TELEVISUAL REPRESENTATION OF JAMES BUTLER "WILD BILL" HICKOK ON HBO'S DEADWOOD

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Abstract

James Butler Hickok oli 1800-luvulla elänyt kuuluisa yhdysvaltalainen seriffi ja sotasankari. Hickokin suosio historiallisena hahmona on jatkunut vuosikymmeniä hänen kuolemastaan nykypäivään asti. Hänen suosionsa ulottuu myös fiktiivisiin tuotoksiin, ja häntä esittäviä hahmoja onkin vuosia esiintynyt useissa romaaneissa, elokuvissa, TV-sarjoissa ja sarjakuvissa. Yksi tällainen tuotos oli vuonna 2004 julkaistu Deadwood-TV-sarja. Hickokin hahmo esiintyy sarjan neljässä ensimmäisessä jaksossa ja sillä on merkittävä rooli sarjan juonessa.

Tässä tutkielmassa analysoidaan, miten James Butler Hickokin hahmoa representoidaan Deadwood-sarjassa. Tutkimus pohjautuu aiempaan kirjallisuuteen televisuaalisten hahmojen kirjoittamisesta ja analysoinnista. Tämän lisäksi tutkielma hyödyntää ja tuo esille aiempaa tutkimusta sekä Hickokista että Deadwood-sarjasta. Tutkielman analyysiosiossa tarkastellaan Hickokin TV-hahmon eri piirteitä (luonteenpiirteet/tavat, ulkonäkö, suhteet toisiin hahmoihin ja ympäristö) ja sitä, miten (jos mitenkään) ne vertautuvat historiankirjoituksen kuvauksiin oikeasta Hickokista. Vertailuaineistona käytetään kolmea merkittävää Hickokia käsittelevää teosta.

Analyysin perusteella voidaan todeta, että Deadwood-sarjassa esiintyvä James Butler Hickok on monella tasolla samanlainen hahmo kuin historiankirjoituksessa kuvattu Hickok. Deadwoodin Hickokin luonteenpiirteillä, tavoilla, ulkonäöllä, suhteilla ja ympäristöllä on hyvin vahva samanlaisuus siihen, miten häntä kuvataan lähdekirjallisuudessa. Eniten eroja löytyi Hickokin ihmissuhteista sarjan ja kirjallisuuden välillä. Aiempaa tutkimusta Hickokin televisuaalisesta hahmosta ja sen representaatiosta ei juurikaan ole. Tutkielma siis kontribuoi omalta osaltaan Yhdysvaltojen (populaarikulttuuri)historian tutkimukseen ja erityisesti historiallisten tv-sarjojen, kuten Deadwood, tutkimukseen.

Keywords DEADWOOD, TELEVISIO, HISTORIA

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this MA thesis is to compare James Hickok's character on the drama series *Deadwood* to how he is described in historical non-fiction literature. The focus will be on the analysis of similarities and differences: what is kept and altered and/or omitted in depicting historical figures in a fictional television series?. Theoretically, this thesis draws on insights from and contributes to television studies (e.g. Seger 2010) and studies on American history (e.g. Clavin 2019, Sonneborn 2010).

The rationale behind choosing *Deadwood* as an object of analysis is my personal interest in American (historical) television series, in general. Moreover, Deadwood is a drama series, and of appropriate length for an MA thesis. As Deadwood is a period drama, i.e. a drama set in a past period in time, doing research on the series also allowed me to indulge in another interest of mine, which is history. In other words, analyzing Deadwood gave me the opportunity to learn more about both history and dramatic television, which I considered to be a valuable learning experience.

Aside from personal interests, both history and fiction can provide valuable perspectives on things encountered in everyday life, in general. The research done in this thesis can thus benefit different groups of people, not necessarily only those whose employment or hobbies are connected to said fields. As seen in both historical literature and the Deadwood series, Hickok's life provides valuable examples of how something like fame can affect a person's life both positively and negatively. One could very well argue that the status of celebrities has become far more prevalent and accessible in Western society after Hickok's time, as seen in things like the growing presence of social media. In this sense, looking back on the story of a person

who achieved fame in a time when that was very rare can provide insight also on current times.

Deadwood is an American television series that was aired by Home Box Office (hereafter referred to as HBO) from March 2004 to August 2006 when it was canceled. Spanning three seasons, the series tells a fictionalized story of the 1870s' mining camp of Deadwood located in the American Black Hills in current day South Dakota. The real-life Deadwood camp was originally built illegally on the territory of the Lakota people outside the United States. The series follows the early years of the camp as it slowly grows into a town and gets annexed to the United States. In the 1870s, several famous American figures of the time lived in the camp at one point or another. This includes people such as lawmen, gunfighters, war heroes and entrepreneurs. Many of these people appear as characters in the series, such as Seth Bullock (U.S. Marshal), George Hearst (entrepreneur) and, the topic of this thesis, James "Wild Bill" Hickok.

James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok was a famous frontiersman who lived in the United States of America from 1837 to 1876. During his life, Hickok served in the American Civil War as a scout, worked in multiple towns as a marshal, won several gun duels and acted as a showman alongside figures such as Buffalo Bill Cody among other things. Eventually in 1876, Hickok moved to the pioneer camp of Deadwood, where he was shot by a local man, Jack McCall, later that year (Clavin 2019). During and after his lifetime, several fictional and non-fictional accounts have been published of Hickok's exploits in newspapers, books and other forms of literature. Hickok is also a popular character in visual media, appearing in several films (e.g. 1995's *Wild Bill*), comic books (e.g. *Wild Bill Hickok and Jingles*) and television series (e.g. *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok*), including HBO's Deadwood.

There can be several reasons as to why Hickok became such a popular character. These can range from his victorious gun duels, relationships with other popular figures or his premature death making him more interesting to the public. Clavin (2019: 55) attributes Hickok becoming a "national sensation" to a 1867 article on him in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, which caught much attention in the US

at the time. Clavin also writes that Hickok himself contributed to his popularity after the article's publication:

> "Harper's article changed Hickok in dramatic ways. He made an effort to live up to the person portrayed in it, while allowing some of the stories to go undisputed. In fact, he began to repeat them in saloons and around campfires, living the life [the author] had partly been responsible for creating, becoming the famous Wild Bill the article celebrated" (Clavin 2019: 69)

After I decided to write about the historical figures in Deadwood, the initial plan for this thesis involved analyzing several of them. However, after doing more research, the topic of the thesis was narrowed down to only Hickok. This was done to make the analysis more thorough. If the analysis had focused on several characters, it would have been less focused. Why specifically Hickok was chosen for this thesis is because of two main reasons. One is that there is a much larger amount of historical research on him than many (possibly any) of the other characters who were based on real people on Deadwood. The second is that Hickok appears in only a few episodes of the series, making him more fitting for a condensed thesis such as this. A more minor reason is also my personal interest in Hickok compared to other historical figures that appeared on Deadwood and my desire to find out more about him.

