

HISTORY AS ALLEGORY¹

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This article is concerned with a recurrent phenomenon in the history of historical writing which does not seem to have received the attention it surely deserves; the perception and representation of one past event or individual in terms of another. The study will focus on the different circumstances in which comments are made on one event (usually in the past) when the commentators are really, or more intensely, preoccupied with another (usually in the present). The main concern of the study is with works of history, but it proves impossible to isolate these productions from other narratives of the past, or indeed from visual representations. Indeed, the most direct way into the subject may well be to comment on a few images.

The first example is well known. It comes from the series of frescoes in the Vatican painted by Raphael and his assistants, representing popes Leo III and Leo IV. Leo III is crowning Charlemagne, while Leo IV is thanking God for a victory over the Saracens. Both popes have been given the features of Leo X, for whom the frescoes were painted. The name 'Leo' and the unmistakable plump face and prominent eyes make the parallels unusually explicit. In some sense, therefore, Leo III and Leo IV are supposed to stand for Leo X. The viewer is surely entitled to suspect that the painted stories of Charles V and the Saracens are allegories of Leo X's relations with the emperor Charles V and the Ottoman Empire.²

Raphael's pupil Perino del Vaga went on to paint a similar series of allegorical frescoes in Castel Sant'Angelo, representing pope Paul III, formerly Alessandro Farnese, as St. Paul and as Alexander the Great.³ There are of course many other examples of what art historians have called 'allegorical portraits' or 'identification portraits'.⁴

The second example is more exotic but it also belongs to a well-known class of images. It is another fresco, from the end of the 16th century this time, in a monastery in Moldavia (Sucevita to be exact), showing the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Pharaoh's troops, who are in hot pursuit, are wearing Polish costume. This might be no more than a traditional anachronism in a part of Europe where the Renaissance and the Renaissance sense of the past had not yet penetrated very deeply.⁵

However, it is also possible (indeed probable) that the artist was making a topical point, a political statement. The painting dates from about the time of King Michael the Brave of Moldavia and Wallachia, a leader whose bravery was displayed in battles with the Poles. The painting is giving us a broad hint that King Michael is on God's side, and it may even be suggesting that the Moldavians are God's chosen people. One might compare a Dutch painting of the passage of the Red Sea painted during the Revolt of the Netherlands, a time when some citizens of the new republic perceived and represented it as a second Israel (and their enemy Philip of Spain as a new Pharaoh).⁶

Iconography is itself a kind of Red Sea, and an amateur like myself has no right to expect the waters to part in order to let him reach his goal safely. Let us therefore turn to literary texts, where the use of history as allegory is somewhat more explicit, at least on occasion.

At much the same time that the anonymous Moldavian artist painted his fresco, many English people were worried about the problem of their queen's successor. When the succession was in doubt, as they well knew, civil wars often resulted. At this point poets and historians alike — Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, Sir John Hayward and William Shakespeare — were concerning themselves with the English civil wars of the late Middle Ages; the Barons' Wars of the thirteenth century, the Wars of the Roses, and the deposition of Richard II by Henry of Lancaster.

Whatever Shakespeare's intention in writing *Richard II*, we know that the followers of the Earl of Essex who rebelled at the end of Elizabeth's reign saw the play as a commentary on the present, since they demanded a special performance.⁷ Like the rebels, the queen was in no doubt that the figure of Richard II was allegorical. As she remarked to William Lambarde, 'I am Richard II, know you not that?'⁸ She also asked Francis Bacon 'whether there were no treason contained' in Hayward's book. Despite Bacon's denial, Hayward went to the Tower.⁹

A few years later, Bacon himself would follow Hayward's example with more success — for his biography of Henry VII has been interpreted as an allegory of James I.¹⁰ Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, which dealt only with antiquity, has also been interpreted as an allegory of modern times, an interpretation supported by the author's famous remark that it was better not to 'follow Truth too near the heels', in other words to comment in print on recent events.

