Augustin, Napoleon ensured his safety during the Reign of Terror. Englund notes that years after Robespierre's downfall he still lamented his death (Englund 73). During the reign of the Directory, he benefited from the political connections of his wife, Josephine de Beauharnais, the former mistress of Director Paul Barras. Her connections and his acumen in stopping the riots of 13 Vendemiaire of Year IV (October 5, 1795) earned him his first important command – that of the Army of Italy. The fact that Bonaparte had political connections to thank for his command is recognized by Chandler, who states how Bonaparte's commanders complained that he earned his position primarily through his connections, and not merit (Chandler 55-56).

Like Vhalnich, Napoleon was recognized as a military genius early on; however, unlike Vhalnich, Napoleon did not hide his ambition nor his political beliefs. Englund notes that Napoleon started writing political pamphlets and essays already in 1788, and had his first one published in 1791 (Englund 33, 46). It was one of his pamphlets, *The Supper at Beaucaire* (*Le souper de Beaucaire*) that brought him the attention of not just Salicetti, but also Augustin Robespierre. Another trait shared by Vhalnich and Napoleon is a love for natural sciences, with Napoleon being a famous admirer of mathematics. His love of science did not stop at mathematics. Historian William E. Burns notes Napoleon's great involvement in the work of the Institute of France, to which he was admitted in 1797, as well as the Institute of Egypt which he formed. In addition, Burns claims that "He [Napoleon] even signed some of his military dispatches as 'Member of the Institute'", and notes that he became a major sponsor of sciences upon his ascension to power (Burns 43).

As the heiress to the Kingdom of Vordan, queen Raesinia Orboan involves herself in covert work against the Concordat and duke Orlanko, in an attempt to ensure her grip to power and reform the country (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 28). After the downfall of Orlanko and the establishment of constitutional monarchy, Raesinia nominally supports the work and authority of the Deputies General; on the other hand, she is exasperated by the deputies' slow rate of progress, and is opposed to measures taken by the Directory of National Defense due to the radical nature of their actions (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 60). In this regard, she takes to supporting general Vhalnich as the alternative leader of the nation, perceiving him as an ally who supports her cause and offers a strong fight to the coalition of nations involved in war against Vordan. Having almost fallen victim to an assassination attempt organized by Johann Maurisk, queen Raesinia goes into hiding, with this being used as a pretext by Maurisk to take more power and continue the terror (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 67). Personally, Raesinia is a proponent of personal action and getting involved directly in matters of the state, but is often discouraged by the course of events which seem to go against her. In addition, the sacrifices borne by her friends and the people of Vordan weigh heavily on her, and Raesinia often questions herself whether it is all for a good cause.

Queen Raesinia can be seen as the counterpart of king Louis XVI, a person who was reviled in post-revolutionary historiography, but whose reputation saw a certain rehabilitation in more recent historiography. While Louis could be seen as incompetent and not suited for his position, he was a proponent of moderate reforms and was invested heavily in the welfare of his people. This, however, was quickly forgotten as his handling of the events of 1789 became both indecisive and heavy-handed. As Schama maintains:

To be sure, [Louis XVI] was, in large part, the author of his plight. His personal popularity, especially outside Paris, was still immense. And even after the Tennis Court Oath he had had many opportunities to exploit it as both Mirabeau and Necker had wanted, and to create an authentic constitutional monarchy. They had all been squandered. Worse still, Louis had shown himself either feebly submissive – as in the immediate aftermath of the *séance royale* – or deviously reactionary, as in the military buildup to Necker's dismissal. (Schama 482)

Queen Raesinia had to tread carefully in order not to insult either the Directory or the Deputies-General (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 59-60), and so did Louis once the

Revolution had begun. Schama notes that, on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1789, Louis had to put on a revolutionary cockade on his hat to display his support of the National Assembly (Schama 487-488). Nonetheless, his actions during the French Revolution precipitated the growing discontent with the monarchy, with one of the last events that brought the downfall of monarchy being the attempted escape of the royal family to the loyalist fortress of Montmedy, known today as the flight to Varennes (Schama 638-640).<sup>4</sup>

While there are certain similarities between the two, Raesinia's personality is ultimately much different from that of Louis. Louis was indecisive and wavering in his stances, and Schama notes that one of his primary concerns was being loved by his subjects, rather than ruling effectively (Schama 105-106); on the other hand, Raesinia held a firm belief in how the country should be organized and was a strong proponent of action, sometimes even with the attitude of "Consequences be damned!". In addition, Raesinia was far more willing to part with her power than Louis, who was highly adamant about maintaining his divine authority as much as possible. In this regard, Raesinia is also reminiscent of Louis XVI's cousin, the Duke of Orléans, who wholeheartedly supported the Revolution, desiring a transformation of the French monarchy from an absolutist one into a constitutional one. In order to show his support for the Revolution, he even changed his name to Philippe Égalité; in 1792 he voted for the unconditional death of the dethroned king in a motion that carried by an extremely slim margin.<sup>5</sup> This, however, did not help him much: as Schama notes, he was guillotined just a few months later, executed on the same place as Louis XVI (Schama 906).