This thesis is organized as follows. The "Background theory" section will establish both how televisual characters can be analyzed and prior research on the topic of Hickok and HBO's Deadwood. The "Data and methods" section will outline which episodes of Deadwood and which pieces of historical literature will be used as data, as well as how the data will be analyzed based on the background theory. The "Analysis" section will compare Hickok's characteristics from the historical literature to those seen in the TV series. The "Discussion" section will provide an overall discussion of what was discovered in the analysis. The "Conclusion" section will address the overall results and value of this thesis.

2. BACKGROUND THEORY

The background theory for this thesis will cover three distinct topics. First, I will give a theoretical overview on the study of televisual characters. This will be used as a basis for the thesis' analytical methodology and will cover how past research has described and analyzed televisual characters. Second, I will present and summarize research on the topic of this thesis, Deadwood, in particular. This will mainly be used to describe what research has been done on the topic and how this thesis is situated in the field. Third, I will give a general overview of past historical research and literature on the life of James Butler Hickok, the protagonist in this thesis. This will tie into the data of the thesis and its analysis segments, in which records of Hickok's life will be compared with the fictional version of him in the television series.

As HBO's Deadwood is a work of fiction, much of this thesis will be based on analyzing the series through the lens of story analysis (the theory of which will be further explored in the next section). In particular, the background research will focus on televisual studies and how prior research has analyzed television series from the perspective of character writing (Seger 2010).

2.1 Televisual character study

In this section of background theory, the analysis of characters in televisual studies is discussed. *Making a Good Script Great* (2010) by Linda Seger discusses the process of writing a script. Seger is an American scrip consultant and author who has written multiple books on the topic of script writing. This book, in particular, has been used and lauded by several professional writers, film directors and academics working in the field of screenwriting. The book contains many chapters dedicated to how Seger thinks characters in visual medium (e.g. film, television, theater, video games) can, are and should be written. This thesis will use the book to establish what role Hickok's character played in Deadwood's narrative. In the book, Seger states her belief that:

Stories become complex through the influence of characters. Characters impinge on a story, give it dimension, and move it in new directions. Characters make a story compelling. Through a character's idiosyncrasies and willfulness, a story changes (Seger 2010: 171).

Deadwood, in particular, has a very large ensemble of characters. According to *Internet Movie Database*, there are 22 characters who are credited to appear in more than 20 episodes on the series (IMDB, 2023). While this thesis will concentrate on analyzing only one of them, Seger's point provides context to how arguably small Hickok's role in the story was, as he appeared in only four episodes.

According to Seger (2010: 171), the three key aspects that form a character's "spine" are motivation, goal and actions. She (ibid.) extrapolates on the meaning further: "Characters need all three of [motivation, goal and actions] to clearly define who they are, what they want, why they want it, and what they're willing to do to get it."

This thesis will focus on comparing the character and actions of Bill Hickok in historical literature to those seen on HBO's Deadwood. This is because historical literature in general and in the case of Hickok is light on describing his goals and motivations. Most non-fiction books on Hickok, such as *Wild Bill The True Story of the American Frontier's First Gunfighter* by Tom Clavin (2019), mainly describe his actions and the events pertaining to his life. While there are things such as anecdotes and quotes that could be used to speculate on what motivated Hickok, this thesis will follow the example set by prior research and not put too much emphasis on this area.

Seger states that characters take actions to achieve their goals, and that characters' actions also showcase their personal qualities. In her words, "[t]he stronger the actions and the stronger the barriers to achieving that goal, the stronger that character will seem." (Seger 2010: 175) These actions might also not be designed solely for the purpose of the character but also for the purpose of the story. For example, if an author were to write a story about Julius Caesar's final days that follows historical events, the characters would have to interact in a way that leads up

to Caesar being assassinated in the Theatre of Pompey. Seger (2010: 194) describes a character's actions' relation to the story as:

> The protagonist can search, investigate, uncover, outwit, plan, transform (others and themselves), create, manipulate, avenge, and/or fix a wrong. Whatever the action, it's important that it drive the story forward, take a number of beats to execute, and affect the outcome of the story.

This quote can in many ways be used to explain many of the actions of Hickok on HBO's Deadwood, as well as his difference to real-life Hickok. The Hickok on the television series has a role to play in contributing to the story David Milch, the directors, and the other series' creators have wanted to tell. While the Deadwood series' creators likely have interest in basing their character on the real-life Hickok (for instance, him arriving in Deadwood and later getting killed by Jack McGall while playing poker), the series' purpose goes beyond simply documenting Hickok's life accurately. In the analysis section, scenes about Hickok that were invented specially for the series can be contrasted to Seger's ideas of a televisual character.

The analysis part of this thesis will follow Roberta Pearson's (2007) model of *Anatomising Gilbert Grissom* for the structure of a televisual character. She herself based this taxonomy on the work of a film researcher David Bordwell (1985: 15), who "suggests that traits, physical behavior and speech constitute a character." As the Director of the Institute of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham, Pearson has published extensively on televisual characters. Her research is particularly suited for this thesis because of her work focusing on American television characters (for instance from *Star Trek* and *Batman*; Pearson 2014, 2017). Pearson created and used this particular model to analyze the character of Gilbert Grissom in CBS's TV series, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Her research has also been largely cited. For example, Iida Rautiainen (2017) used Pearson's taxonomy in her MA thesis, referring to it as, "a useful tool for forming a multifaceted view of the characters, because it serves as a guide for examining the characters in a very detailed and comprehensive way" (29). In her book *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century*, Amanda D. Lotz also frequently cited Pearson's

article in its character analysis. Lotz (2014) referred to the way Pearson used her model as a "masterful deconstruction of the Grissom character"(204).

In her research, Pearson specifies a character's structure being made up of six major aspects: *psychological traits/habitual behavior, physical traits/appearance, speech patterns, interactions with other characters, environment* and *biography* (Pearson 2007: 43). For the purposes of this thesis, analysis of Hickok's *biography* is somewhat problematic. This is because, while Hickok's real-life biography is fairly documented, we do not know if the fictional character that appears on HBO's Deadwood shares this past. The series makes numerous allusions to Hickok's life before coming to the Deadwood camp, yet details are still lacking. David Mylch himself has, in the behind-the-scenes material (interviews, DVD/Blu-Ray specials, episode commentaries), cited parts of real-life Hickok's biography (such as him working as a scout for the U.S. Army), but it is unclear if this reflects Hickok's past in the series. Moreover, Hickok's *speech patterns* can be difficult to analyze. Due to the period he lived in, there are no sound recordings of Hickok's speech, nor have I found any research that has anecdotally described how Hickok spoke, with the exception of quotes attributed to him. Therefore, I will only use the psychological traits/habitual behavior, physical traits/appearance, interactions with other characters and environment aspects in my analysis (as elaborated in the Data and methods section).

