

**FROM INFAMOUS TO FAMOUS: THE PORTRAYAL OF HISTORICAL FIGURES
IN MODERN TV SERIES – BETWEEN REHABILITATION AND CELEBRITY
CULTURE. THE CASE OF HENRY VIII AND CESARE BORGIA**

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Abstract: *Recent historical revisionist tendencies have significantly influenced modern audiences' views towards certain historical figures that have been regarded for centuries in a negative light, as new insights into their lives and times have motivated the realm of fiction to approach their stories from a different angle. This article aims to look at the portrayals of Henry VIII and Cesare Borgia, as their image emerges from two recent historical TV series, "The Spanish Princess" (2019), and "The Borgias" (2011), and to discuss how these representations become embodiments of nostalgia, by analysing the historical inaccuracies attributed to these characters and trying to account for the significance behind them.*

Key words: *celebrity culture, Cesare Borgia, historical revisionism, King Henry VIII, nostalgia, rehabilitation.*

1. Introduction: Nostalgic embodiments and historical fiction in the 21st century

History is an enduring enigma: we shall never fully grasp its actual narratives, inhabitants, mores and values. This reality is, perhaps, behind history's frequent changes of stories and story patterns, as one day, a particular English king or any well-known member of the aristocracy might be regarded with great reverence and the other day, he might be blamed for everything that had gone wrong in his country at a specific point in time. The displeasing truth that is looming in history's prisons and catacombs is that what we know as history is nothing more than the discourse about it, and not the actual past, as there are countless reasons why it cannot be truly and fully fathomed, reasons that shall be detailed in forthcoming paragraphs. The hypothetical historical "truth" is also closely connected to the perspective from which something is viewed and to multiple political or cultural agendas that may dominate the sociocultural landscape at a particular moment. Historical revisionism is only one such perspective, a perspective that aims to rehabilitate various historical figures that were wronged in previous centuries, – due to other as well as adverse political or cultural agendas that were in control at the time – thus trying to offer a balanced narrative about them that would explain their lives, decisions, and actions.

Historical revisionism has started as a movement that tried to "do justice" to the past and present it objectively; however, according to Tucker, "revisionist historiography can also fabricate misrepresentations of the past" (2007:1). The same theoretician, Aviezer Tucker (2007:2), when referring to these new "misrepresentations", speaks about the causes that generate the revision of the past, allowing the historical revisionism to exist in the first place, and one particular motive that is relevant to this article is called by him the "value-driven revision"; in other words, there is potential for a new and fresh perspective to emerge that would describe and explain certain historical events, processes, even people, as the cultural shifts and turns and the revolutions in the systems of values permit it. Theoretically and ideally, taking into account the ideas aforementioned in this paragraph, historical revisionism should reevaluate the past to correct the inevitable biases of any nature and deriving from numerous injustices that were committed as they served those in power at a certain point, and, thus, showing the "real" historical "truth" this time around, a claim also supported by Barbara Krasner (2020), as she delves into the controversies surrounding this topic.

Despite that, historical revisionism is still far from the flawless machine or mechanism that rights all wrongs of the past and fully immerses itself in the historical experience as understood in its primary connotation – the real historical events that occurred and the real historical men and women that lived at some point in time – that it aspires to be; according to Tucker's first statement mentioned in the previous paragraph, there is no guarantee that, while attempting to correct some biases, historical revisionist agendas will not go too far into the opposite direction and exaggerate different aspects that might have been overlooked in prior accounts, aspects that, without a shadow of a doubt, do contain a grain of truth, but by being overstated and amplified too much, they become new misrepresentations of the past, the same past they were striving to make amends for.

This paper aims to highlight that, in spite of historical revisionism's best attempts to rewrite history right, a rewriting shall always mean exactly what it proclaims to be according to its definition: a falsification, a re-interpretation, a re-presentation, a re-invention even of something that cannot ever come back to life as it was, despite all efforts. An entirely objective review of the past is quite impossible, or at least it is not very frequently the case, as sometimes the revised perspective over the past is biased as well, and not necessarily with a political agenda in mind and not always on purpose; such revisions can also "distort or even rewrite the past" in a manner that would suit the present, the expectations, the needs of the present day cultural environment (Krasner 2020:78).