It would be easy to multiply examples from early modern Europe of historical representations which conceal or imply comments on the present, whether to flatter, justify, warn or criticize a particular individual or group. The problems begin when we try to unfold what was implicit, hundreds of years later. For this reason a historian turns with relief to a handful of examples where contemporaries themselves commented on the allegory.

One day in 1625, for example, the poet Vondel was talking to an Amsterdam patrician, Albert Burgh, about the execution — not to say the judicial murder — of a leading figure in Dutch politics, Johan van Oldenbarneveld, six years earlier. 'Write a tragedy about it', said Burgh. 'The time isn't ripe', replied Vondel, who was presumably afraid of the possible consequences of the act. 'Just change the names' was Burgh's response.¹¹ The result was a play set in ancient Greece, Vondel's *Palamedes*. The injured innocent Palamedes clearly stood for Oldenbarnevelt, while Agamemnon, equally obviously, stood for the prince of Orange.

In the France of Louis XIII and XIV, it was the government rather than the opposition which produced the best-known historical allegories of the time. Among the works which emanated from the circle of cardinal Richelieu, for example, were two biographies of cardinal-statesmen, one of Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and the other of Georges d'Amboise. In both cases, the allegorical intention is reasonably transparent.¹²

Again, when Louis XIV was beginning his period of personal rule, in the 1660s, the court painter Charles Lebrun produced five scenes from the life of Alexander the Great, while Racine wrote a play on the same subject. In this case the point of the parallel was simply to glorify the young king, who took particular pleasure in identifying himself with Alexander.¹³

In other examples from the time of Louis XIV the object of the enterprise seems to have been warning rather than glorification. Racine's *Britannicus* implied a parallel between Nero, that 'monstre naissant', and Louis so shocking that no one but the king himself could afford to notice it. To be exact, almost no one. A contemporary recorded his observation that after this play, which refers to Nero's performances on the stage, Louis never danced in public again.

It would be as easy as it would be tedious to multiply examples of this kind of historical allegory. The question which most concerns a cultural historian is whether this literary mode has a history, whether it changes over time. The American critic Angus Fletcher has claimed that 'allegorization is a constant... process of representation'.¹⁴ One purpose of this article is to show that this view needs qualification. It will argue that allegory differs not only in importance but also in meaning from one period to another, thanks to changes in views of the relationship between the events represented, whether explicitly or implicitly.

It may be useful to begin by distinguishing two types or two uses of allegory. The first might be called 'pragmatic'. In these cases, the allegory is a means to an end, not an end in itself. When direct means of political comment are suppressed, it is time to use the method of Aesop, as the Poles used to say at the time of their communist regime.

In the nineteenth century, despite the dominance of the doctrine of the uniqueness of historical events, the Cambridge Union, for instance, a club of students which was not allowed to debate contemporary political issues, discussed those of the seventeenth century instead. Again, it has been pointed out that Delaroche's painting of 'Cromwell and Charles I', exhibited in Paris 1831, refers to the revolution of 1830, when Louis Philippe replaced Charles X.¹⁵

A famous twentieth-century example of the method of Aesop is Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible*, the second part of which (made in 1946, and dealing with the increasing paranoia of the authoritarian ruler), could not be shown in public until the death of Stalin, so obvious was the parallel between past and present. An equally famous example, from the culture of the other super-power of the time, is Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, a play about witch-hunting in seventeenth-century Massachusetts which was first performed in 1953, during the witch-hunts of the McCarthy era. Intriguingly enough, contemporary reviewers made no open references to the politics of their own time. It is not that the reviewers were obtuse; in this case the reviews too have to be read allegorically.

