

# The Role of History in Bestseller and Blockbuster Culture

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## Abstract

History provides an infinite supply of dramatic events, stories, characters and conflicts. The article provides a brief overview of prevalent conceptions and ideas of history that can be applied to the wide-spread historical fictions of the bestseller and blockbuster culture. On the background of the current alliance between history and media, I propose a methodological distinction between three levels: 1) a historiographical level, concerned with overall considerations and reflections, 2) a user-orientated level focussing on the uses and functions of history, and 3) a genre-orientated level considering historical films and TV drama productions within a frame of genre traditions, including hybrids. The insights are applied analytically using the case of the Danish bestseller biography and blockbuster film *Marie Krøyer*.

**Keywords** Historical cinema, Bestseller biographies, Biographical blockbusters, History and media culture, Marie Krøyer.

### The challenge of abundance

It is striking that our Western societies are currently confronted with a huge dose of history ubiquitously presented in all genres and on all platforms. Representations of historical events and people are an integral part of the prevailing bestseller and blockbuster culture. Bestseller lists are usually divided into 'fiction/crime', 'non-fiction' and 'biographies/autobiographies'.<sup>1</sup> In all of these categories, diverse genres connected with history and memory are popular – from the historical (crime) novel to new studies of WW II and memoirs or biographies. The attraction of factual genres connected with the past is indisputable.

Historical films of all subgenres aspire to blockbuster status. As the widespread tie-in phenomenon indicates, connections between bestsellers and blockbusters are tight (cf. Feather and Woodbridge, 2007). Historical TV drama series are important to national identity and generate extraordinary ratings, even when repeated (Agger, 2005). When these series are exported, their production design and dramatic attitudes to historical narration often appeal to international audiences, as in the case of Ken Follett's novels and their adaptations as TV series – *The Pillars of the Earth* (2010) and *World Without End* (2012).<sup>2</sup> Ann Gray and Erin Bell (2013) have thoroughly documented and analysed the growth of factual historical productions and the emergence of new genres in the UK since the mid-1990s.

These facts point to one simple answer to the question of the role of history in bestseller and blockbuster culture. History provides an infinite supply of dramatic events, stories, characters and conflicts, and all categories of historical representations in all subgenres play a vital role in the development and maintenance of this culture. They are vital to development because new genres and genre blends are constantly being created. They play a key role in their maintenance because these events, stories, characters and conflicts can be interpreted again and again in renewed versions, seen from new contemporary perspectives. For instance, the biographies of historical characters such as Elizabeth I or Abraham Lincoln have been reinterpreted in remakes<sup>3</sup> – and most certainly will be again in the future. Biographies seem to have a special appeal not only in books, but also on television and in films. According to Robert Burgoyne, the biographical film is by far the largest subgenre (Burgoyne, 2008, p. 16).

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, I aim to provide a brief overview of prevalent conceptions and ideas of history that can be applied to the historical fictions of the bestseller and blockbuster culture. Secondly, I want to apply the theoretical insights analytically in order to test their implications. I limit myself by using only one case. In examining the Danish bestseller biography and blockbuster film *Marie Krøyer*, I draw attention to the different choices made, in order to focus on their consequences. I have chosen this case because it is representative of current bestseller and blockbuster culture. However, the definition of these terms cannot be directly transferred from an American to a Scandinavian context because of the obvious differences in scale and consequently budgets, domestic and international promotion strategies. My definition is pragmatic: a Danish bestseller must have figured on the current Danish bestseller lists for a period; often it has appeared in several issues. A Danish blockbuster must figure on The Danish Film Institute's yearly top 10 list and must have made a considerable impact in the public sphere (advance publicity, posters, interviews, reviews and blogs).