Finally, I will use Anna Novokhatko's article, "Cinematizing the Epic Gaze: Julius Caesar and Pompey in Lucan and in the HBO/BBC Television Series Rome" (2021) as an example of analyzing televisual characters. This ties into the previous paragraph about Pearson's character study, as Novokhatko uses many similar tools in analyzing characters. Like this thesis, Novokhatko compares historical figures to their representations as televisual characters. Her work was also done on another HBO series, Rome, which was released at the same time as Deadwood;Rome from 2005 to 2007, Deadwood from 2004 to 2006. In a sense, Novokhatko's research is more similar to my thesis than any prior research on Deadwood, despite the fact that Novokhatko is analyzing a different series. As in this thesis, Novokhatko (2021) brings up the point that it is uncertain which sources series creators used when adapting historical figures onto their story. While striving to point out the

similarities between the characters of Julius Caesar and Pompey Magnus on HBO's Rome and Lucan's The Civil War she states that, "it is quite possible that if the producers were asked about any role of Lucan in creating the characters for the series, they would be surprised" (2021: 418). While this thesis will not strive to find only similarities between historical and fictional Hickok (instead focusing on analyzing both the similarities and differences), it will make the same allowance as Novokhatko and analyze its respective series based on historical sources, regardless of whether the series was based on them. Novokhatko manages to draw multiple parallels between the characters' historical and series versions. Inadvertently, she addresses many of the points brought up in Pearson's model, such as a character's appearance, habitual behavior, environment and biography. For example, Novokhatko analyzes that in both the literature and the series, Pompey is depicted as an "old warrior past his prime… indecisive, hesitant, and insecure", whereas Caesar in both mediums is a "traditional heroic warrior who possesses great military prowess" (2021: 421). While not arguing that HBO's Rome took direct inspiration from Lucan's work, Novokhatko concluded that "the 1st century CE Lucan's epic text created a certain model of looking at Republican Rome". While not necessarily aiming for a similar conclusion, this thesis will take Novokhatko's research into account when conducting its own analysis.

2.2 Prior research on HBO's Deadwood

Next, I will give an overview of earlier research on HBO's Deadwood. While not as popular as HBO's other series such as *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) or *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), Deadwood has nevertheless been researched rather extensively / from different viewpoints. Much of this research focuses on the use of the English language in Deadwood, particularly in the series' dialogue. Brad Benz, who has written many articles about the topic in the *Great Plains Quarterly* book (2007: 239-251), argued that:

It's not surprising that Deadwood's discourse has generated so much critical discussion… Deadwood's discourse creates a distinct new vernacular for the Western genre, one that, like tall talk, blurs fact and fiction, as it liberally mixes language both historic and contemporary.

The question of Deadwood's relation to the English language is a theme that appears in much of the research done on the series, even in fields outside linguistics. Other papers that have researched the topic of (the English) language include: Alison Landsberg's (2010) *Waking the Deadwood of history: Listening, language, and the 'aural visceral'*, Daniel Salerno's (2010) *"I Will Have You Bend": Language and the Discourses of Power in Deadwood*, Kirsten Møllegaard's (2014) *Dirty Words in Deadwood: Literature and the Postwestern* and Rex Troumbley's (2013) *Profanity Politics of the HBO's Series Deadwood: Authenticity, Lawlessness and Living Outside Civil Society*. These pieces of research study dialect, profanity and overall use of English dialogue in the series. Due to this thesis deliberately not focusing on analyzing Hickok's speech, these sources are rather different from my own research on Deadwood. However, they do provide context on how popular of a topic the series' use of English is among researchers.

Apart from language studies, research on Deadwood covers a variety of disciplines ranging from sociology, literature, economics, psychology and history. Of these, history is the most prevalent to the topic of this thesis. To specify, history in this case refers to the series' fiction being compared to historical data about the real-life Deadwood camp and 19th century United States. This is opposed to, for example, historical research done on the series itself as a production or its place in media/television history. In his paper, *"Here Was a Man": Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in HBO's Deadwood,* Schlimbach (2016: 1) argues that: "The representations of history in the series add new perspectives to a narrative of American national identity, which for a long time was closely connected to the Westward movement and the settling of the West."

Schlimbach (2016) later elaborates that, for example, Deadwood sheds light on the role of women in the 19th century American frontier, which he believes is an

overlooked and "silenced" aspect of the era in other pieces of fiction. While Deadwood is set in a mining camp populated mostly by men, the series also gives focus to the resident women, who mainly worked in prostitution. The series' events are also set a little over a decade after the American Civil War, concentrating on such things as post-traumatic stress of veterans as well as the new social status of African Americans. In fact, Deadwood addresses the status of various social minorities of the era, such as Chinese Americans, Native Americans and physically disabled people. While not the focus of this thesis, this gives some context to the setting Hickok's character existed in during his brief time in the series.

There are several perspectives that have been used to conduct historical research on Deadwood. Rebecca Weeks (2022) in her book, *History by HBO: Televising the American Past*, analyzes the sets used in the making of the series and how well they represent the historical camp. In his paper, *"The World is Less Than Perfect": Non-traditional Family Structures in Deadwood*, Paul Zinder (2013) analyzes the families represented on the series and how they compare to actual 19th century American families (Zinder 2013). Moreover, there are studies, such as Petch (2013) that analyze the larger historical context of the series' events. Likewise, much of the aforementioned research on Deadwood's language dabbles in history by making comparisons between the series' English and historical English and concludes that there are many accurate similarities between the two. David Milch himself believes that the characters in Deadwood often speak in a language that is "someone else's", elaborating that they borrow heavily from the era's popular literature, which for example could be the works of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens or the Bible (Faragher 2007: 61). This thesis will further contribute to finding similarities and differences between the series and history, but will stand out from other research by fixating solely on the analysis of Bill Hickok's character.

The most important area of prior historical research for this thesis is the prior thesis done on the real-life people represented as characters on the series. Mark L. Berrettini (2007) makes a televisual character analysis of many of these characters such as the saloonkeeper Al Swearengen, the Sheriff Seth Bullock, the actor Jack Langrishe and the businessman George Hearst. However, Berrettini's article is

somewhat lacking on historical comparisons and focuses more on analyzing the series' narrative. In reference to that, John Mack Faragher (2007) gives more insight into the historical background of the series' characters, including Bill Hickok. Faragher's work is the most similar piece of previous research to this thesis. Still, in analyzing Hickok, Faragher is still relatively light on the historical comparisons and analysis this thesis addresses. Most of his analysis focuses on the role Hickok's character played in the story of the Deadwood series. For example, while Faragher brings up Hickok's real-life assassination in reference to the same event/scene that happens on the show, he analyzes it from a narrative point of view, concluding that Milch was deliberately "playing against the viewer expectations that Wild Bill will be the protagonist of the series". This could be in reference to Hickok being the most known historical figure in Deadwood or his frequent presence in the early episodes of the series. Unlike Faragher's work, this thesis will not make any analysis in regard to the possible narrative purpose behind Hickok's actions in the series. Faragher's research also focuses a great deal on Deadwood's production and its place in American televisual history, which this thesis will not focus on.