As in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some modern works of scholarship demand an allegorical reading as well as a literal one. The late Arnaldo Momigliano, one of the classic scholars of our century, once confessed that his concern with Greek liberty at a time when he was living in Mussolini's Italy was a political gesture. At much the same time, another Italian historian, Francesco Ercole, was writing about the 'crisis of Italian liberty' c1500, the 'dictatorship' of Savonarola and his political use of a youth movement. Again, in 1965, the Polish intellectual Leszek Kolakowski published *Christians without a Church*, a study of dissident intellectuals of the Reformation who looked forward to what we might call the 'withering away of the Church'. Its relevance to political debates in Poland was obvious enough, and in any case Kolakowski made his views explicit a year later, on the tenth anniversary of the Gomulka regime, before going into exile.¹⁶

It looks as if pragmatic allegory is, if not a constant presence, at least a recurrent phenomenon in cultural history, resurfacing every time it is needed. In this sense Fletcher's claim, quoted above, is a reasonable one.

However, historical allegories cannot be reduced to attempts to avoid the censor. A second type of allegory might be described as the 'metaphysical' or 'mystical' type, because it assumes some kind of occult or invisible

connection between the two individuals or events discussed, however widely separated they may be in space or time. There is an obvious analogy with the ancient, medieval and Renaissance view of 'correspondences' between the cosmos, the microcosm, and the body politic, the idea that the king 'is' the sun, for instance, or that he is the head while his people are the body (or the feet, as Queen Elizabeth once claimed at a moment of exasperation with Parliament).

The point to emphasize is that according to this view, the present is experienced as a kind of 'replay' or 're-enactment' of past events. It is as if someone, perhaps God, is writing our script. This is the essential assumption underlying the second type of allegory. As the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins put it, discussing the perception of Captain Cook by the Hawaiians as an incarnation of their god Lono, 'Hawaiian history often repeats itself, since only the second time is it an event. The first time it is myth'.¹⁷ His observation seems to be applicable to western culture as well. The question which needs to be discussed here is, Does this idea itself have a history?

Let us begin with the Bible, in which the dominant linear interpretation of history coexists with the assumption of re-enactment. In the Old Testament, Joshua, for example, is presented as a new Moses, and so is Elijah. In the New Testament the idea of replay informs the *Acts of the Apostles*, in which the apostles are regularly described as re-enacting Christ's life, death and resurrection.¹⁸

Despite their interest in historical parallels, classical Greek writers such as Thucydides, Polybius and Plutarch do not seem to have viewed history in allegorical terms. In Plutarch's parallel lives, for instance, one example does not stand for another. The Romans, on the other hand, were closer to the Jews in this respect. Virgil wrote of a second Argo and of Rome as a New Troy. At an implicit level, the *Aeneid* presents Augustus as a second Aeneas. Virgil appears to be doing considerably more than draw attention to certain parallels between the two leaders. He seems to be suggesting that it is the destiny of Augustus to re-enact the career of Aeneas and refound Rome.

The relation between pairs of events was discussed at a general level by rabbis and by fathers of the Church. However, they had less to say about re-enactment than about its inverse. One form of inversion is the idea of the fulfillment of prophecy, when the script, the written history, precedes the events instead of following them. In the second form of inversion, one event 'prefigures', 'announces' or 'foreshadows' another. Thus the rabbis conceived of Israel's redemption in the future age of the Messiah as 'foreshadowed in every detail by the redemption from Egypt'.¹⁹

Again, Tertullian and Augustine were especially concerned with *typus*, *allegoria*, or *figura*, or in Erich Auerbach's famous definition,

'something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical'.²⁰ This vocabulary was still in use in the early modern period. Re-enactment, on the other hand, lacked a technical description until the seventeenth century, when the German poet Andreas Gryphius presented the 'martyrdom' of King Charles I as a *Post-Figuration* of Christ's.²¹ The term 'postfiguration' never came into general use. Indeed, as late as 1968 a scholar claimed to have 'coined the term'.²²

All the same, the idea of re-enactment was as important as its complementary opposite, prefiguration, from the Middle Ages onwards, whether the paradigms were applied to individuals, places or events. The majority of the paradigms were religious, but secular examples become increasingly important, as the following pages will attempt to illustrate.