The character of Johann Maurisk, the president of the Directory of National Defense, reminds the reader greatly of Maximillien Robespierre. The similarities between actions undertaken by both Maurisk and Robespierre have already been explained, however it is interesting to note the similarities and differences in their characters. Just like Robespierre, Maurisk is a person who begins his political career

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<sup>4</sup> Though it was Montmedy, and not Varennes, that was the ultimate destination of the French royal family, the event is given this name due to the fact that the Bourbons were captured in Varennes. As such, even though the name is somewhat misleading, it has become a staple in historiography of the French Revolution, and has been used here as well.

<sup>5</sup> The size of the majority voting for the execution of Louis XVI is a matter of debate. Schama considers that the motion was in fact carried by 75 votes, as there was a number of representatives who voted for a conditional death sentence (Schama 754). However, if observed by the number of votes for unconditional death sentence and taking into consideration the fact that any proposal required a majority of all votes to be adopted, the motion carried by a single vote: 361-360 in favour.

with strong ideals and desire to reform the society; in Maurisk's case this is turned through failures and disappointments into radicalism (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 266). Robespierre, however, was considered to be a morally upstanding person, even though his ethics during the Reign of Terror were questionable. Schama states that Robespierre was morally earnest and politically consistent, and that the details of his private life were well known and considered exemplary (Schama 657, 659). Maurisk's morals, however, see a great downturn following his rise to power. This, in the end, is the great difference between their characters. Robespierre, despite his increasing paranoia and despite trying to nurture a cult of personality, saw power as a means of stabilizing the state. Englund notes that Napoleon even considered Robespierre to be a moderate who wanted to end the French Revolution, rather than prolong it, though this needs to be taken with a grain of salt as Napoleon was influenced by his positive opinion of the Robespierre brothers (Englund 73-74). On the other hand, Maurisk sees power as an end in itself, and the terror he perpetrates is primarily in the name of preserving his position (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 266). In this regard, and taking into account his downfall into an immoral lifestyle, it can be claimed that the character of Maurisk is also influenced by the person of Paul Barras, the leader of the French Directory who was infamous for his alleged immorality and who was perfectly willing to perpetrate coups and counter-coups to solidify his power.

Another character who is radicalized during the course of the Revolution is medical student George Sarton. Just like Maurisk, Sarton is a member of Raesinia Orboan's cabal of revolutionary students, and during the course of *The Price of Valor* he is described as Doctor-Professor, indicating that he has finished his medical studies. While playing a small role in *The Shadow Throne*, the only mention of Sarton in *The Price of Valor* is during his presentation of the Spike, his machine for execution which he invents for the purpose of inducing painless death upon those condemned to death (Wexler, *Price of Valor* 56). As such, Sarton can be seen as the counterpart of Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, the Parisian doctor who became involved in the work of the Estates-General in 1789 and proposed the use of a suspended blade as a means of painless decapitation. However, Dr. Guillotin was opposed to the death sentence, and regretted that his name was given, in Schama's words, to "a device of such mechanical impersonality. [...] His proposal, he insisted, had always been 'philanthropic' and humanitarian" (Schama 707). It is not known whether Sarton has any such moral

qualms; given his radicalization and his vocal support for Maurisk's terror, it is unlikely that he has any issues with his machine being used *en masse* against real and perceived enemies of the state, particularly as it brings him benefits in professional life.

One of the most important speakers of the early stages of revolution in Vordan is Danton Aureenne. Although a feeble-minded individual likened in character to a small child, Danton holds a fantastic power which allows him to hold extremely charismatic speeches, capturing the attention of the masses and bringing them to a state of frenzy (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 54, 59). Due to this, he is used by Raesinia as the main speaker of her reformist cabal, espousing the values of moderate reform and resistance to Concordat and foreign influences in Vordan. With his nature and his role unknown to his opponents, he is considered a dangerous individual, and is first imprisoned in the Vendre, and ultimately killed while holding a speech to the Deputies-General (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 151, 324). Due to his oratory power, Danton Aureenne can be likened to the person of Georges Danton, one of the most eminent speakers of the French Revolution and leader of the moderate faction of the Jacobin Club. Involved in the work of the Committee of Public Safety and the National Assembly, Danton was present in the top echelons of the French Government. However, his "moderate radicalism" and opposition to Robespierre's refusal to curb the Terror brought him many enemies among the other factions of the National Convention, such as Hebertistes (Schama 909). Danton was ultimately executed in 1794, following accusations of corruption and power-grabbing. His death, however, weighed heavily even on Robespierre's proponents, and was a rallying call during the coup that brought Robespierre down. Schama claims that, as Robespierre found himself at a loss of words at the attack he was under in the National Convention, a deputy mocked him, stating that "The blood of Danton chokes him" (Schama 949).