2.3 Prior historical research on James Butler Hickok

Finally, I will discuss prior historical research done on the real-life James Butler Hickok, which I will make use of extensively in the analytical section of the thesis. Overall, Hickok is a well-established figure in the field of American History. There have been many autobiographies and other books about his life that may or may not have served as inspiration for David Milch in creating HBO's Deadwood. Hickok also appears in numerous other publications, such as Clavin's *Dodge City: Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and the Wickedest Town in the American West* (2017), that do not primarily focus on him, as he participated in many notable events in late 19th century America. Part of the reason why Hickok is such a well-covered topic could be because of his success in the field of fiction. Deadwood is hardly the first time Hickok is used as a fictional character. Even when he was still alive, there has been popular fiction based on Hickok's character and deeds (Clavin, 2019: 10). Barring

HBO's Deadwood, this thesis will however only use the non-fiction sources of Hickok.

Why Hickok specifically was chosen as the target of analysis for this MA thesis involves a few reasons. First, based on my preliminary research, Hickok's character on Deadwood is a relatively unresearched topic at the time of making this thesis. Most of the prior character research involved the characters who played a larger role in the series, such as Al Swearengen (Deadwood's wealthy saloonkeeper) and Seth Bullock (Deadwood's sheriff). Second, there is a large amount of historical literature written about Hickok. This made performing this type of an analysis significantly easier than with other characters on the show who either had little presence in historical texts or were completely fictional series creations. Finally, Hickok's character only appeared in the first four episodes of Deadwood's first season, excluding his scenes in the fifth episode as a corpse. Moreover, Hickok's relatively brief appearance made him appealing for the analysis, considering the intended length of this thesis. Many of the other historical figures that appeared on HBO's Deadwood were present in all 36 episodes of the series, with many also returning in 2019's *Deadwood: The Movie*. Analyzing any of these characters would have likely been too cumbersome for this thesis and led to a more superficial analysis with too much material to cover.

The first historical source is the book *Old Deadwood Days* by Estelline Bennett (1928, 1982). The reason why Bennett's pioneering work is important to bring up is because Bennett herself lived in the Deadwood camp in the 1870s when she was a child. The book does not have information on only Hickok but is an overall autobiographical account of people who lived in the Deadwood camp during the period depicted in the series. Unfortunately for the purposes of this thesis, Hickok is not a particularly relevant part of Old Deadwood Days, which further motivates this thesis to rely more on other sources. One such source is Tom Clavin's (2019) *Wild Bill: The True Story of the American Frontier's First Gunfighter*, which covers Hickok's entire life and gives many details about his characteristics that can be used for comparison with the Deadwood series. Hence, this book will be used as the primary historical source for this thesis, due to a combination of reasons. One is that Clavin can be

estimated to be a reputable source for the topic of Hickok. He is both an established journalist and author of other historical books on the period Bill Hickok lived in. Another reason is that his book was the newest non-fiction one published about Hickok at the time the bulk of this thesis' background reading took place. Lastly, Clavin's book is more accessible than others on the topic because it was also published as an e-book, making it more efficient to use for doing research. Other non-fiction sources on Hickok include, *They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok* by Joseph G. Rosa (1974), *Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody* by Bill Markley (2022), *Wild Bill Hickok (Legends of the Wild West)* by Liz Sonneborn (2010) and *The Real Deadwood: True Life Histories of Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, Outlaw Towns, and Other Characters of the Lawless West* by John Edwards Ames (2004). Of these sources, only Sonneborn's book will be used for the analysis. This is due to my personal access to said title, as well as added details that were not found in Clavin's book, such as a photograph of Hickok depicting his full height. I also considered it important to find a secondary source to Clavin, so that I could cross-reference some of his claims. While an attempt was made, Rosa and Ames' books were not available at / via the University of Jyväskylä. However, both Clavin and Sonneborn cite Rosa and Ames' books in their respective bibliographies. Markley's book on the other hand was published when the background part of this thesis was already mostly completed.

Like alluded to previously, this thesis itself will not conduct historical research of its own but instead utilizes historical sources of Clavin (2019), Sonneborn (2010) and Bennett (1928, 1982) to perform a televisual character analysis of Hickok on HBO's Deadwood.

3. DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Data

The Deadwood series itself will be the primary source for the thesis. This will however only include the series' first five episodes of the first season: "Deadwood", "Deep Water", "Reconnoitering the Rim", "Here Was a Man" and "The Trial of Jack McCall". These are the episodes in which Bill Hickok's character appears in the series. While Hickok's character is still posthumously mentioned by others in the later episodes and seasons of the show, these will not be used as data for the analysis. This is because the characterization they provide for Hickok has minimal bearing on the aspects the analysis will focus on.

For the actual analysis, I have watched the above mentioned episodes multiple times and made detailed notes and observations of the scenes in which Hickok appears. These episodes will then be compared with the historical data, which are Clavin's (2019) *Wild Bill: The True Story of the American Frontier's First Gunfighter* (primary historical source), Bennett's (1928, 1982) *Old Deadwood Days* and Sonneborn's (2010) *Wild Bill Hickok (Legends of the Wild West)*. I have carefully read and re-read both Clavin's and Sonneborn's books, as well as the parts of Bennett's book that pertained to Hickok. This reading was done after a recent re-viewing of HBO's Deadwood. In my analysis, I have used the notes I have made of the aforementioned episodes in systematically comparing them to what was written about the real-life Hickok.

3.2 Methodology

After I decided to write about the historical figures in Deadwood, the initial plan for this thesis involved analyzing several of them. However, after doing more research, the topic of the thesis was narrowed down to only Hickok. This was done to make

the analysis more thorough. If the analysis had focused on several characters, it would have been less focused.

The methods used in this thesis are mainly based on the model suggested by Pearson (2009) in her analysis of the televisual character Gilbert Grissom. However, this thesis will somewhat modify Pearson's model to better accommodate Hickok's character analysis and also to better fit the intended length of this thesis. Of the six major aspects of a televisual character that Pearson listed, four will be used in conducting the analysis on Hickok:

1. Psychological traits/habitual behavior
2. Physical traits/appearance
3. Interactions with other characters
4. Environment.