As in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Christ remained a major model. In the eleventh-century chronicle of Rodolphus Glaber, King Robert was described as an imitator of Christ.²³ One of the chroniclers of the death of the English archbishop Thomas Becket, murdered in his cathedral, described his hero's 'passion'.²⁴ Bartolomeo of Pisa wrote a treatise *On the Conformity of the Life of the Blessed Francis to the Life of the Lord Jesus*.

Certain rulers also achieved paradigmatic status. In Byzantium, for instance, later emperors were described as new Constantines.²⁵ In the west, Gregory of Tours also applied the description 'New Constantine' to Clovis.²⁶ Charlemagne too was a 'New Constantine', but he in turn became a paradigm for descriptions of the rulers who came after him. Around the year 1000, for instance, the emperor Otto III was described as a 'second Charlemagne'.

In some of these cases the appellation 'new' may have been no more than a flattering comparison, but serious claims for re-enactment made from time to time. Prophecies of a future second Charlemagne were current from the fourteenth century onwards in the writings of Telesphorus of Cosenza and others, and these prophecies were applied in succession to Charles VI of France, Charles VIII of France, the emperor Charles V, and so on.²⁷

The range of paradigms in use by early modern times was a rich one. Charles VIII of France was represented as a new Hannibal after he crossed the Alps in 1494.²⁸ For Savonarola, he was the 'new Cyrus'. It was not uncommon for a ruler to be described as a new Josiah (in the case of Edward VI), a new Solomon (in the cases of Philip II and James I and VI), or a new David as in the cases of Henry VII of England, the emperor Maximilian I, Philip II, and William of Orange. Pope Julius II was viewed as a new Julius Caesar.²⁹

These parallels were not confined to rulers. Hernán Cortés was proclaimed to be a new Caesar, a new Joshua, and a new Moses.³⁰ Peter Heylin presented archbishop William Laud as 'the English Cyprian'.

The examples given so far have all been male. Female examples are relatively rare. The rarity was doubtless self-perpetuating in the sense that

the dominance of male paradigms gave few women, even queens, much of an opportunity to be described as a second anyone. However, there were significant exceptions to this rule. Catherine de' Medici of France was both portrayed and described as the goddess Juno (in the frescoes of the country house at Tanlay, for example), while the dedication to her of a life of Queen Artemisia informed Catherine that she would see her own life reflected in that of her ancient predecessor.³¹ Queen Elizabeth I was occasionally compared to male prototypes such as Perseus but she was more commonly described as Astraea, the virgin associated with justice and the golden age.³² The entry procession into Moscow of the empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1742 identified her with Judith and Deborah as a heroine who had freed her people, while Catherine the Great was described by the archimandrite Lavrentii as a new Judith and a 'second Helena' (a reference to the mother of Constantine).³³ Joan of Arc, 'La Pucelle', was viewed as a second Virgin Mary. A sixteenth-century Venetian visionary, Mère Jehanne, was described by the French scholar Guillaume Postel as a new Eve.³⁴

In the early modern period it is often difficult to know how seriously to take these descriptions, whether as elegantly allusive compliments or as the expression of precise hopes or expectations. The problem for modern interpreters is that the same vocabulary was used by different people to express different views of the relation between old and new, from plain analogy to mystical connection.

It is likely, however, that when Charles VIII of France or the emperor Charles V, say, was described as a second Charlemagne, something more than a simple comparison was intended, at least on occasion.³⁵ The similarity of the names (as in the case of the popes called Leo) was sometimes taken to be a sign of the similarity of the destinies. On occasion, the relation between two rulers may have been viewed as prefiguration rather than re-enactment, since the second Charlemagne was supposed to unite the world in one flock as the first had been unable to do.