Another important factor in the Vordani revolution are the lower classes, particularly the various gangs assembled in the districts of Oldtown, the Dregs and the Docks. One of the leading gangs is known as the Leatherbacks, centered in the Docks. Their leadership consists of women, who also comprise the majority of their membership (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 44). One of their main goals is to ensure their survival in a situation where hunger and economic hardship forces many in the lower-class districts to a life of banditry and lawlessness. However, as time progresses, the Leatherbacks become politically engaged and rise to be one of the shock units of the

Revolution, being prominent in leading the charge during the capture of Vendre (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 159, 232-257). After the beginning of the Revolutionary War, the Leatherbacks provide the backbone of the Fifth Volunteers Battalion, more commonly known as the Girls' Own Battalion, the first all-women unit in the revolutionary army of Vordan (Wexler, *Shadow Throne* 386). It can be claimed that these groups can be taken to represent the *sans-cullotes* mobs of Paris, the most radical group participating in the French Revolution, which espoused values such as total economic and social equality, and were one of the leading forces behind the violence of the Revolution. The Leatherbacks themselves, being led and consisting mostly of women, can be seen as the representation of the French women which played an important role during the Revolution. This role was not exercised just through peaceful means, such as writing and participation in discussions in clubs and salons; historians Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite also note what they call "women's practice of militant citizenship". This is visible particularly in the examples of the women's march on Versailles in 1789, the demands to be granted the right to bear arms, as well as the insurgency organized by the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women in 1793 (Levy, Applewhite 82-83).

## 4. THE VIABILITY OF THE FANTASTIC AS A PLATFORM FOR HISTORICAL NOVELS

As the theoretical basis of the genre as well as its inspiration in historical events have been established, it is necessary to deal with the final possible point of contention – that of the relationship between history and literature, i.e. fiction, with particular focus on the fantastic. This will be covered in this chapter through an overview on the possibility of literary influences on narrative history, as well as an overview of the relationship between history and the fantastic.

### 4.1 HISTORY AND LITERATURE – A CASE FOR NARRATIVE HISTORY

*There was a time—we see it in the marvellous dawn of Hellenic life—when history was distinguished neither from poetry, from mythology, nor from the first dim beginnings of science.*

Theodore Roosevelt, *History as Literature*, December 27, 1912

One of the most important questions of history, one that is grounded in the very roots of history itself, is the question of its scientific pedigree. The notion that history is, despite its attempts at objectivity and scientific method, a human construct is familiar to every historian, though their reactions to it vary. Some are insulted, while others embrace the implications of such a belief. This matter comes to a head especially when the question of the relationship between history and literature is brought up, a question that has been debated since Aristotle. Aristotle made a clear distinction between history and poetry (*poiesis*), proclaiming poetry to be superior to history; Aristotle believed poetry dealt with what could be, rather than what was, and thus considered it appropriate to express universal truths, in opposition to history's particularity:



The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal, I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages. The particular is – for example – what Alcibiades did or suffered. (Aristotle 35)

On the other hand, it could be claimed that history is both art and science, or that it at least contains elements of both. This much has been recognized by Hayden White, who dealt with the matter particularly in his work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973). White notes that the discussion on which of these elements are more important for a historian continues to be a matter of debate, and ultimately lies in the center of the philosophy of history. In White's words: "Again, where one historian may take it as his task to reinvolve, in a lyrical or poetic manner, the "spirit" of a past age, another may take it as his task to penetrate behind the events in order to disclose the "laws" or "principles" of which a particular age's "spirit" is only a manifestation or phenomenal form" (White, *Metahistory* 4).

The beginnings of the study of history are well-known to every student of history who had to undergo a course on the history of historiography. The works of Herodotus, Titus Livius, and Pliny were works of literature as much as they were of history; the goal of their works was not just to educate their readers and preserve history to posterity, but also to amuse. Medieval chronicles such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or *The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* provide a report of historical events, though influenced by various interests, worldviews and goals, and oftentimes of dubious historical value. The efforts of historians of the Early Modern era and the Age of Enlightenment, such as David Hume and Edward Gibbon, laid foundations for the modern practice of history. Gibbon's revolutionary work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (first volume published in 1776), was particularly influential in this regard; due to his objectivity in comparison with many other historians of his age, as well as his use of primary sources, Gibbon's methodology became a model for future historians, and paved the way for the professionalization of history. This process culminated in Germany, where Leopold von Ranke emphasized archival research and analysis of historical documents as a method of research. The

Rankean philosophy of history, based on the utilization of proven primary sources and narrative history, allowed for the establishment of history as a professional academic discipline despite its shortcomings. And thus came forth modern history, no longer the realm of writers, Christian scribes or mythologists, but scientists and academics – or so it is hoped.