Psychological traits/habitual behavior regards analyzing Hickok's actions and skills (e.g. gunfighting, horse riding, carpentry) and how these reflect his psychology. *Physical traits/appearance* concerns Hickok's looks, from descriptions of his body to his personal apparel (e.g. facial hair, hat). *Interactions with other characters* deal with Hickok's relationship with other people/characters. *Environment* takes into account the spaces Hickok inhabits on/in Deadwood and how they reflect his character. All four aspects will contrast Hickok's character in the series to descriptions of him in the literature. Admittedly, some of these aspects will unavoidably intersect with one another in the analysis. However, there will be an attempt to make each section of analysis distinct.

The omitted two aspects from Pearson's taxonomy are speech patterns and biography. As there are no recordings of Hickok's voice and because historical literature does not describe his speech in much detail, it would be very difficult to analyze how Hickok in the series compares to the real Wild Bill in this regard. While there might be some data available on the dialect used in the era and the region Hickok lived in, I consider these sources to be too disconnected and vague to apply to analyzing Hickok. The reason why biography is omitted is because HBO's

Deadwood only provides a retelling of the last few days of Hickok's life. From the perspective of historical literature, this is a relatively small part of Hickok's biography. For example, in Clavin's (2019) book, Hickok's time in Deadwood covers less than 20 pages of the over 200 page book. While the series makes occasional references to Hickok's past, such as him having shot a man in Abilene or having been a stage performer with William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody, I do not consider there to be enough material in the series for a proper analysis on Hickok's biography.

The analysis will also draw inspiration from the above mentioned Seger (2010) and Novothatko (2021) in analyzing televisual characters and comparing them to their counterparts in historical literature. For example, the Discussion section will address possible character writing reasons behind Hickok's representation in the series.

The above mentioned four aspects (psychological traits/habitual behavior, physical traits/appearance, interactions with other characters and environment; Pearson 2009) of Hickok on HBO's Deadwood will be compared with the descriptions provided of his character in the cited historical literature. This will then be reflected on in light of Seger (2010) and Novothatko (2021) insights on fictional writing in the Discussion section. I will utilize the ebook formats of the above-mentioned three historical books (Clavin, Bennett and Sonneborn) because of the tools this format allows, such as the search function or the text copy function, to make my research more effective. For example, when searching for mentions of Hickok's eye color, I will search the books with the term "eye" and note down the references to Hickok's appearance. The findings of the analysis and discussion will then be combined in the Conclusion section of the thesis.

4. ANALYSIS

In the analysis, I will begin each section with characterizations from the literature, after which I will describe Hickok in the television series and make systematic analysis between these two data sets. I consider this style to make the most sense for the analysis because the Deadwood series was itself based on historical literature. The analysis will not address every scene and detail involving Hickok in the series but only those that are relevant to Pearson's (2009) four aspects in the analysis of televisual characters.

The analysis will frequently cite the first five episodes of Deadwood's first season included in the data. They will be referenced in the following style: SXEX: Episode title, in which the "S" is short for season and the "E" is short for episode.

4.1 Psychological traits/habitual behavior

As a person, Hickok is at times described (in both Clavin and Sonneborn's books) as a sort of an enigma and contradiction. After he became famous, Hickok also became a "marked man" (Clavin 2019: 11), meaning that a lot of people, whether for fame or money, wanted to kill him. Despite his situation though, Hickok reportedly did not change much of his lifestyle to protect himself. He spent much of his time in dangerous frontier towns, frequently gambling and telling tales in public places, not trying to hide his identity in any way. As discussed later in the physical traits/appearance section, Hickok's manner of dress also made him immediately recognizable. As Clavin describes Hickok: "He did not invite trouble, yet he had the confidence to inflict damage on those who chose to cause trouble. No wonder that to this day, Hickok has been a hard man to understand." (Clavin 2019: 71).

Hickok inflicting "damage on those who chose to cause trouble" likely refers to both his ability to defend himself and to willingness to bring wrongdoers to justice. Many of the gunfights Hickok won were in self-defense, with Hickok having a habit of letting his opponent draw their gun first before he shot them. Hickok was

also not completely without caution when appearing in public. Per Clavin, Hickok was "sure to keep his back to the wall, walk down the middle of a street instead of on the sidewalk, and develop a sixth sense for danger" (2019: 69). Hickok was also willing to use his reputation to his advantage when it came to intimidating people. As Clavin says, later in life, Hickok's "bravado and his reputation were better protection than his pistols" (2019: 160). Hickok's sense of justice is perhaps best seen in him frequently seeking occupation as a lawman, and he ended up serving as law-enforcement (sheriff or marshal) in several settlements, including Hays City, Abilene and Newton among others. During his service, Hickok frequently intervened when someone was doing something he deemed unjust. At times, this might have also extended beyond the law. For example, in Hays City, Hickok shot a local man, Daniel Strawhun, for "threatening violence" before Strawhun's gun had left his holster (Sonnerborn 2010: 54-55). As Clavin describes it, Hickok "was quick to act, doing what he thought was right and damn the potential repercussions" (2019: 116).

Many of these traits of Hickok's character are present in HBO's Deadwood's version of him. When Hickok first enters the Deadwood camp in the series, he is fully dressed in his characteristic apparel and many of the locals recognize him on sight. (S1E1: Deadwood) Later in the same episode, a man comes to Deadwood claiming that "Indians" (i.e. indigenous Americans) massacred a group of Norwegian settlers not far from the camp. After hearing the news, Hickok participates in the party that goes to investigate if there were any survivors. He also considers the witness to be untrustworthy and intimidates him to ride with the party. Later when the party returns to camp, Hickok questions the man, suspecting (correctly) that he was lying and had personally participated in the massacre. After the man pulls out his gun, Hickok shoots him dead. In the next episode (S1E2: Deep Water), a brother of the shot man plans to kill Hickok while he is playing poker in a saloon. Hickok sits with his back to the wall and realizes the man's intent. As the man starts approaching him, Hickok shoots him before he gets to pull out his gun.

These scenes in HBO's Deadwood seemingly reflect very accurately on the type of man Hickok is described in the historical literature used in this thesis. In both

mediums, Hickok is seen to possess a strong sense of personal justice and confidence to handle and protect himself in dangerous situations. Deadwood also illustrates the contradiction of Hickok's character, in that he simultaneously makes no attempt to hide who he is but also takes certain cautions in protecting himself. This however connects to a further contradiction that pertains specifically to Hickok's life in the Deadwood camp.

According to the literature, Hickok's intention in coming to Deadwood was to prospect for gold so that he would be able to prepare a good life for himself and his newly married wife. However, after he arrived in Deadwood, Hickok mostly spent his time drinking and gambling. His success at gambling was also notably bad in Deadwood, perhaps due to the camp's players being more skilled than what he was used to. Hickok's friend, Charlie Utter (spelled as "Charley Utter" by Clavin), who accompanied him to Deadwood, is said to have been concerned about Hickok's condition (Clavin 2019: 170). Hickok is also said to have told Utter that he believed someone in the Deadwood camp would end up killing him. This could have connected to both Hickok's declining eyesight (in other words, his ability to defend himself) and how dangerous Deadwood was at the time. While Hickok's mental state at the time is described as being "moody" or "melancholic" (Clavin 2019: 170), his mood reportedly was not completely negative. The letters he sent to his wife from the camp were mostly positive and he also still did things outside saloons such as target practice or eating with his friends. (Clavin 2019: 164-176).