During the last thirty years, increasing public interest in the so-called Skagen painters, their artistic milieu and their biographies has been manifested in large exhibitions and a number of books.<sup>4</sup> *Bal-laden om Marie Krøyer* by Anastassia Arnold (1999) is a typical, popular biography published in five issues including a book club edition.<sup>5</sup> In 2012, Bille August's film *Marie Krøyer* was released, crediting Arnold's biography. Ticket sales in Denmark in 2012 amounted to 296,206, making it number 6 on the Top 10 list of Danish films in 2012. *Marie Krøyer* was one of three major biopics in 2012, the others being Nicolaj Arcel's *A Royal Affair* and Anne Grethe Bjarup Riis's *This Life*. The reception of these releases confirms the biopic to be a steady love affair between producers and audiences.<sup>6</sup>

### **The alliance between history and media**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Friedrich Nietzsche was already dealing with the challenge of the surfeit of history. In *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1874), he issued a warning. Advancing oblivion as a precondition for happiness, Nietzsche claimed that the overdose of history prevalent in his time could be potentially dangerous, in that it might damage the creative instincts of individuals as well

as whole populations. Accordingly, the original title was “The Historical Disease” (Kristensen and Schmidt, 1994, p. 8). For Nietzsche, the surfeit of history depended first and foremost on the close alliance between education (‘Bildung’) and the widespread influence of historical knowledge, science and method that characterized the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the current situation, the alliance between history and media has radically transformed this diagnosis. History is not so much connected to our educational systems as to our media culture, where it is treasured by large audiences: the popularity of mediated history culture is shown in data such as numbers of printed books, box office returns, and TV ratings and reviews. In particular, memory studies research has demonstrated that mediated representations of historical events are highly influential (Erll and Wodjanka, 2008, p. 140).

It is a general assumption today that most people receive their basic historical education through films and TV series: ‘Blockbuster history films, mini-series, documentaries, docudramas – all these genres are increasingly important in our relationship to the past and our understanding of history’ (Rosenstone, 2006, p. 4).<sup>7</sup> To a large extent, however, what still remains to be explored is the exact impact this may have on real audiences. To my knowledge, limited interest has been displayed in more clear-cut reception studies of historical films or TV series.<sup>8</sup>

Another intriguing question concerns how the role of mediated history is assessed by history and media scholars. Here, several approaches compete. The conceptualisations and understandings of historians and media researchers appear to differ. Historical research (Bryld 1999, Jensen 2003, Karlsson 2009, Warring 2011) acknowledges the significance of history conveyed by fiction, but typically downplays the aesthetic level. However, there is a growing awareness that the criteria of evaluation *should* vary. As Pierre Sorlin puts it, ‘Most books and reviews on the subject of history in film compare the events shown in film with a written description of the same events, but such an approach is ineffective. What should we compare?’ (Sorlin, 1980, p. 32). According to Sorlin, as well as Rosenstone and Zander (both 2006), it is crucial to explore the inter-relationship between history and aesthetics to understand the appeal of all types of historical representation. The past is not just the

past, but 'a past that fits within the demands, practices, and traditions of both the visual media and the dramatic form' (Rosenstone, 2006, p. 38, original emphasis). The claim of creativity can be extended to historical documentaries: 'To paraphrase John Grierson's famous definition, a historical documentary is a film characterized principally by the *creative treatment of past actuality*' (Ludvigsson, 2003, p. 63, original emphasis).

During the last decades, genre based studies of historical film and TV drama have asserted themselves as means of better understanding the impact of history in films. Burgoyne summarises the fact/fiction discussion by underlining the feasibility of the plot-driven genre definition of the historical film genre: 'the [historical] genre is composed of dramatic feature films in which the primary plot is based on actual historical events, or in which an imagined plot unfolds in such a way that actual historical events are central and intrinsic to the story' (Burgoyne, 2008, p. 2).<sup>9</sup>

In the vast, expanding field of study roughly delineated above, I find it useful to distinguish between three levels: 1) a historiographical level, concerned with overall considerations and reflections, 2) a user-orientated level focussing on the uses and functions of history, and 3) a genre-orientated level considering historical films and TV drama productions within a frame of genre traditions, including hybrids. In the following, my task will be to briefly illustrate the scope of each level by using the case of *Marie Krøyer* – the film and the book.

### **The historiographical level**

On this level, I shall briefly refer to three impressive representatives of historiography – Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur and Friedrich Nietzsche. This may seem grandiose considering the scope and spatial limitations of this article; however, in this case they serve to illuminate that even the historiographical level has a mundane utility value.