In their attempt to explain the events of the past, historians can make use of several methods or kinds of discourse, with narrative history being one of the most prevalent methods. Based on chronological depiction of historical events, historians attempt to provide for an orderly and easily understandable depiction of the human past. This is where literature and history meet once again, for narrative history is, in its essence, a form of story writing. As Hayden White notes:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories” that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between “history” and “fiction” resides in the fact that the historian “finds” his stories, whereas the fiction writer “invents” his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian's operations. ... In the chronicle, this event is simply “there” as an element of a series; it does not “function” as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end. (White, *Metahistory* 6-7)

In short, backed by extensive research and analysis of historical processes, events, figures and all other factors important for the course of human events, historians write a story that is usually considered an accurate account of the past. It should thus not come as a surprise that some of the first works of history, particularly biographies, were written not in a dry academic language, but in a stylistically rich and enjoyable fashion. In fact, Theodor Mommsen was awarded the 1902 Nobel Prize in Literature for his work on one of the seminal pieces of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historiography, *A History of Rome* (first volume published in 1854). Mommsen is not the only historian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature; Winston Churchill was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1953,

while Svetlana Alexievich received a Nobel Prize in 2015.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the importance of the connection between history and literature was recognized by many historians already in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as proven by the quote from Theodore Roosevelt at the beginning of this section.

The connection between history and literature, however, also remains a controversial one. The very hint of this connection will often raise eyebrows, if not the hair, of many a professional historian in whose eyes the “reduction” of history to literature through the use of narrative discourse represents a profanation of the science they attempt to uphold so high. In his seminal paper, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory”, as well as in the aforementioned *Metahistory*, Hayden White outlines several reasons from multiple perspectives as to why narrative history could be considered problematic. For example, White notes the strong opposition from the *Annales* group, for whom narrative history represented merely the history of politics, crises and conflicts. White, however, also states that “the rejection of narrative history by the *Annalistes* was due as much to their distaste for its conventional subject-matter ... as to their conviction that its form was inherently ‘novelistic’ and ‘dramatizing’ rather than ‘scientific’” (White, “Question of Narrative” 8-9).

However, this position by the *Annalistes* begets new problems. As White points out, their fight against narrativity due to its “novelistic” and “dramatizing” effect virtually puts dramatic events out of the scope of historical study. In addition, modernist literature and theatre show that a narrative can be achieved without dramatizing, and drama can be achieved without theatricalizing (White, “Question of Narrative” 10). Finally, it could be said that the rejection of narrative discourse by the *Annalistes* due to its “inherent” ideological component is not completely valid as other forms of research can also be ideologically influenced. Even natural sciences, though based in empirical research and experimentation, can fall victim to ideology, as shown by the

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<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that the term “literature”, particularly in the sense used in the Nobel Prize for Literature, denotes in English language not just creative writing, but any kind of written work. Thus, it includes all different modes of writing, such as fiction, non-fiction, creative non-fiction and so forth. For example, the works of Alexievich can be placed within the realm of creative non-fiction: although it is based in oral testimonies of interviewed persons, creative interventions were made for artistic purposes. In addition, it must be noted that Alexievich is not a professional historian, though her works are grounded in historical events.

example of Lysenkoism<sup>7</sup> in the Soviet Union. A more recent example can be found in the fact that various articles on COVID-19 by Chinese scientists were later censored by Chinese authorities. In accordance with this, the position of the *Annalists* can be viewed as a critique of all humanities and social sciences, and not just history, as their methods are equally in danger of being impacted by ideological concerns. Finally, it must be noted that, as much as the *Annalists* might interpret the narrative discourse as a means of describing short-term events, rather than long-term historical processes, that is not so. That much is recognized by Michel Foucault, who described his view of the state of contemporary historiography in his lecture “The Order of Discourse”:

History as practiced today does not turn away from events; on the contrary, it is constantly enlarging their field, discovering new layers of them, shallower or deeper. ... But the important thing is that history does not consider an event without defining the series of which it is part, without specifying the mode of analysis from which that series derives, without seeking to find out the regularity of phenomena and the limits of probability of their emergence, without inquiring into the variations, bends and angles of the graph, without wanting to determine the conditions on which they depend. (Foucault 68)

A more detailed analysis of the issues of narrative history was performed by structuralists and post-structuralists, like Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and others. According to White, Levi-Strauss claimed that there is no genuine difference between “historical knowledge” gained through the historical method and “the mythic lore of ‘savage’ communities.” In fact, traditional narrative historiography, according to Levi-Strauss, is just the myth of the modern, bourgeois and industrial Western civilization. As White argues: “Far from being a science or even a basis for a science, the narrative representation of any set of events was at best a proto-scientific exercise and at worst a basis for a kind of cultural self-delusion” (White, “Question of Narrative” 11). On the other hand, Barthes challenges the objectivity of traditional historiography through its connection with the narrative discourse, and in White’s words, he attempted this by “exposing the ideological function of the narrative mode of representation with

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<sup>7</sup> A political campaign spearheaded by Soviet agronomist Trofim Lysenko and supported by the top echelons of the Soviet government. Resulted in the imprisonment and death of thousands of biologists. Pseudo-scientific measures advocated by Lysenko directly contributed to a fall in the output of crops in the Soviet Union after the catastrophic famines of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and was one of the causes of famine in Mao’s China which killed 30 million. The term today denotes a deliberate distortion of scientific facts for political or ideological purposes (Kean 2017).

which it has been associated” (White, “Question of Narrative” 12). In short, Barthes and other post-structuralists claim that narrative history suffers from fallacies relating to the nature of its referents, and that it is paradoxical that narrative history, which originated in fiction, became a representation of past events. In this regard, as well as their stances on the ideological nature of the narrative discourse, French post-structuralists raised similar concerns regarding the narrative discourse in historiography as the *Annalistes*.