Hickok's melancholic behavior is also present on HBO's Deadwood. Like in the cited literature, Hickok in the series frequents saloons drinking whiskey and playing poker and avoids any chance at prospecting. Charlie Utter, who also appears on the show, questions Hickok over what is happening to him, to which Hickok states that he believes he is going to die soon (S1E4: Here Was a Man). In one scene in the show (S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim), Hickok is seen sleeping on the floor outside his hotel room, despite the danger it would put him in. Yet, as mentioned in the literature, Hickok also shows signs of his negative mood going away before his death. Hickok is asked by a local widow to investigate a possible murder of her husband. Hickok readily accepts for the sum of 100 dollars, an amount he had the

widow choose. Hickok is shown being very diligent about this job compared to his previous activities in the camp. He investigates the murder by talking to the locals and also consults some of the friends he has made in the camp for advice. After he realizes that the widow herself might be in danger, Hickok advises her to leave the camp. Like in the literature, Hickok also writes seemingly positive letters to his wife (S1E4: Here Was a Man). Regarding his wife, in both the literature and the series, Hickok appears to be loyal to her. Clavin describes Hickok as being "completely faithful to his wife" (2019: 166). In the series, Hickok also commits no act of adultery despite prostitution being very popular in the camp. When the owner of one of the camp's brothels asks Hickok why he has not once visited his establishment, Hickok simply says it is because they have "no poker". In another scene (S1E4: Here Was a Man), when Hickok is offered services by a prostitute after winning a poker game, he refuses.

What Hickok is perhaps best known for is his talent as a gunfighter. Before he even entered military service in the Union Army, Hickok is described as a very accurate and quick marksman, with there being claims of him having already won shootouts at the age of 24 (Sonneborn 2010: 22-27). Even during his later years when Hickok's eyesight began to deteriorate, he was reportedly still very good at target practice. Hickok's skill with guns is also seen in the series. While Hickok does not perform any target practice, as mentioned above, he is shown being able to shoot two people who intended to shoot him. Other characters on Deadwood also make mention of Hickok's skill with the gun.

Besides gunfighting, Hickok in the series also demonstrates other skills such as horseback riding (S1E1: Deadwood) and carpentry (S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim). Hickok is described to have been adept at both things in Clavin's book (2019). As evidenced by his letters, Hickok in both the literature and the series was a literate man. Hickok was also said to "have a particular fondness for children. He enjoyed talking to and sometimes playing with them" (Clavin 2019: 71). This is also presented in Deadwood, where Hickok helps in taking care of an orphaned young girl and is also shown playing with her (S1E4: Here Was a Man). As for things Hickok was not notably good at, both the literature and the series make note of him

having bad success with poker and no interest or skill in prospecting during his time in Deadwood.

Many of the psychological traits and habitual behavior of Hickok's character described in the literature is present in the series. In summary, most of Hickok's scenes in Deadwood reflect on his skill and fame as a lawman, as well as the melancholic mood his psyche assumed during his stay in Deadwood. The former is represented by his skill with the gun and his investigative abilities. The latter on the other hand is seen in his fixation on gambling and drinking, as well as his lack of motivation to do almost anything else. All of this is based on historical literature. As Hickok appears in only four episodes in the series, Deadwood naturally did not address all of the psychological traits and habits of his that were described in the literature. For example, there is no reference to Hickok's eyesight going bad in the series as it did in real life. While not usable (or intended to be a) a documentary of what kind of actions and habits Hickok in real life was prone to take, HBO's Deadwood can be argued to have been very accurate in its representation of Hickok's behaviors.

4.2 Physical traits/appearance

Real-life Hickok's physical appearance is something that is very well documented. As Hickok was already famous during his lifetime and lived in a period where photography had been invented, there were many pictures taken of him in the 19th century. Many of these pictures have also survived to the present day.
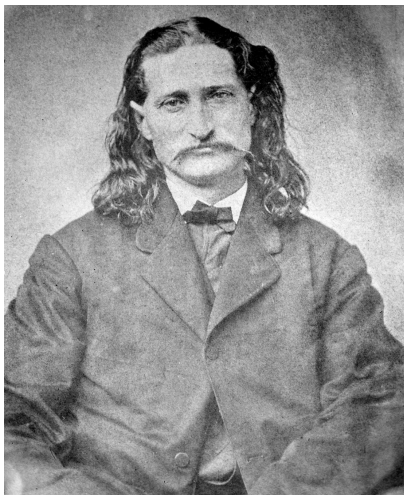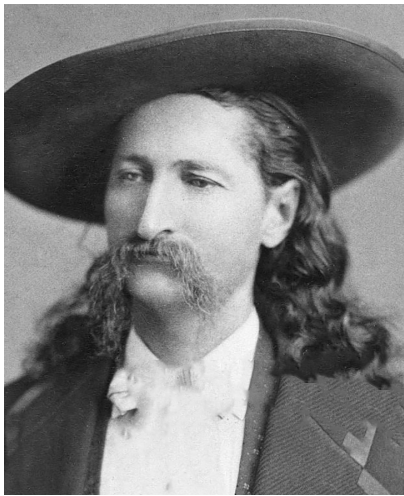
Image 1: Hickok wearing a hat (Clavin 2019: 4); Image 2: Hickok when he was young (Clavin 2019: 14); Image 3: Hickok a year before dying (Clavin 2019: 127); Image 4: Hickok standing (Sonneborn 2010: 40)

Sonneborn (2010) describes Hickok's appearance as follows:

> A tall, handsome man with hair down to his shoulders, a bushy mustache, and a wide-rimmed hat cocked to the left. The belt worn over his long coat held a holster, on which his right hand rested, ready to pull out his gun at any moment (9-10).

> He wore top-boots, riding breeches, and dark blue flannel shirt, with scarlet set-in front. A loose neck-hankerchief left his fine, firm throat free (38-39).

Six foot one with perfumed, blond hair worn down to his shoulders, he often wore a black frock coat, starched collar, white shirt, scarlet vest, and boots made of calf (40).

In his book, Clavin (2019) reiterates many of these physical descriptions of Wild Bill Hickok:

Six feet, lithe, active, sinewy, daring rider, dead shot with pistol and rifle, long locks, fine features and mustache, buckskin leggings, red shirt, broad-brim hat, two pistols in belt, rifle in hand—he is a picture (52).

A chest whose breadth and depth were remarkable. His small round waist was girthed by a belt which held two of Colt's Navy revolvers. His legs sloped gradually from the compact thighs to the feet, which were small and turned inward as he walked (65-66).