The relationship between history and fundamental narrative patterns has been thoroughly analysed by Hayden White in *Metahistory* (1973) and Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et Récit* (1983-85). Hayden White's subtitle is "The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe", and this title is symptomatic of White's aim and of the well-known 'literary turn' in historiography. His basic assump-

tion is that 'a chronicle' is transformed into 'a story' 'by the characterization of some events in the chronicle in terms of inaugural motifs, of others in terms of terminating motifs, and of yet others in terms of transitional motifs' (White, 1975, p. 5). In history, chronicles are transformed into stories. Inspired by Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), he distinguishes between four 'modes of emplotment' that can be applied to the story: 'Romance, Tragedy, Comedy and Satire' (White, 1975, p. 7). This explains why the transfer of historical events to history books or to any kind of historical narration or fiction tends to follow certain patterns. Historical stories are formed by the need to fit these narrative patterns.

In accordance with the demands of the biographical genre, Arnold's biography registers the life of Marie Krøyer from her birth to her death. In great detail, Arnold interprets her dilemmas as a result of the prevalent conditions at the time, such as the pressure of a paternalist society obstructing the professional ambitions and active sexuality of women. In contrast, August's film deploys the tragic mode of emplotment by focussing on a certain narrative pattern – the transition from a life of great expectations to a life of dissolution in her relationship to two men. This is represented by a limited period of transition in Marie Krøyer's life when her marriage to P.S. Krøyer is breaking down, due to his mental state and her response to his problems. It is also the period when he bluntly makes it clear to her that she herself is not an artist: she does not render the light in her paintings. At the same time, she is helplessly attracted to Hugo Alfvén, the Swedish composer. Highlighting this fundamental narrative pattern – the play about the eternal triangle – the film allows itself more liberty than the printed biography, adhering to rules that are artistically motivated.

In his comprehensive work *Temps et Récit*, Paul Ricoeur analyses the relationship between history, time and narration, basing his theory on Augustine's concept of time and Aristotle's concept of mimesis. According to Augustine, the present always includes the past – and inaugurates the future. Ricoeur shows how these categories combine with his three forms of mimesis to determine the way in which factual or fictive historical narration is carried out.

With the simultaneously inaugural and terminating motif of Krøyer's coffin drowning in rainy water in the windy Skagen churchyard, the story in the film is precisely framed from the begin-

ning, just as the dominant mode is presented – revolving around Marie’s personal tragedy in spite of all her success. In this way the beginning represents the end: this scene includes the past in the present and forebodes the future. The keynote of *ending* is present in the film from the beginning.<sup>10</sup> The biographical genre as such presupposes the whole life of the protagonist, and this often (but not always) includes death as well. In this case, however, we witness the death of Marie’s husband. This emphasises the main point of view of the film – P.S. Krøyer’s gradual decline assumes a defining role for her life. The contrast with Arnold’s biography is striking: Arnold records the death of P.S. Krøyer in detail, but the event is not ascribed so much significance as in the film.

In spite of his warnings on the abuse of history in *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, Nietzsche also stresses its uses:

In three respects history belongs to the living person: it belongs to him as an active and striving person; it belongs to him as a person who preserves and admires; it belongs to him as a suffering person in need of emancipation. This trinity of relationships corresponds to a trinity of methods for history, to the extent that one may make the distinctions, a monumental method, an antiquarian method, and a critical method. (Nietzsche, n.d., p. 7)

Nietzsche goes on to expand on the advantages and drawbacks of the three methodological approaches. Monumental history teaches us that greatness is possible, but the danger is that history might be idealized. Antiquarian history is useful, as it is primarily aiming at piously preserving, not creating. However, there is the risk that by way of the same piety, an equalizing attitude is attributed to phenomena of a different status. The monumental and the antiquarian approaches should therefore be supplemented by the critical, analyzing and challenging approach to history. Nietzsche’s conclusion is that history can be useful, but only in the right ‘dietary’ proportions; otherwise it is harmful.