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, analytical philosophers did not make any similar attacks on history and its status as a science as Levi-Strauss or Barthes did, but still heated debates were held in regards to the use of narrative discourse. Analytic philosophers pointed out various different “codes” that can be used depending on what kind of function a text or speech act are to perform. Hence, according to White, proponents of narrative history defended the status of narrative discourse in history as being dependent on correspondence and coherence criterion of truth-value. The narrative form of the discourse does not carry any meaning by itself, as it is only a means of transmitting the message (White, “Question of Narrative” 17-18). While White notes that this stance has serious fallacies recognized by other members of the analytic school of philosophy, he claims that these fallacies are “not sufficient reason to deny to narrative history substantial ‘truth-value’” (White, “Question of Narrative” 21). In fact, denying the value of narrative discourse in historiography would, according to White, be akin to denying that literature can give any valid thoughts on reality (White, “Question of Narrative” 21). In addition, White notes that analytic philosophers often eschew literary elements of narrative history in favor of logic, thus ignoring the “truth” that could be related in figurative or allegorical terms (White, “Question of Narrative” 25).

White also mentions the attempt of Paul Ricoeur to describe the metaphysics of narrativity. According to Ricoeur, as White maintains, “the ‘reading’ of an action ... resembles the reading of a text; the same kind of hermeneutic principles are required for the comprehension of both” (White, “Question of Narrative” 26). In Ricoeur’s own words: “To understand a story is to understand both the language of ‘doing something’ and the cultural tradition from which proceeds the typology of plots” (Ricoeur 57). In short, no text, be it historiographical or fictional, can exist outside its cultural context; though different cultures may place an emphasis on different matters, no text appears

suddenly out of nothing. As history is the study of past human actions, its primary goal is the understanding of those actions; in this endeavour, it is necessary to provide various explanations which serve as a means of understanding history. To Ricoeur, “plot” is not merely a component of the fictional or the mythical, but is vitally important for historical representations as well. As such, every historical event has its place in the plot, as long as it contributes to its development.

This is somewhat reminiscent of Edward Hallett Carr’s opinions on what constitutes historical events, expressed during the first of six lectures which were published in his book *What is History* (1961). As Carr illustrates, many men before and after Caesar have crossed the Rubicon, but only Caesar’s crossing of the river is considered historically relevant, having directly precipitated a civil war and kicking off a chain of events that lead to the end of the Roman Republic and its transformation into the Roman Empire (Carr 11). It is also reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s stance towards discourse and its (re)production, particularly in terms of creation and perpetuation of doctrines within disciplines. In short, a discipline is a means of controlling the discourse regarding its subject matter; each discipline has its own rules, but also its power dynamics which determine what becomes part of the doctrine, and what does not. In Foucault’s words, “heresy and orthodoxy do not derive from a fanatical exaggeration of the doctrinal mechanisms, but rather belong fundamentally to them” (Foucault 64). In this regard, Foucault does provide a criticism towards discourses which are, among others, used in historiography. Of course, this criticism is not directed solely towards historiography and historians, but it does note difficulties that can be seen when operating within the context of history.

Ricoeur also claimed that historical narrative, having “temporality” as its “ultimate referent”, should be placed in the category of symbolic discourse, or in White’s words: “a discourse whose principal force derives neither from its informational content nor from its rhetorical effect, but rather from its imagistic function” (White, “Question of Narrative” 28). With this in mind, and taking into account the allegorical characteristics of narrative history stemming from it being a symbolic discourse, Ricoeur claims that narrative history is, as White relates, “a means of symbolizing events without which their ‘historicality’ cannot be indicated” (White, “Question of Narrative” 29).

Ultimately, however, every discussion regarding the use of narration as a form of discourse in history boils down to the more basic question of what history is, and whether we can truly perceive the past. The primary problem of analyzing and researching the past is that it cannot be remade; it cannot be (re)witnessed personally, nor can experiments be held to test the claims made by historians. The inherently unique context in which historical events have occurred cannot be recreated, and modern medicine is yet to find a way to raise people from the dead. Thus, any research of history, even those that are not based in narrative history, will have to be based to a degree in imagination. This, according to White, does not represent a problem, but a simple realization and acceptance of the nature of exploration of the past. In the final section of his essay, White concludes the following:

One can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less 'true' for being "imaginary." It all depends upon how one constructs the function of the faculty of imagination in human nature. [...] How else can any "past," which is by definition comprised of events processes, structures, and so forth that are considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an "imaginary" way? Is it not possible that the question of narrative in any discussion of historical theory is always finally about the function of imagination in the production of a specifically human truth? (White, "Question of Narrative" 33)