Tall, he was over six feet, splendidly built, and his face as handsome as his form, with strong clear-cut features and keen dark blue eyes, long drooping mustache and hair curling upon his shoulders (82).

He stood six feet, one inch, weighed 175 pounds and his graceful, straight figure, brown, wavy hair down to his shoulders, piercing gray blue eyes, fair complexion, aquiline nose, flowing mustache and always expensive dress, made him a figure to attract attention (111).

Wearing a cutaway coat, flowered vest, ruffled white shirt, salt-and-pepper trousers, string tie, high-heeled boots, and a broad-brimmed hat (140).

With a dress code that ran to long hair, buckskins, and a broad-brimmed hat set at a rakish angle (148).

For physical features, the most consistent descriptions of Hickok pertain to his hair, facial hair and height. Consistently described as being six feet tall or slightly taller, Hickok seemingly fits the period's idea of a man who is "handsome", "splendidly built" or "a picture" (2010, 2019). Another reason for these descriptors could be Hickok's frequently mentioned shoulder-length, wavy/curly hair and bushy/long/flowing mustache. As reflected in the photographs (Images 1—4), these

descriptions of Hickok's physical traits appear to be both accurate and something that well-described Hickok during many points in his life.

While aspects of Hickok's wardrobe seemingly changed over his life, some features appear to be more consistent than others. Hickok wearing a large hat is something that is mentioned at least four times in the cited literature (2010, 2019) and it is also a characteristic that can be seen in the surviving photographs of Hickok. Hickok's changing attire also seems to fit the description of him having "expensive dress" (2019). Hickok having a gun on his belt is also a detail that frequently appears in the literature. More specifically, as seen in the above citations, Hickok carrying two pistols is something that is brought up on multiple occasions.

In HBO's Deadwood, Bill Hickok is played by the actor Keith Carradine. Like Hickok, he is reported to be six feet and one inch tall (IMDB, 2023). In the series, Hickok also shares many physical features that real-life Hickok is seen/said to possess in the above pictures and citations.

Image 5: Hickok in HBO's Deadwood (S1E1: Deadwood)

As seen in the screenshot from the episode "Deadwood" (S1E1: Deadwood), Hickok's physical features are very representative of the descriptions of real-life Hickok in the historical citations and images. Hickok's hair in the series is blond (or light brown) and goes down to his shoulders. It could also be accurately described as being wavy or curly. Likewise, the style of Hickok's mustache on Deadwood is very

similar to the ones seen in the real-life pictures and matches the description of being "bushy". As for physical deviations, Hickok's eyes on Deadwood are of different color than in real-life. While Hickok's eyes are described as blue or gray blue in the above citations, Keith Carradine's eyes are more brown or hazel. Carradine also did not seemingly wear different color contacts in the scenes where he played Wild Bill Hickok.

The wardrobe of Hickok also has many similarities with real-life Hickok's choice of clothing. Hickok's apparel remained largely the same between his scenes in the Deadwood series. Almost all the articles that appear in the series are also mentioned in the literature: a broad-brimmed hat, a white shirt, a vest, collar, a coat, a neck-handkerchief. As mentioned in the citation from Clavin, Hickok also holds two pistols. According to Clavin (2019), there is some dispute among historians over what kind of pistols Hickok wore. Whether or not the guns used in the series are Navy Colt Revolvers – as presented in Clavin's book – remains unclear. A notable inclusion to Hickok's character on Deadwood is that he seemingly holds a small knife that is tied to a necklace. While Clavin (2019) at many points mentions Hickok having a bowie knife, the knife that appears in the series seems to be of a different variety. From my understanding, bowie knives are considerably larger than the knife Hickok possesses in the series.

Overall, Hickok's physical features and choice of attire on Deadwood are very accurate to how he is described in the literature and seen in the photographs. Hickok's height, hair, clothes and even his choice of weaponry all have at least one historical citation that could fit the description of Hickok's appearance in the HBO series. One could argue that this adds a level of authenticity to Deadwood, as it was able to accurately visually represent one of the notable figures of the period and setting the series attempted to depict.

4.3 Interactions with other characters

On Deadwood, Bill Hickok's character is seen interacting with three characters that are also said to have some relationship with Hickok in the historical literature. In no particular order, these are Charlie Utter, Martha "Calamity Jane" Canary and Jack McCall. Hickok on the show also interacts with other Deadwood residents that he is not mentioned to have any relationship with in the literature. For this section of the analysis, I will include what I view as the most important ones of these relationships.

Charlie Utter in real life is said to be a close friend to Hickok as well as someone who accompanied him to the Deadwood camp. According to Clavin, "Hickok's friendship with Utter was among his most enduring," and the two had known each other for years before coming to Deadwood (2019: 129). In both the series and the literature, Utter attempts to help Hickok prospect in Deadwood and criticizes and shows concern over Hickok devoting his time to saloons. As mentioned earlier, in both the series and the literature, Hickok confides to Utter that he believes he will die in Deadwood. Sonneborn also describes Hickok and Utter's relationship as being "combative" and that "Utter was also willing to strike back when Hickok did something that annoyed him" (2010: 79). An example of their relationship can perhaps be seen in the third episode of Deadwood (S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim), where Utter asks Hickok to come have dinner with new friends they have made in the camp. When Hickok initially refuses, Utter gets aggravated with him, saying that Hickok could "enjoy sitting with someone who wasn't looking to beat you at cards. Or blow your fucking head off." This is in reference to Hickok spending most of his time gambling and having been almost shot while doing so.

Martha "Calamity Jane" Canary, like Bill Hickok, is a famous historical figure of the time. Bennett describes the notable people who came to the Deadwood camp in 1876 in the following way: "Calamity Jane was the one woman whose name has persisted with that of Wild Bill" (1928, 1982: 183). One of the reasons why Canary became famous was for her claims of being Hickok's lover at the time. Hickok, according to her, "was the only man she ever had loved" (1928, 1982: 185). While

Canary was likely part of the group that came to Deadwood with Hickok, both Clavin and Sonneborn state that there is no evidence of there being a romantic relationship between her and Hickok. In the HBO series (S1E5: The Trial of Jack McCall), while Canary is shown liking Hickok, there is no romantic relationship between their characters, with Canary simply referring to Hickok as his "best friend". Even this could however be an exaggeration. According to Sonneborn, "[e]ven calling their acquaintance a friendship was something of a stretch. Calamity Jane herself acknowledged that was the case in her 1896 autobiography" (2010: 88).