The problem of ambiguity recurs in the case of cities, so often described as a new Jerusalem, second Rome, and so on. For Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantinople was a 'New Jerusalem'. For the French monastic chronicler Rodolphus Glaber, the new Jerusalem was Orléans.³⁶ For some fifteenth-century Florentines it was their city which was the New Jerusalem.³⁷ Medieval London, like Rome in the time of Virgil, was presented as a New Troy, by the chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example. Charlemagne was described as making his capital city of Aachen a 'New Athens' (according to his teacher Alcuin), or a 'New Rome' (according to his biographer Einhard).

Many new Romes followed, including Trier and Constantinople.³⁸ Padua was described in the thirteenth century as 'virtually a second Rome' [*quasi secunda Roma*].³⁹ A similar claim would be made for Prague in the

time of Charles IV and for Florence in the early fifteenth century, as well as for Milan and Venice.⁴⁰ In the sixteenth century, Seville also claimed to be a New Rome.⁴¹ So did cities as small as Enkhuizen in the Netherlands, where the town hall may still be seen inscribed with the gold letters SPQE on the mode of SPQR, 'Senatus Populusque Romanus'.

That in some cases at least the description was not a simple comparison can be seen from the case of Moscow's claim to be the third Rome, put forward in abbot Filofei of Pskov's famous letter to tsar Basil III (written in 1510).⁴² In this case there was a serious claim to the inheritance of Rome and Constantinople and an affirmation of a historical destiny.

The range of examples should not be confined to Europe. In the late sixteenth century, Garcilaso de la Vega 'the Inca' presented Cuzco as New Rome, an early example of the kind of identification which would become characteristic of the Americas (New Amsterdam, New York, New Orleans, Athens Georgia, Paris Texas, Novo Friburgo, Nova Odessa, and so on), whether these names should be interpreted as expressions of the hopes or the nostalgia of emigrants from the old world.⁴³ Once again, the problem is how to decide how seriously to take these names, or more exactly to discover how seriously they were taken in different centuries.

Not only cities but whole nations were identified with predecessors, especially the Jews. In late medieval chronicles, France was presented as a Holy Land, the French as a Chosen People.⁴⁴ In similar fashion, in early modern times England was known as the Elect Nation, while the Dutch Republic was sometimes described as a New Israel, and America presented as a New Canaan.⁴⁵ In these cases, as in that of Moscow, the descriptions were affirmations of an historical role, a future destiny.

What was implied by these affirmations may become a little clearer if we examine in more detail the idea of the re-enactment of an event or a sequence of events. At the level of ritual, this is commonplace: the Mass as the re-enactment of Christ's Passion, for example. However, the idea of re-enactment also affected the perception of historical events. In the twelfth century, for instance, the French monk Guibert of Nogent described the Crusades as a new Exodus.

Again, the very concept of a 'Renaissance' of classical antiquity, a *Renovatio*, depended on the assumption of re-enactment.⁴⁶ The movement we call the renaissance was indeed a massive attempt or series of attempts to re-enact the achievements of classical antiquity, while the reformation was a collective attempt to re-enact the history of the early Church. That the idea of Reform ('re-form') was more than a metaphor is suggested by the labors of such scholars as John Foxe and John Knox, who saw the events of their own day as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies.⁴⁷ In similar fashion the celebrations of the centenary of the Reformation, in Germany in 1617 (perhaps the first centenary to be celebrated in this

way), represented the event as the fulfillment of what Scripture had foretold.⁴⁸

Implicit parallels between events distant in time also underlie a number of historical studies published in seventeenth-century Europe, whether their allegories were pragmatic or metaphysical. In the Dutch Republic, for example, the historian Gerard Vossius published an account of the controversy between Augustine and the Pelagians at the time of the Synod of Dort in 1618, when the theology of grace and free will was being debated once again. In 1682, a divine called Samuel Johnson published a study of *Julian the Apostate* which discussed the problem of passive obedience in the primitive church and obviously referred to the British Exclusion Crisis (too obviously, since the author was imprisoned and whipped). In France in 1709, during the War of the Spanish Succession, the propagandist and art critic Jean-Baptiste Du Bos wrote a history of the League of Cambrai against Venice two hundred years earlier.