A clarification that is needed here is in respect of the two meanings of history that were touched upon in the preceding paragraphs. Thus, according to the Romanian historian Lucian Boia (2011:53), as he pointed out in his most famous, but also most controversial work, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, the notion of history is often confusing itself and produces confusion to specialists and non-specialists alike. The reason for this is that it can convey two different yet complementary ideas: first and foremost, we can speak about what most people believe history to be, and that is the actual past, the real occurrences that happened decades ago, centuries ago, or even millennia ago. The other, secondary meaning, is the tricky one, as those who do not possess enough knowledge in the field, but even some historians, have a tendency to mistake one connotation of history for the other, as besides the meaning listed above, history is also the discourse about the past. In other words, history with this connotation is in fact the discourse about itself, the science and the object of its research overlapping in this particular situation, as very mindful underscored by Lucian Boia in another written work of his that deals with the same topic, *The Game with the Past. History between Truth and Fiction* (1998:7).

An illustrative example in the case described above would be that of King Richard III of England, as the last part of the 20th century and the first one of the 21st century have brought a significantly changed point of view in connection to his life that highly contradicts the image Shakespeare built for him in his famous eponymous chronicle play from 1597. But Richard III is not the only one; there are many other historical figures, including many kings, but not only, that find themselves in the very same situation as the 21st century advances more and more. The focus of this article will be two historical figures whose images emerge from two recent and popular historical TV series, one of them being King Henry VIII of England, and the other one is Cesare Borgia, another famously infamous personality who lived around the same time, during the Renaissance, a member of the well-known and controversial Borgia family. For context, the Borgia family is known first of all for its head, Rodrigo Borgia, who became Pope Alexander VI in 1492 and was famously accused of many crimes, such as corruption, simony and nepotism.

The premise for this research is that more and more the representation of historical figures in film – but not only, other types of media and cultural artifacts are included as well; however, the focus will be on film for this particular case study – tends to be anachronistic from

the perspective of the pattern of values, especially moral ones, that the characters exhibit and act according to, making them look more like postmodern heroes and celebrities than people of their own time – in this case, people of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, the media and the manners in which they portray the world deeply influence us, and with history and the past even more so, as there is no immediate “reality check” to remind us that when we read a historical novel or watch a historical movie we are not offered the so-called “truth” about a certain time or a particular person, as Nickolas Haydock states in his research about movie medievalism, *The Imaginary Middle Ages* (2008:7). This is why literature and films about a distant past, such as the Middle Ages or, as is the case of this research, the early modern period, possess such a great power to shape and reshape former times for audiences, postmodern readers and viewers. The film (or its version for the small screen, the TV series or the mini-series) as a medium of conveying messages about the past, perhaps creates a relatively lasting impression, given the visual impact of this particular form of expression.

Given the force of the media (in this case, that of the film) to construct as well as alter and deconstruct the sense of the past in the minds of people living hundreds of years after certain events occurred, it is no surprise that historical movies can and most likely will promote a particular ideology, even unintentionally, and not necessarily a political one, but rather a *cultural* one that abides by the moral rules, values, expectations and needs of the 21st century. One such potential cultural ideology is what is called, for the purpose of this research, *the nostalgic ideology*, or nostalgia understood as a possible ideology, something that may already be regarded as a broader contemporary phenomenon, one that does not only encompass the fields of film and literature studies, but it also makes itself visible at the social level. As Harry M. Benshoff puts it, “cultural artifacts always convey ideologies, whether they are consciously encoded into them by their producers or not, and whether their consumers are aware of them or not.” (2016:19).

In this direction of understanding and interpretation, it can be argued that at the intersection of historical revisionism, which set in motion a series of reconsiderations over many historical personalities that were regarded for centuries as blameworthy, starting thus the rehabilitation trend, and the celebrity culture that engulfs each and every aspect of modern life, the effect is a far-fetched representation of these figures of history in media. This sort of representation turned them from being “demonized” in the previous centuries into idealisation and still failed to offer a balanced point of view and “do justice” to the image of these people. It also reflects a very specific characteristic of nostalgic expressions, and that is bestowing upon the past the needs and expectations of the present. As David Lowenthal suggests in a metaphorical way about the past in the present, “old dwellings are uninhabitable unless modernized, doomed by current demands of comfort, safety, and decor.” (2015:514).

In her introduction to *Media and Nostalgia. Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Katharina Niemeyer (2014) agrees with this idea, according to which the past as represented in nostalgic adaptations bears various features of the present: “Nostalgia becomes, consequently, a way to transform the past by imagination.” (2014:3). Svetlana Boym, in her study devoted to this notion, *The Future of Nostalgia*, supports Lowenthal’s and Niemeyer’s assertion, implying that the “needs of the present” are the ones that determine in what shades we paint the past, especially in respect of nostalgia and nostalgic dreams: “Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future.” (Boym 2001:5).