The debate on whether or not narrative history represents a legitimate form of discourse for history, or a viable method to be used by historians, will continue, and it is doubtful that any conclusive and final answers will be found. Be that as it may, many historians have demonstrated in their works that historiographical texts do not have to be dry and aloft on the pedestal of academic writing, and that incorporating the imaginary does not have to be at odds with historical integrity. For the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution in 1989, Simon Schama published *Citizens: Chronicles of the French Revolution*. Written in a form not dissimilar from a novel, Schama managed to present the French Revolution, its actors, virtues and flaws in a highly interesting and easily readable form, meant not just for the academic audience, but also the public at large. Regarding his choice to portray the events of the French Revolution in the narrative fashion, Schama states the following:

I have chosen to present these arguments in the form of a narrative. If, in fact, the [French] Revolution was a much more haphazard and chaotic event and much more the

product of human agency than structural conditioning, chronology seems indispensable in making its complicated twists and turns intelligible. So *'Citizens'* returns, then, to the form of the nineteenth-century chronicles, allowing different issues and interests to shape the flow of the story as they arise, year after year, month after month... As artificial as written narratives might be, they often correspond to ways in which historical actors construct events. That is to say, many, if not most, public men see their conduct as in part situated between role models from an heroic past and expectations of the judgment of posterity. (Schama 18-19)

In short, Schama claims that narrative history provides the best means to entangle the complicated web of historical actors behind the French Revolution, starting from the position that a revolution was not a *fait accompli*, a chain of events that was bound to happen. One of Schama's claims in the preface to *Citizens* is that France saw growth and modernization in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that "it may be possible to see French culture and society in the reign of Louis XVI as troubled more by its addiction to change than by resistance to it" (Schama 17). As such, Schama does not put the emphasis on the obsolescence of the *Ancien Regime*, but the interaction between historical actors and their role in the realization of the Revolution. Equally important is Schama's recognition of the shortcomings of narrative history brought up by Hayden White regarding its artificiality and imaginary nature.

A question that can also be asked is: what position does historical fiction take in this debate; that is, what role should historical fiction take in comparison with academic historiography? According to Richard Slotkin, historical fiction can be complementary to academic historiography, and the example of Schama's work shows that a mixture of historical fiction and academic writing can be successful. According to Phillipott, Slotkin's work demonstrates that "historical fiction can be equally as 'true' as its academic counterpart" (Phillipott 11). A work of historical fiction will always be fiction, but well-researched historical fiction based on facts can be as useful as historiographical works, at least for those outside the profession. Indeed, if history itself is necessarily based in the imaginary, historical fiction grounded in well-executed research and relevant historiographical works can be seen as a credible representation of the past despite its official lack of academic credentials. This is particularly so if the author of the work of historical fiction happens to be a trained historian, such as Simon



Schama or Phillipa Gregory, who might also add a list of references to accompany the novel and thus lend it stronger credibility in the eyes of historians.

It can thus be safely stated that the relationship between history and fiction does not need to be controversial or problematic. Rather than a rivalry, the relationship between the two can be described as a symbiosis of sorts, a partnership of equals, each specializing in their own field and bringing forth advantages for the other. Just as history as an academic discipline can benefit from the use of literary methods and forms, so too can fiction, particularly historical fiction, benefit from advances in history that may bring forth a plethora of new topics and themes to be creatively explored.

#### **4.2 REALITY AND IMAGINATION – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND THE FANTASTIC**

The question of whether or not fantasy is a suitable means of “portraying” historical events in literature stems from a dichotomy which many historians cannot overlook: fantasy is not empirical, while history is, or at least attempts to be. This opinion has, at first glance, some theoretical merit: after all, it is indeed true that dragons and magic do not exist, and that trying to fit them in a neatly-explained historical narrative would not make much sense. This open hostility towards the very idea, however, does not hold under the pressure of its own hypocrisy. The matter of a possibility of having one neatly-explained historical narrative put aside, it is a fact that the fantastic has influenced history and the study of history itself even though it does not exist.

Even though the fantastic does not exist in our Western empirical world, the belief in the fantastic does, and this belief itself has often been enough to change the course of human history. Medieval history is full of such examples. One need only recall the witchcraft trials and all the innocent people burnt at the stake to see how violent a reaction those beliefs elicited. In addition, Irina Metzler brings forth the description of violence towards cats in the Middle Ages on the basis of religious beliefs in her article “Heretical Cats: Animal Symbolism in Religious Discourse”. The hatred of cats, stemming from the Christian belief that they were demonic animals and central to several heretical cults, led to the death of many felines unlucky enough to be caught

by a faithful Christian wishing to prove his devotion to God. This trend particularly caught wind after pope Gregory IX issued his bull *Vox in Rama* in 1233, describing, among others, the usage of cats in heretical rituals (Metzler 23). While there is no proof that this extermination of cats enabled the proliferation of the Black Death in Europe by itself, it enabled a large growth in the population of rodents that did act as transmitters of the disease, exacerbating the situation.