The point to emphasize is that some people at least expected the re-enactment of certain dramatic historical episodes virtually scene by scene. In France, for instance, the wars of religion were seen by the Protestants as a re-enactment of the persecution of God's people as described in the Bible. In later generations they remembered the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, in which many protestants were killed, as a second Massacre of the Innocents.⁴⁹ The wars were also viewed as the re-enactment of the civil wars of ancient Rome, with a new 'triumvirate' in place of Mark Antony, Octavian and Lepidus. For example, a painting by Antoine Caron, c1562, now in the Louvre, represents a massacre ordered by the three men. This allusion to the deeds of the so-called 'triumvirate' is made even more transparent by the anachronistic inclusion in ancient Rome of the papal fortress, Castel Sant' Angelo.

Again, in the 1640s, the English civil war was perceived as a replay of the French wars of religion. One English gentleman remarked that he was lent Enrico Davila's history of those wars 'under the title of *Mr. Hampden's Vade Mecum*; and I believe that no copy was [more] like an original than that rebellion was like ours'.⁵⁰

A similar thought occurred to a number of Englishmen at the time of the so-called 'Exclusion Crisis', when the attempt was made to exclude the Catholic James Duke of York, the younger brother of Charles II, from the succession to the throne. At this time John Dryden (better known today for his biblical allegory *Absalom and Archithophel*), wrote (or at least collaborated on) the play *The Duke of Guise* to show the 'parallel' between 1583 in France and 1683 in England, with the earl of Shaftesbury in the place of the Duke and the Dissenters in place of the Catholic League. It was of course a copy in reverse, with extreme Protestants replacing extreme Catholics, but the threat to the authority of Charles II and to Henri III was much the same.

Charles II liked the play and asked Dryden to translate a recent history of the Catholic League. Dedicating his translation to the king, Dryden suggested that 'the Features are alike in all' in the case of the events of 1584 and 1684. All the same, it is not altogether clear what kind of parallel Dryden is drawing, whether he is thinking in terms of similarities (which are indeed close) or of occult correspondences or connexions (as the references to the dates 1584 and 1684 suggest).⁵¹ It is still less clear whether he expected the course of English history to follow the French model (the assassination of the Duke of Guise, assassination of Henri III, and so on).

One reason for the difficulty of interpreting Dryden's intentions is that the late seventeenth century is a period in which the traditional theory of correspondences between microcosm, macrocosm and so on is supposed, by modern scholars, to be declining, to be replaced by a new mode of thought represented by Galileo, Descartes, Bayle and many others.⁵² As an American historian of science, Marjorie Nicolson, put it, 'Our ancestors believed that what we call "analogy" was *truth*, inscribed by God in the nature of things. This belief was now questioned'.⁵³

Intellectuals such as Pierre Bayle who doubted whether comets are really signs and were skeptical of correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm were likely to have doubts about historical correspondences too. The book of history like the book of nature was coming to be interpreted literally rather than allegorically, part of a general 'rise of literal-mindedness'.⁵⁴ Analogies were still drawn, but their logical status changed. They were increasingly believed to be subjective rather than objective.

The speed of this change of attitude or mentality is difficult to calculate. It is likely that Catholics such as Charles II, who had been presented as a new David at his coronation, or Dryden (despite his acquaintance with the works of the skeptics), continued to think in the old way.⁵⁵ So did some Calvinists, among them the French pastor Pierre Jurieu, who referred to the Dutch king of England William III as a 'second Moses' or a 'second David'.⁵⁶

At least the direction of change is clear. By the eighteenth century it is not difficult to find dismissals of allegory, or of traditional claims for allegory, from Shaftesbury's discussion of the topic early in the eighteenth century to Joseph Spence's rejection of the allegories of Cesare Ripa and Edmund Spenser in 1747.⁵⁷ The rising importance, in the nineteenth century, of the doctrine of the uniqueness of events, of what Friedrich Meinecke called 'historicism' (*Historismus*) undermined metaphysical allegory still further.⁵⁸ It was not only historians who professed this doctrine; the modern idea of 'revolution', which dates from 1789 or thereabouts, is the idea of an irreversible change, a rupture with the past well symbolized by the decision of the French revolutionaries to change the calendar and begin again with 'Year 1'.