Nostalgia is, thus, not only about the past, but rather about the past in conjunction with the present. Even the word “representation”, commonly used when referring to historical portrayals of different eras or different people made in the present with the means of the present, can be viewed as self-explanatory; if one spells it as “re-presentation”, it is simple to understand

that a representation means nothing else but to present something or someone again, in a different context and under different circumstances: “What is gone can only be re-enacted, repeated, reconstructed, reshowed, rethought and restored by an artificial act, by *mimesis* [...] what is past comes along with the present, via *re-presentation*.” (Niemeyer 2014:3). The past as re-presented in today’s culture cannot exist as its “true” historical self, therefore it is completely understandable why historical figures will appear in 21st century adaptations as postmodern heroes with contemporary values and mannerisms rather than individuals of their own age.

In terms of the methodological tools for this inquiry, contemporary cultural criticism was employed, focusing on an ideological analysis of the corpus, considering the historical inaccuracies attributed to these characters, and trying to account for the significance behind them. In the two TV series chosen for this article in order to depict the case study and to defend the claim, *The Spanish Princess* (2019) and *The Borgias* (2011), there are many instances in which the historical inaccuracies that are illustrated and reflected at the level of different actions and mentalities of the historical characters that are being discussed, Henry VIII and Cesare Borgia, support the hypothesis. Thus, in the process of trying to rehabilitate these historical figures, the creators and directors of these productions, consciously or unconsciously, decided to represent them as postmodern heroes with a system of thought and a moral code that would meet the expectations of the 21st century audiences. For this reason, different reprehensible deeds of the real people that were actually recorded in historiography as facts are overlooked or attributed to other characters. On the other hand, some actions that would cast a positive light on them and would romanticise them were taken away from other characters (that were actually responsible for those particular actions) or wholly invented in order to clearly establish the role of the likeable and courageous protagonist of the narrative. Therefore, the narrative imagined a distorted version of the past for contemporary viewers, a positive exaggeration of the potentially real behaviour and personality of these men.

The rehabilitation trend that followed the historical revisionism which attempted to offer a new interpretation and put a new spin on different historical personalities was thought as necessary in the context of previous negative promoting of these people (sometimes even negative propaganda), thus the purpose was to portray them as complex and round characters and in a humane light. However, as argued earlier in this paper, this rehabilitation trend finds these historical personalities positioned at the confluence of historical revisionism, with its praiseworthy but failed intentions of portraying the past “as it truly was”, and nostalgic fantasies, that positively exaggerate the features of the same past. The result emphasises another cultural and social phenomenon, one very briefly touched upon in a prior paragraph, that of the celebrity culture; it has existed since long ago, in a similar fashion to nostalgia and the romancing of the past, but it has amplified in the 21st century, the technological developments playing an important role just as they did in the case of nostalgia too. According to Ellis Cashmore (2006:1-2), our “consumer society” may be responsible for the rise of the celebrity culture, as it turns the celebrities into “commodities”, “products”. This explains, to a certain extent, the connection between historical revisionism, rehabilitation, nostalgic embodiments, and celebrity culture, as Cashmore defines celebrity culture as the “ghoulish fascination with the lives of other people”. (2006:1). Therefore, one last question that can be raised before proceeding with the analysis of the two historical figures would be whether the purpose of these nostalgic re-presentations of historical figures in recent media is, in fact, a commercial and consumerist one, trying to transform the historical characters into celebrities so as to be able to sell them to a public eager to buy such depictions of the past.

2. Analysis

2.1. The portrayal of Henry VIII in *The Spanish Princess* (2019)

King Henry VIII of England is considered, perhaps, one of the most infamous figures in world history. And not undeservingly. He has always been depicted exclusively as a cruel tyrant who cares little for anything or anyone but himself. He was referred to even while still alive as an “English Nero”, by Philipp Melanchthon, a German Lutheran reformer, in 1540, according to John Matusiak, in his biography of Henry VIII from 2013. The most common portrayal of the English king is thus the one provided by Linda Collins and Siobhan Clarke in their 2021 study, *King and Collector: Henry VIII and the Art of Kingship*:

No English king is as well known to us as Henry VIII. He is famous for six marriages, for breaking with the Pope, dissolving the monasteries and creating the Church of England, and for his ruthless elimination of those who stood in his way. Between 1509 and 1547, more English notables were executed than under any other monarch before or since (Collins and Clarke 2021:15).