Even in more enlightened times, the belief in the fantastic impacted historical events. The story of the infamous mystic Grigori Rasputin and his connection with the Russian imperial family is well-known and represents another similar case. Historian Orlando Figes notes that the belief of the Romanovs that Rasputin was a faith healer that could cure crown prince Alexei of his illness brought him to the imperial court and earned him great power and influence, particularly with empress Alexandra (Figes 48). However, he was a controversial character, and while tales of his (mis)deeds range from factual to gossipy, there is no doubt that there was belief among the Russian elite and even ordinary people that Rasputin was a criminal, and probably a heretic as well. Figes notes that these claims were made even worse by the rumors of a love affair with the empress (Figes 50). Despite all this, and despite the clearly negative effect their relationship was having on their standing with the Russian people, the Church and the Army, the Romanovs continued hosting Rasputin and remained his benefactors. Figes notes that this relationship was for the Romanovs what the Diamond Necklace Affair was for the Bourbons: not the main cause of their overthrow, but something that made the whole situation so much worse (Figes 52).

History is affected by a certain connection to the fantastic as well. While the times when historians have explained historical events as the will of the Divine Providence are long since gone, there are still areas of history that delve into the fantastic itself while trying to research the belief in the fantastic. Religious history is a potential example of this fallacy. It is an important part of modern and contemporary historiography. Religion, after all, is an important aspect of every human society. However, issues can arise when certain lines are blurred, and when certain borders are passed. For example, at a debate held at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, religious historians William Lane Craig and Bart D. Ehrman discussed whether or not historical evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ exists (Craig, Ehrman 1). While it will not be the aim of this thesis to question any religious beliefs

or their nature, it must be noted that there is a strong discrepancy in the very topic of the debate that represents a major fundamental flaw in the scientific process used by some religious historians dealing with the question at hand. The method presented by William Lane Craig, in addition, shows an additional flaw in the method used; the main “independent” source used remains the Bible, namely the Gospels and the New Testament, and the “equations” used to prove that there is a high certainty that Jesus Christ rose from the dead have no basis in empirical reality. Craig himself notes that the event is and must be supernatural, but does not doubt its authenticity (Craig, Ehrman 17). On the other hand, Ehrman refutes the possibility of historical proof of the resurrection, representing a more scientific and empirical view on the matter. The very fact, however, that this question would be a point of discussion in academic circles is discouraging to the notion of history as a legitimate science, and shows clearly what can happen when the fantastic is introduced to history in an unscientific manner.

Finally, a consideration should be made about branches of history that necessarily have to rely on sources which may contain fantastic elements, such as the history of the Middle Ages. As described above, belief in the fantastic was a major element of the mentality of medieval societies, and this influence can be seen in the various sources used by medievalists. Historian Paul Hayward states that one major kind of sources for the history of the Middle Ages are hagiographies, descriptions of lives of saints. As Hayward notes, they necessarily involve invocation of God and celebration of God’s work through the actions of the saint – a supernatural element, even if the life of the saint is accurately portrayed (Hayward 7). Another example that can be taken is the usage of the Bible by historians dealing with the Iron Age and early Archaic age Middle East, even though the Bible obviously contains elements which are supernatural. Should these sources be discarded, alongside the works based on them? Doing so would be a massive overreaction, a case of throwing away the baby along with the bath water. It is assumed that a historian well versed in his trade would be able to look through these elements and use them to gain an insight about the people and societies his works are dealing with. Hayward made this claim in regards to Medieval sources, though this could be extended to all such sources:

One might wish for better sources, but these are the sorts of history that the medieval world produced, and making them work for us presents a stimulating challenge. If we are to make sound use of them, we need to grasp the cultural systems and practices that

governed their production and consumption. We cannot escape the need to look for nuggets of fact, but recognizing them and utilizing them to good effect requires sensitivity to the criteria by which medieval authors selected and adapted them for inclusion in their histories. (Hayward 7)

Why, then, does historical fantasy represent such a blatant disregard for the historical in the eyes of some professionals? This thesis has shown that historical fantasy can represent history as well as regular historical fiction, and that it is a suitable platform for such endeavors. It could be said that this is a case of overbearing caution; afraid of being called out as unscientific, those historians will outright dismiss any kind of fiction that is not set in our empirical world. Perhaps it is also a lack of imagination, or a lack of capability to discern the real from the imaginary. Whatever the cause, it is certain that these fears are not well-grounded, and can only do harm to the development of historical fantasy as a genre. After all, historical fantasy must rely heavily on the works of historians; and while the approval of professional historians is certainly not a precondition for the writing of works of historical fantasy, condemnation from those historians can only discourage potential writers and maintain the view of literary fantasy as “low brow” literature, unsuitable for any meaningful discussion on complex matters such as history.

In the end, this dismissal of historical fantasy becomes moot when its importance in popularizing history is taken into account. Just as any novel belonging to the genre of historical fiction, historical fantasy can and does introduce a large number of readers to history, sometimes even representing the first contact these readers may have with it. In turn, they are often encouraged to find out more about the historical elements of the works they read about, and find the connection between the scientific and the literary. Thus, it could easily be asked: what do those happy amateurs see in these novels that professionally trained historians do not see, or do not want to see?