In her introduction to *The Historical Film* (2000), Marcia Landy argues that Nietzsche’s overall categories are still valid for identifying and analysing prevalent forms of historicizing in film. Cinema is obviously attracted to monumental history. Its narration is

characterized by 'a vision of the past during moments of crisis and heroic conflict, and it reveals a penchant for the actions of heroic figures' (Landy, 2000, p. 3). Historical Hollywood productions provide ample illustration. Antiquarian history also plays an influential role. Its inherent tendency to overemphasise the reverence of the past becomes evident in the many nostalgic Heimat-films produced for national audiences in Germany and Denmark. In contrast, critical history re-examines the values and angles of former representations, thus clearing the way for new approaches as seen in Edgar Reitz's TV drama serial *Heimat* (1984) that formed a challenge to nostalgic Heimat-films.

The dominant approach in both the film *Marie Krøyer* and the written biography is *critical* representing a late rebuttal of the gossip in Skagen and Copenhagen which accused Marie Krøyer of causing her husband's death by leaving husband and daughter in favour of her lover. Arnold's as well as August's contribution are part of an on-going re-evaluation of the conditions and options of women in the milieu of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both suggest that Marie Krøyer is richly endowed by nature, but caught in dilemmas typical of society at that time. She is not an artist, but an artisan. She ought to possess all the chances for happiness, not least in a milieu characterized by the artists' liberal attitudes to the dominant conservative society. She ought to be able to combine the role of wife and mother with her work as an artisan.

The critical attitude is illuminated by inextricable dilemmas that her husband, her lover and the rules of society kept presenting to her. She cannot cope with P.S. Krøyer's manic-depressive state of mind – she does not want to leave him, but his uncontrollable threats and rage force her to do so. A parallel is drawn to her second relationship: while she is pregnant by Alfvén, he leaves her. Finally, she is let down by Lachmann, the lawyer, representing the conservative trend in society, as he prepares her fatal break with her daughter, who subsequently chooses her foster mother instead of Marie.

To focus on the bigotry of society, the film enhances the role of Lachmann. In an intense scene vis-à-vis Marie Krøyer, we witness Lachmann's shift of attitude from sympathy to antipathy when he realizes that she has been unfaithful to Krøyer, that she is pregnant, and that he cannot hope to possess her himself.



In their critical approach, the film and the written biography emphasise different aspects, but both clearly side with Marie Krøyer. A slight antiquarian touch might be ascribed to the film in the obvious pleasure that it takes in displaying the costumes and the interiors, showing Marie's talent for arts and crafts. Seen as a commentary to women's conditions, however, the film is by no means nostalgic.

### **The user-orientated level**

During the 1980s and 1990s in particular, historical research and related areas within literature, media studies, and anthropology addressed questions of the uses and functions of history. In her survey of the concepts connected to this turn, Anette Warring (2011) points out that it was founded in cross-disciplinary research, and that consequently the concepts applied within the field derive from different traditions. Hence, we find more or less synonymous concepts designating the same phenomenon, namely that history can be used in various ways and serve several functions, dependent on the identity of the users and the purposes they pursue.

Some of these concepts are 'history culture' ('Geschichtskultur'), 'historical consciousness', 'didactics of history' and 'uses of history'. The affinity of the terms is illustrated by Ludvigsson: 'History culture is our term for that which includes and represents all the various uses of history that exist in society' (Ludvigsson, 2003, p. 12). Referring to Ricoeur's understanding of the relationship between time and narration, Ludvigsson defines historical consciousness:

The historical consciousness of a people in a society is the instrument whereby those people make meaning of the past. Involved is the process of linking the past to an understanding of the world. More specifically, it is the process of remembering the past, and understanding the present, and of creating perspectives for the future. (Ludvigsson, 2003, p. 8)

In his survey "Historiedidaktik: begrepp, teori och analys", Karlsson draws on work by Rüsen (1992) and Jensen (2003), among others, to expound an elaborated typology of the uses of history. Karlsson's distinction between the categories 'need', 'uses', 'users' and 'function' (Karlsson, 2009, p. 59) makes it clear that everybody can-

not be expected to have the same needs and to use history in the same way, and it certainly highlights the different intentions that may lie behind any use of history, including its use in historical films and TV series. To the question of whether the misuse of history exists or not, Karlsson gives an answer which resumes the thread from Nietzsche: 'Use of history develops into misuse in the case when the use of history either directly or indirectly violates common human rights and values' (Karlsson, 2009, p. 69).