Even the actor portraying him in *The Spanish Princess* adaptation (based mostly on Philippa Gregory’s historical novel *The Constant Princess*, which follows the life and destiny of Henry’s first wife, Katherine of Aragon), Ruairi O’Connor, admitted in an interview for *Entertainment Weekly* that it was difficult to get past Henry’s notorious reputation and offer a fresh and significantly different perspective of a younger Henry, who is not yet king and is known for the moment just as Prince Harry (Lee Lenker 2019). The straightforward decision to depict Henry in his younger years rather than when he is already in power and the older and ruthless monarch, as he is generally illustrated in history as well as in different forms of contemporary media, could tell something about what the directors and scriptwriters of the show intend for the character. Although there is a real and factual basis for portraying Henry as a romantic hero, or at least as one who thought of himself in such terms, the seeds of the future King Henry VIII were already there, according to many historical accounts (such as Robert Hutchinson’s *Young Henry. The Rise of Henry VIII*, or John Matusiak’s *The Life and Rule of England’s Nero*). Henry had real potential to be represented as a romantic hero, for he would read with great enthusiasm romantic literature as a young prince, finding medieval chivalry and the “true knights’ code of honour” extremely important to him, as well as considering Henry V (the English ruler who defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415) his most cherished personal hero (Matusiak 2013:21; Collins and Clarke 2021:19), the warning signs were very much overlooked in the TV series.

Thus, Henry VIII is given the credit for the love letters sent to Katherine of Aragon before she first came to England (season 1, episode 1; “The New World” 40:14-41:31), letters that were, in fact, written and sent by his older brother, Prince Arthur, Katherine’s then fiancé, as Amy Licence noted in her biography of the Spanish princess, *Catherine of Aragon. An Intimate Life of Henry VIII’s True Wife* (2016:59). Besides, Henry is constantly being represented as actively fighting for Katherine, as, of course, the narrative of the series is also framed as a love story; for instance, he always chooses Katherine over anything and everything, even the “temptations” his grandmother suggests to him (the grandmother brings some courtesans to him one night); so instead of giving in to temptation, betraying Katherine and behaving in a manner the contemporary audiences would expect Henry VIII to, he defies his grandmother’s wishes for Katherine’s sake and is shown going to pray with his grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, instead:

Lady Margaret Beaufort: What you feel for her is lust. It’s of the flesh. It’s not of the heart. [...]
Henry: Thank you... but what I feel is of the heart. (season 1, episode 5; “Heart versus Duty” 28:22-28:26; 29:37-29:43)

However, instead of this, there are at least two historical accounts that contradict his unshakeable fidelity to Katherine; according to both Robert Hutchinson's and John Matusiak's accounts, on June 27, 1505, Henry made a "protestation", a renouncement of his betrothal to Katherine and signed it in the presence of many ecclesiastical and administrative officials, giving it, thus, a formal significance. Of course, this was his father's idea, for Katherine's status diminished once her mother, Queen Isabella I of Castile, died. Still, Henry obediently listened to his father's advice: "Prince Henry was made to declare [...] that his marriage contract to Catherine was 'invalid, imperfect and of no effect or force' on the grounds of his minority at the time of the original contract". (Matusiak 2013:39).

Moreover, another interesting account in which a letter sent by Henry to Pope Julius II is mentioned is carefully overlooked in the TV series; in that particular letter, Henry complains about Katherine's constant fasting and abstinence, and how that could affect her ability to bear children when she is to become his wife; in doing so, as John Matusiak argues, he tried to excuse himself for the repudiation of the marriage to Katherine, thus, perhaps for the first time, practicing his future habit of "perceiving his victims as their own executioners", as well as "how to sweeten misdemeanours by wrapping them in principles". (2013:40; Hutchinson 2011:109). None of these accounts is even alluded to in the TV series *The Spanish Princess*. Instead of being shown on the screen as forsaking Katherine in any formal or informal manner, Henry is only represented as praying to know what the right thing is to do under such circumstances (season 1, episode 7; "All is Lost" 15:24-17:00). Henry is also actively refusing the marriage to another princess (Katherine's niece, princess Eleanor, daughter of Archduke Philip of Burgundy) imposed on him by his father. At the same time, this could have been more difficult to do in reality, as he, as mentioned earlier, signed an official contract in which he repudiated Katherine and his betrothal to her (season 1, episode 8; "Destiny" 20:58-23:38).