[Michel] De Certeau goes on to assert that the return of the repressed other (fiction) in history creates the *simulacrum* (the novel) that the history refuses to be. However, in refusing the real (which can only be symbolized, never represented), history refuses the *possible*, and it is precisely this refusal that prohibited history from becoming a *modern* science. For it is a characteristic of modern science (as against its Aristotelian prototype) to be more interested in the real than in the true; that is why it can, like fiction, proceed

hypothetically, testing the boundary between the real and the possible... (White, "Historical Fiction" 147-148)

## 5. CONCLUSION

This thesis discussed the representations of the French Revolution in the selected novels belonging to gunpowder fantasy, a new sub-genre of historical fantasy whose features distinguish it from previously existing genres such as steampunk. In order to achieve this, several approaches were taken.

First, a theoretical basis of the genre was laid out, displaying how the genre fits within the canon of the theory of the fantastic; that is, how this theory can be applied to the genre. In this regard, works of Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson were analyzed and applied to the works of the genre. In addition to these, the theoretical work of Gyorgy Lukacs was also analyzed due to his criticism of historical fiction. Finally, a connection was established between the tradition of historical fiction, historical fantasy and gunpowder fantasy. This led to defining several important tenets that define gunpowder fantasy: the setting of the world in a certain technological and social period, the connection with empirical historical processes and events, and a firmly established relationship between technology and the fantastic.

Second, the influence of the history of the French Revolution on the works of the genre was analyzed. This is divided into three sections: historical geography, historical figures and historical processes and events. The section on historical geography analyzed the geography of the world of the *Shadow Campaigns* series, and looked into its progenitors in the historical geography of Europe in the Revolutionary era: France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Russia, and others. In addition, a comparison was made between the lands of Khandar and Egypt. The section on historical figures drew comparisons between the characters of the *Shadow Campaigns* series and their counterparts in the history of the French Revolution. From less important figures such as doctor Guillotin or the marquis de Launay to giants of the Revolutionary era such as Robespierre and Bonaparte, a firm connection between the two was established. Finally, the thesis analyzed processes and events that occurred before and during the revolution in Vordan, seeking to compare them with empirical events and processes that were central to the happening we know today as the French Revolution. The impact of philosophers of the Enlightenment, the processes of economic and social

modernization, as well as changes in the conduct of war all had an influence on these events and made them not just unique, but ground-breaking.

Finally, it was necessary to describe and analyze the relationship between history and fiction in general, and history and the fantastic in particular. While the relationship between history and historical fiction may be seen as problematic due to the constant questioning of the scientific pedigree of history (not the least by historians themselves!), the thesis argues that that need not be. Rather than causing friction, history and literature can complement each other. In regards to the relationship between history and the fantastic, it was necessary to prove that the fantastic is indeed a genre no less well-suited for historical endeavors than regular historical fiction. After all, history is scientific and empirical, grounded in reason and the scientific method, while the fantastic belongs to the imaginary. The thesis thus aimed to show that the fantastic, despite being imaginary, influenced not just history in the sense of the past events of humankind, but the study of history as well, and that because of this it cannot be outright rejected.

This thesis has shortcomings. The corpus of works of gunpowder fantasy used in the thesis is small, and may be considered by some as insufficient. This was, admittedly, done so on purpose for the sake of brevity and practicality. It is the belief of the author of the thesis that the works analyzed represent well the general nature of the works of gunpowder fantasy, and that they are thus well-suited for the purpose of use in this thesis. In addition, it could be said that the corpus of literary theory used could have been greater, and perhaps should have. It was the intention of the author to place the works in question within a certain context of the fantastic, and not bring out any new or revolutionary revelations on the matter of the theory of the fantastic. As such, the author limited himself on the subject matter, again for the sake of brevity and practicality.

Irrespective of its limited corpus, this thesis has made several important points. It has shown that gunpowder fantasy has a rightful place within historical fantasy, and that it is a suitable platform for the portrayal of historical events and processes. It has proven that the French Revolution and its events are the inspiration behind the works of Django Wexler, and has analyzed all the connections between the two. Due to that, the thesis has proven that gunpowder fantasy can be taken into consideration in

discussing the nature of relationship between history and fiction in general, which has potential to benefit both literary and historical studies. Ultimately, it has aimed to show that the imaginary is no less real for being imaginary, and that the fantastic, even when we know it is supernatural and unreal, shapes our world even today.



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## ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS

As one of the most influential events of the Western world, the French Revolution has been the topic of countless works of literature, both fictional and non-fictional. In recent years, the events, figures and geography of the French Revolution has served as an inspiration for authors in a new genre of fantasy, known as gunpowder or flintlock fantasy. Taking novels of Django Wexler's *Shadow Campaigns* series as an example, this thesis establishes the basic tenets of this genre based on the theory of the fantastic. It also discusses the similarities between the various elements of the novels and their historical counterparts. Finally, the thesis discusses various questions regarding the fundamental principles of history as well as its relationship with the fantastic. Through this, the thesis demonstrates that historical fantasy is a suitable vessel for fictional portrayal of historic events, despite the criticisms of its detractors.

Key words: French Revolution, gunpowder fantasy, flintlock fantasy, Django Wexler, historical fiction, historical fantasy, narrative history