In *Clio på bio* (2006), Ulf Zander more explicitly draws attention to the various functions of history in cinema, illustrating some of the positions in Karlsson's typology.<sup>11</sup> According to Zander, representation of history in visual media must be assessed by other criteria than those strictly related to science of history. In many ways, Zander's position is similar to Rosenstone's, the essential question being: 'How do films construct a historical reality? Which rules, codes and strategies bring the past to life on the silver screen?' (Zander, 2006, p. 14, my translation).

Zander points out that *existential* need and the *moral* use of historical films are highly significant factors in the use of history. He emphasizes that the inherent feature of almost all historical films is their *mirroring* of the past in the present. Voluntarily or involuntarily, every historical film bears the mark of the time in which it is produced. Very often it serves as an open or hidden comment on contemporary events. Both *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* were a comment on their own time, asking crucial questions about the dichotomy between civil rights and segregation.<sup>12</sup>

In a different context, I have observed a similar mirroring phenomenon in historical crime novels and crime documentaries, which adds a special flavour to them. I distinguish between three functions attached to crime genres: 1) history as a mirror in combination with a moral scale enhancing similarities and differences between past and present, 2) history as a forum in which national self-understanding finds its popular expression when asking questions about crucial aspects of national history, and 3) history as a catalyst for the consciousness of time, a function that matches the interplay between 'sujet' and 'fabula' in these genres (Agger, 2013, pp. 38-45).

In the discussion of the uses of history, memory (or oblivion) is an influential category. Although it is difficult to define exactly what 'memory and popular film' is, it represents an expanding

field (Grainge, 2003; Erll and Wodianska, 2008). German researchers have coined the term 'Erinnerungsfilm'. But when does a historical film turn into a 'memory film'? The most precise definition of this necessarily imprecise term is offered by Astrid Erll, who defines it by the process it involves. The way in which a film is used determine its status as a 'memory film': 'Nicht der Gegenstand des im Film Erinnerung, sondern das durch den Film 'um den Film herum' Erinnerung macht seinen Status als Erinnerungsfilm auf' (Erll, 2008, p. 8). If a film has an impact on the area that Erll considers to be 'the collective memory', if it is debated in the media, discussed by the critics, or debated via the internet, it can assume the status of a 'memory film'.<sup>13</sup>

At least two needs and corresponding functions (in Karlsson's and Zander's sense) can be attributed to *Marie Krøyer*: 1) The need to remember the struggle for women's emancipation a hundred years ago, to verify what happened in the daily entanglement of work and priorities, marriage and divorce, individual and societal choices and consequently the function to re-evaluate that part of history as a whole; and 2) the need to rediscover the appalling dilemmas of personal, professional and societal conditions and consequently the function of rehabilitating Marie Krøyer. To this, we should add 3) the function of mirroring and negotiating the present in the past. Marie Krøyer certainly mirrors the current tendency among young women to wish for perfection as wives, mothers and professionals along with the persistent inability to live up to their own high standards.

### The genre level

The term 'historical film' is an overall category; it merely indicates that a given film is set in a period of the past. However, it does not convey anything about the genre or genre blends of the film. As Higson points out, history can be adapted in various ways, each with its own label: as 'heritage cinema' adapting literary classics or plays, as 'bio-pics' concentrating on biographies or 'true stories', as 'costume drama' enhancing the appearance and interiors of the period in question (Higson, 2003, pp. 13-22), or as a combination of the above-mentioned genres. Proximity to literary sources is characteristic: 'Very few of the 'British' period films made in the 1980s and 1990s and set before the Second World War were

developed as original screenplays, as opposed to adaptations from another source' (Higson, 2003, p. 20). The categories 'heritage cinema' and 'costume drama' are rather broad, but in any case, the proximity to well-known literary predecessors tends to influence the ways in which the genre of the concrete cinematic adaptation is implemented.