And yet... this story is surely too simple. The historical allegories of the last three centuries are not all reducible to pragmatism. It is difficult if not impossible to perceive or remember anything without the use of mental schemata of some kind, including what we might call either 'master schemata' or the organizing myths of a particular culture.

For example, the French Revolution was experienced by some contemporaries as a re-enactment of ancient Roman history, as the driving out of a new Tarquin. The French revolutions of 1830, 1848 and 1871 were viewed in their turn as re-enactments of 1789. In similar fashion, the Russian Revolution was experienced (by Trotsky, among others) as a replay of the French Revolution. Again, the Spanish Civil War was viewed by some participants as a re-enactment of the Russian Revolution.

Historians too find it difficult to avoid parallels of this kind, even if they claim to believe in the uniqueness of events. As Hayden White has shown, they 'emplot' their histories, at least on occasion, according to the models of epic, romance, comedy, and tragedy, models which imply re-enactment, even if the historians concerned are not always conscious that this is what they are doing.⁵⁹

What is at once fascinating and teasing about the more recent examples is the difficulty of deciding how to interpret the allegories. There is, dare I say, an aura of post-figuration about them, a sense of the re-enactment of an exemplary event, even if this cannot quite be admitted in our more literal-minded age. This concern with re-enactment is particularly clear in the Victorian historian Edward Augustus Freeman, for whom English history was 'a drama of rebirths and resurrections', with Simon de Montfort, for instance, who led the barons in revolt against King Henry III, as a new version of the Anglo-Saxon leader Earl Godwin, who led the opposition to King Edward the Confessor.⁶⁰

A final cluster of examples may reinforce this suggestion. Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevsky* (1938), unlike his *Ivan the Terrible*, did not need to outwit the censor. Yet this celebration of the nation's capacity to defeat its invaders surely gains in what we might call 'resonance' by evoking the distant Russian past. Again, Lawrence Olivier's film of Shakespeare's *Henry V* was not a pragmatic allegory. All the same, it was viewed at the time, the end of the Second World War, to be making a statement about the present. Children, including myself, were taken to see it by their schools. We were encouraged to view the Normandy landings on D-Day as a replay of the battle of Agincourt, when God was on the side of the English.

In similar fashion, on the other side, Mizoguchi's film *The Forty-Seven Ronin* (1941), narrating the suicide of a group of loyal samurai at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had equal contemporary relevance. If it was made too early to have been intended to support Japan's entry into the Second World War or even to encourage the *Kamikazen* pilots on their

suicide missions, it served at least to remind the Japanese people of their traditions of sacrifice.

There is no need to end with the Second World War. To this day, every December, the Protestant inhabitants of Derry — which they call ‘Londonderry’ — perform their traditional ritual to commemorate the siege of 1688-9. This ritual has its effects on everyday life. Some Protestant Irish refer to the current period of ‘troubles’, long as it has lasted, as the ‘siege’. They use the phrase ‘no surrender’ to refer not to the citadel but to their refusal to accept a solution to the Northern Irish problem in terms of compromise. They write ‘Remember 1690’ on the walls of houses, referring to the victory of William III and the Protestants at the Battle of the Boyne. In other words, they view the present as a replay of the past.⁶¹ How different are their attitudes from those of Dryden, or indeed of the Hawaiians who are supposed to have seen Captain Cook’s arrival as the epiphany of god?⁶²

NOTES

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- 9 David J. Womersley, ‘Sir John Hayward’s Tacitism’, *Renaissance Studies* 6 (1992), 46-59.
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- 13 Chantal Grell and C. Michel, *L’ école des princes, ou Alexandre disgracié* (Paris 1988).

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