Another idea to point out would be Henry's conflict with his father deriving from King Henry VII's intention to marry Katherine in the TV series (season 1, episode 5; "Heart versus Duty" 02:20-02:56; 20:50-22:37); a lot of emphasis is put on this plot line in the TV adaptation, as this narrative is, indeed, helpful in highlighting Henry's loyalty to Katherine. However, Henry VII's suggestion of marriage to Katherine of Aragon after his wife's death is quickly dismissed by Katherine's mother, Queen Isabella, and no mention of a conflict on the grounds of jealousy between father and son is noted (Hutchinson 2011:91); their conflicts instead derived more likely from Henry's personality and demeanour, which displeased his father (Matusiak 2013:53).

Last but not least, it is also worth mentioning the historical inaccuracy of Katherine and Henry being both able to choose each other and their marriage out of love after the death of Katherine's first husband and Henry's elder brother, Prince Arthur, while this was more of a decision made entirely by their parents (Queen Isabella I and King Henry VII) for political interests only (season 1, episode 3; "An Audacious Plan" 12:43-13:52; 37:47-40:01; Hutchinson 2011:83).

It is important to note that for Henry VIII's analysis, only the first season of *The Spanish Princess* was taken into account (there is a second season as well that depicts Henry's older years, when he is already in power and king of England) for the reason that this is the season that portrays Henry's younger years, before he ascends to the throne. One final clarification regarding the representation of both Henry and Katherine in this TV series would be connected to the changes in the characters' ages, which helped to frame the narrative as more of a love story and less of a political game. Both at the beginning of the story and when he meets Katherine, Henry is portrayed as less young than he truly was. Henry is not as young at the beginning of the story and when he first met Katherine as he was historically.

2.2. The portrayal of Cesare Borgia in *The Borgias* (2011)

Moving on to the other historical character analysed here, Cesare Borgia, known for being the son of Rodrigo Borgia, who became Pope Alexander VI, and considered infamous throughout the past five centuries for his ambition to make a state for himself in the centre of the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance and the ruthlessness he employed to achieve his goals, the growing interest for his life can be explained in the light of a new understanding of his context and circumstances; as Sarah Bradford puts it, “it was an age in which the standards of public and private morality were far from strict”, and the accusations of “murder, rape, incest, robbery and treachery” that he was charged with were, in fact, common for the majority of his contemporaries in similar positions to his (2011:4).

Nonetheless, in recent portrayals of his character in the media, as opposed to previous cultural representations, such as the one from *The Borgias* TV series, Cesare Borgia’s character can be interpreted in the same terms as that of Henry VIII, as the attempt to rehabilitate his name is visible. Still, it is taken, in a similar fashion to Henry’s, an idea too far, by portraying him as a veritable hero, in utter opposition to the villain he used to be regarded as. Cesare’s image is described in Sarah Bradford’s biography of the Italian nobleman in harsh terms; thus:

Cesare Borgia’s name has been a byword for evil for over five centuries. [...] Wielding the sword and backed by the power, wealth and prestige of the Papacy itself, Cesare at twenty-seven became the most feared, hated and envied man in Italy, earning himself the reputation of the terrible ‘Valentino’. Each of the princes and states in turn felt themselves menaced by his growing ambition, and his threat to the Italian political establishment generated a sense of shock and outrage which formed the basis of the Borgia legend (Bradford 2011:3).

However, Bradford’s portrayal in this paragraph only repeats the stereotypical image of Cesare that has been promoted, as she states, “for over five centuries”. Cesare’s name is not “a byword for evil”, but nor could he be seen as your typical modern hero who always saves the day. However, according to *The Borgias*, Cesare cannot perform any reprehensible acts unless motivated by noble reasons, such as family or love, when, in fact, as claimed by many historical accounts, his main drive was his ambition, not his love for his family – even though it cannot be denied that he did love his family for real. (Bradford 2011:95; Hibbert 2021:95).