On the basis of his plot-driven genre definition (cf. above), Burgoyne rejects 'heritage cinema' and 'costume drama' as historical genres and makes the following claim: 'The great majority of American films that take the past as their subject can be classified into one of five variant groups: the war film, the biographical film, the epic, the metahistorical film, and the topical film' (Burgoyne, 2008, p. 3). This taxonomy determines the structure of his book. In my view this standpoint is too limited. No doubt the five genres are part of popular mainstream cinema, but so too are 'heritage cinema' and 'costume drama'. Is it meaningful to dismiss *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or *Titanic* (1997) as historical films for their excessively melodramatic handling of history? Basically all main genres can ally themselves with historical films, and in doing so (cf. Agger, 2005, pp. 125-128) they produce an even greater variety of subgenres. Consequently, the awareness of genre and genre blends in the study of historical films must be just as sensitive as in the case of contemporary films.

The impact of new genre combinations is illustrative. According to Paul Grainge, the postmodern pastiche has a mode 'that has the potential to be critical and transgressive, but that can also suggest an awareness about the constructed nature of feelings and emotions while allowing them to be experienced and enjoyed' (Grainge, 2003, p. 10). The recent contrafactual films of Quentin Tarantino constitute good examples of this. *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), in particular, is a meta-film. The characters are constructed as genre-stereotypes: the hero from a spaghetti-western, the gangster hero, the villainous nazi-antagonist, the beautiful female double agent, the melodramatic victim, and the femme fatale (cf. Woisnitza, 2012, p. 260). A similar set-up is constructed in *Django Unchained* (2012). Although objections to this form abound, it is beyond doubt that Tarantino's two most recent films do contribute to the ongoing discussion of the role that history can play in historical films. Options and consequences are discussed by McGee (2012) and Woisnitza (2012).

Relating the film *Marie Krøyer* to the genre level is uncomplicated, yet illuminating. It does not aspire to any remarkable renewal of genres or interesting genre combinations but follows the conventions of mainstream biopics. The film constitutes a traditional adaptation of a bestselling biography into a classical biopic. In the wake of Arnold's biography, it does renew the interpretation of Marie Krøyer's personal biography and her role in the art and lives of her two husbands. It conveys its point of view by focussing on the social and personal limitations of a gifted woman, making use of a realistic style which enters into a dialogue with the well-known paintings and the preconceptions on which the story is based.

### Conclusion

The popularity of history in media culture is highlighted by the many bestsellers and blockbusters currently feeding on historical events and characters. As a result, scholarly attention to the many ways in which history and media culture can be combined is much more acute now than it was just a few decades ago. The abundance of historical representations in fiction presents a challenge: How can we explain this development and in which ways can we analyse the overwhelming stream of productions in the bestseller and blockbuster culture? As always, it is important to distinguish between different levels of enquiry.

Methodologically, I propose to distinguish between the historiographical level, the user-orientated level and the genre-orientated level. The questions asked at the historiographical level can lead to interesting discoveries of fundamental patterns and attitudes in narration. The analyses of the uses and functions of history help determine the intention and purpose of the analysed production, and not least its attitude to current issues by its function as a mirror or a commentary. Here, the genre level is indispensable. Even in the bestseller and blockbuster culture where genres deliver the vehicle of development, the overall category 'historical fiction' is far too broad; genres constantly merge and new subgenres develop, demanding new approaches.

As demonstrated by my single case, one can combine these approaches, and the combination will often yield new insights. Further, the case of *Marie Krøyer* represents a written biography as well as a film, highlighting the relationship between a bestseller and a

blockbuster. The concept of time is expanded chronologically in the book, whereas the mode of narration in the film can be ascribed to the historiographical level and is combined with the functions of remembrance of the past and reflection of the present. This is executed in the biopic, a traditional cinematic genre that has kept up its popular appeal without conspicuous innovations.

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- Gone with the Wind*, 1939. [Film] Directed by Victor Fleming and George Cukor. USA: Warner Bros.
- Heimat*, 1984. [Television serial] Directed by Edgar Reitz. Germany: ERF.
- Inglorious Basterds*, 2009. [TV serial] Directed by Quentin Tarantino. USA: Universal Pictures.
- Lincoln*, 2012. [Film] Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA: Dreamworks.
- Marie Krøyer*, 2012. [Film] Directed by Bille August. Denmark/Sweden: SF Film Production.
- The Pillars of the Earth*, 2010. [Television miniseries] By Ken Follett, John Pielmeier. Directed by Sergio Mimica-Gezzan. Germany, Canada, UK: Tandem Communications.
- A Royal Affair*, 2012. [Film] Directed by Nikolaj Arcel. Denmark: Zentropa Entertainments.
- This life*, 2012. [Film] Directed by Anne-Grethe Bjarup Riis. Denmark: Regnar Grasten Film.
- Titanic*, 1997. [Film] Directed by James Cameron. USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, 2013. [Television miniseries] By Stefan Kolditz. Directed by Philipp Kadelbach. Germany: TeamWorx.
- World Without End*, 2012. [Television miniseries] By Ken Follett, John Pielmeier. Directed by Michael Caton-Jones. Germany, Canada, UK: Tandem Communications.

## Notes

- 1 Cf. the Danish bookseller chains Arnold Busck and Bog og Idé: <<http://www.arnoldbusck.dk/bestsellerlister?gclid=CJL8-bmMuLUCFYlb3godjmUABw>>, <<http://www.bog-ide.dk/?ID=2>> (Accessed 12 July 2013).
- 2 Cf. <<http://ken-follett.com/filmography/>> (Accessed 12 July 2013).
- 3 Andrew Higson (2003) analyzes the specificity of *Elizabeth* (1998) in



- relation to its time of production. Ulf Zander (2006) draws attention to the impact that the interpretations of the role of Abraham Lincoln has had on films of American history as a part of a nation-building process.
- 4 Important representatives being Michael Ancher and Anna Ancher, Peder Severin Krøyer and Marie Krøyer, Viggo Johansen, Carl Locher, Holger Drachmann, Hugo Alfvén.
  - 5 According to <<http://www.skagensmuseum.dk/shop/show/produkt/dansk/balladen-om-marie-kroeyer-br-af-anastassia-arnold/>> (Accessed 15 August 2013), it has sold 170,000 copies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The interest in Marie Krøyer is confirmed by Mette Bøgh Jensen, 2012, focussing on her artistic works.
  - 6 Cf. The Danish Film Institute: <<http://www.dfi.dk/FaktaOmFilm/Tal-og-statistik/Billetsalg/Billetsalg-for-danske-film-2012.aspx>> (Accessed 15 August 2013). The three films figure on the top ten-list of Danish films 2012. With 528,425 and 764,516 admissions respectively, *A Royal Affair* and *This Life* were very successful at the box office. *Marie Krøyer* also figures on the top 10 list of DVD-sales (Nielsen, Quarter Top 100, first quarter 2013), as did *A Royal Affair* and *This Life* in 2012. *A Royal Affair* and *This Life* are not based on bestselling novels or biographies to the same extent as *Marie Krøyer*, but they are not without written foundations either, that is, Bodil Steensen Leth's *Prinsesse af blodet* (2000) and Axel Holm's *Hvidstengruppen* (1945, 2012), respectively.
  - 7 Cf. Edgerton, 2001.
  - 8 Cf. Gray and Bell's statement: "Relatively little is known about who actually watches history programmes and even less is known about what they glean from their viewing" (2013, p. 158).
  - 9 Here, Burgoyne echoes Natalie Zemon Davis's *Slaves on Screen* (2000).
  - 10 Marie Krøyer came to Skagen for the funeral; the local population blamed her for Krøyer's condition after their divorce, and she was advised not to participate and did not (Arnold, 2012, p. 291). This is visualized in the film by her isolated presence at the funeral.
  - 11 The original typology is from a previous version of *Historien är nu*, edited by Karlsson and Zander.
  - 12 In the same way, Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012) conveys a timely commentary to the first period of Barack Obama's presidency. The film was based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* (2005), number 10 on the nonfiction bestseller list of *New York Times*, February

- 10, 2013, representing another example of the tie-in of biography and blockbuster.
- 13 This was the case with *This Life*. Another example rooted in the same period is the German TV drama *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (2013), which prompted a veritable wave of memory about life in Germany during WW II.