Thus, for the sake of this idea, any actions of the real historical man that would not fit into this paradigm were discarded; any blameworthy deeds or misdemeanours that could not be justified by noble reasons and a superior code of honour were attributed to other characters, the main scapegoat being in most of the cases Juan Borgia, Cesare’s younger brother. Therefore, in the TV series, it is Cesare’s brother Juan who is presented as being involved in an affair with their youngest brother’s (Jofre) wife, Sancia of Naples, for no other reason than simply illustrating him as a womaniser and a man who does not care whether he hurts his family or not (season 1, episode 6; “The French King” 12:24-16:06), while according to both Sarah Bradford (2011:74) and Christopher Hibbert (2021:97), Sancia was first and foremost the mistress of Cesare. *The Borgias*’ director, Neil Jordan, did not want to show Cesare as having a debauched lifestyle (because it would break the narrative), and so even his syphilis diagnosis (Bradford 2011:90; Hibbert 2021:116) was attributed to his brother Juan (season 2, episode 7; “The Siege at Forli” 12:33-13:58). Moreover even the actor playing Cesare Borgia in this TV series, François Arnaud, has admitted in an interview for *Collider* (Radish 2013) that “even Neil Jordan [the director] was a bit scared because he thought I was maybe playing it too much like a good guy”.

Another blamable act that is thought too to have been committed by Cesare (Hibbert 2021:119; Bradford 2011:97; Sabatini 2011:127) is the murder of Lucrezia’s secret lover, Paolo/ Pedro Calderon, event depicted in the TV series as being fully Juan’s responsibility once again (season 2, episode 2; “Paolo” 44:57-46:36); such an act could not have been attributed to

Cesare, as, according to this TV series' narrative, he would not have done anything to hurt his family, especially his sister Lucrezia, whom he is shown as having a deep affection for. In historical accounts he is considered to have done this act not so much in order to protect his sister's honour, but rather out of fear that this behaviour of Lucrezia could affect and interfere with his plans and ambitions.

Speaking of murders, instead of simply attributing to the character the real murders he had committed, he is depicted as committing other, entirely fictional ones, but murders that can be justified without breaking the narrative, such as the murder of the abusive husband of a woman he had fallen in love with – and who had also spoken words of offense regarding his mother – (season 1, episode 5; “The Borgias in Love” 49:05-50:47; he is even shown as feeling guilty for this one) or the murder of his sister's abusive husband (season 2, episode 5; “The Choice” 44:48-46:53). As it can be remarked, in both cases, the murders can be excused because the character has committed them for love and for family, in order to protect the ones he cares for the most.

His brother Juan's murder, whom Cesare was only rumoured to have killed, is attributed to him here, but the interpretation of this event is again in Cesare's favour, as he murders his brother because he has become a threat to his own family (season 2, episode 9; “World of Wonders” 43:57-47:48); so this film version of Cesare is shown committing even such an atrocious crime as a fratricide while still being consistent with his superior and noble system of values, out of concern for his family's well-being and safety.

On the other hand, while specific actions were taken away from him, as being unworthy of his heroic character, others that would highlight his role as the hero and the protagonist of the story were offered to him, such as the constant fight against and final defeat of the Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola, who was established even early in the first season as one of the leading “villains” of this narrative, as someone who is actively threatening the papacy and, therefore, Cesare's family. However, as appealing as this might sound, this major plot line of the second season has no historical evidence, and Cesare is being inaccurately given credit for it; Christopher Hibbert, in his account of the whole Borgia family, does not mention at all any involvement of Cesare in this matter (2021:106), while Sarah Bradford, who only focuses on Cesare's life, completely overlooks the episode with the Dominican monk, proof enough that this significant part of Cesare's life (as for him, in this TV series at least, finding information about the Dominican monk in order to undermine his power and influence in Florence, arresting him and eventually burning him at the stake – for the sake of drama and sensationalism, of course – was a way to show to his father, Rodrigo Borgia, that he was worthy of more than an ecclesiastical position within his papacy, an important plot and actual pursuit of the real Cesare, who considered himself better than his brother Juan for a military role) was not, in fact, a real part of the historical man Cesare Borgia's life.

3. Conclusions

To conclude, any media product or cultural artefact reflects an ideological stance; negatively distorting historical events or characters according to a certain political agenda has been considered for many centuries as such a position, and so could count the favourable exaggeration of different eras of the past or different individuals who lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Thus, the portrayal of the past in the present will always and inevitably be a biased one, consciously or unconsciously, and even if these depictions of historical figures share a name and an identity with the people they are representing, they have little to do with their historical counterparts. It is also highly probable, taking into account the manner in which these historical personalities are presented to the postmodern audiences, so as to be as likeable as possible and as relatable as possible, at least from the perspective of their mores and values, as well as their system of thought and judgment, that they become not only embodiments of

nostalgia, but also embodiments of celebrity as understood from a 21st century point of view, that is to say, something that would appeal to large masses of people and would sell well.

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