The third notable figure connected to Hickok during his time in Deadwood is Jack McCall, Hickok's murderer. Before the murder, McCall had played at least one game of poker with Hickok, where Hickok "cleaned him out"(Clavin 2019: 178). After the game, Hickok gave McCall money to buy food out of pity. On the following day, McCall shot Hickok in the back when he was in the middle of another poker game (Clavin 2019: 178-179). HBO's Deadwood expands upon the relationship between Hickok and McCall, where the two play multiple games before the murder. On first seeing Hickok, McCall says that he "is not impressed"(S1E1: Deadwood). As the two play, McCall makes several remarks about Hickok's bad success at gambling. In the scenes between the two, Hickok is frequently irritated by McCall, saying that the "game is always between you and getting called a cunt." (S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim). In the fourth episode (S1E4: Here Was a Man), the series also depicts the sequence of events in whichHickok wins against McCall and decides to give him money, followed by McCall later shooting Hickok in the back of the head.

The most notable deviation to Hickok's relationships in the series compared to the literature is Hickok meeting and befriending Seth Bullock in Deadwood. Bullock was the later sheriff of Deadwood and a historical figure in his own right (Bennett 1928, 1982: 44). However, based on my reading of the literature, Hickok and Bullock never met each other. In the series, Hickok and Bullock first meet when forming a search party to investigate a massacre that happened outside the camp. Hickok immediately recognizes that Bullock is also a former lawman and the two have several interactions during the series (S1E1: Deadwood). The interactions between the two are relatively positive. For example, Hickok helps Bullock in the building of

his hardware store (S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim). Later, after Hickok is murdered, Bullock rides out of camp to chase McCall, wanting to bring him to justice (S1E5: The Trial of Jack McCall).

While mostly accurate, Hickok's relationships with the other Deadwood characters could be the thing that is most different about him compared to how he is described in the literature. While Hickok's final moments with McCall are very accurate to how they are described in history, the two having a negative relationship for days before the murder appear to be an invention of the series. Likewise, Bullock and Hickok forming a short-lived friendship seemingly has no historical basis to it. Hickok's feelings regarding Canary are hard to decipher in both the literature and the series, as Hickok had only just met Canary before coming to Deadwood. While the series did not make the two lovers, one could argue that they were better acquainted in the series than in real life. Finally, Hickok's relationship with Utter appears to be the one most true to the literature, with Utter being the loyal friend who tries to support Hickok. As not only Hickok, but every character in the series is a fictional creation/representation, it partly explains why this is the aspect where Hickok deviates the most from the literature. All of the series' characters have their own role in contributing to the series' narrative. In other words, their own roles extend beyond simply providing an accurate representation of Hickok's relationships.

4.4 Environment

The last section of the analysis – environment – is also the shortest one regarding Hickok's character. This is because in both the series and the literature, Hickok's choice of location during his time in Deadwood is fairly limited. However, it is still a relevant part of the analysis as Hickok's environment in the Deadwood camp reflects heavily on his character in both the literature and the HBO series.

After arriving in the camp, Hickok is said to have made the Nuttall and Mann's No. 10 saloon (where Hickok was later murdered) his "headquarters", meaning the place where he spent most of his time (Clavin 2019: 169). As described before, this

was due to Hickok's affinity for both gambling and whiskey during his short residence in Deadwood. This fact is also present in the HBO series, where the No. 10 saloon is the location where most of Hickok's scenes are set. Like in the literature, Hickok goes to the establishment to play poker and to drink whiskey. In the fourth episode (S1E4: Here Was a Man), Hickok does play poker at a different establishment called the Bella Union, which was a real place in Deadwood next to the No. 10 saloon (Bennett 1928, 1982: 101-102). However, there is no mention of Hickok having ever visited the Bella Union in the literature used for this thesis.

Another reason why Hickok mainly frequented the No. 10 is because he had made a deal with the saloonkeeper. Because of Hickok's notoriety, his presence would make any establishment he spent time in more popular. In exchange for Hickok using the No. 10, the saloonkeeper offered Hickok a "generous bar tab" (Clavin 2019: 172). This detail is also mentioned in the HBO series (S1E1: Deadwood and S1E3: Reconnoitering the Rim).

In both the literature and the series, Hickok's frequenting of the No. 10 saloon reflects on a few parts of his character. It emphasizes how fixated on gambling and drinking he was during his time in the Deadwood camp. Frequently being at the same place could also reflect on the confidence of Hickok's character, where he did not attempt to hide his presence in Deadwood despite knowing that a lot of people wanted to kill him. This is further emphasized in the series where Hickok is almost shot in the second episode (S1E2: Deep Water). One could also claim that in both the literature and the series, Hickok's confidence led to his ultimate death, as Jack McCall knew where Hickok liked to spend his time.

Besides the No. 10 saloon, there is no specific mention of Hickok's habitation in the literature. Presumably, he slept his nights in a tent. This can be inferred from a story where, one night, Hickok came back from the saloon drunk and went to sleep in his friend Charlie Utter's tent (Sonneborn 2010: 79). In the series, Hickok slept and ate his breakfasts at a local hotel.

The literature used for this thesis does not provide detailed descriptions of the No. 10 saloon or other places where Hickok spent his time in Deadwood. Therefore, there is much that can be done in the way of analysis for how accurate the sets used

in the HBO series were. Overall, however, the environment surrounding Hickok in the series is very similar to the one in the literature. The names "No. 10" and "Bella Union" are both historically accurate, as is Hickok frequenting the former establishment. Like many of the other analyzed aspects, these similarities argue for Hickok's story on Deadwood being a relatively faithful representation of his final days. They also inadvertently give a small but accurate window into the final part of Hickok's biography.

5. DISCUSSION

As a whole, the way in which Bill Hickok's character is represented on HBO's Deadwood is very accurate to the historical literature used in this thesis. The four selected aspects of Pearson's model of character analysis (psychological traits/habitual behavior, physical traits/appearance, interactions with other characters and environment) all have many similarities between the series and the literature. Some, such as Hickok's appearance, could have seemingly only been made more accurate by somehow altering Hickok's / the actor's facial features. In other words, it could be said that David Milch and the other series creators captured almost every possible aspect of Hickok's character that they possibly could have when creating Deadwood. The way Milch described his own process in regard to utilizing historical research in writing the characters was, "[y]ou try to encounter all of the materials that are trustworthy… and then you try to forget it. The most important part is to forget it" (2004, An Imaginative Reality).

Like Novothatko (2021), this thesis will not attempt to speculate on which specific sources Deadwood's creators utilized when creating the series. As mentioned by Milch, he himself may not know the answer to that question. However, it is worth discussing how (or even if) the Deadwood series benefits from representing Hickok so accurately. As stated by Seger, "[c]haracters make a story compelling" (2010: 171). One could argue that even outside fiction, Hickok could already be considered a very compelling character. Considering his accomplishments as both a soldier and a lawman, as well as the fame he later achieved and how that affected him, Hickok's life and character were very unique. In this sense, if one were to utilize Hickok's character in their own story, there is a strong argument that he will be compelling if written as accurate to history. That is not to say that there is something inherently bad about altering Hickok's character when writing him. While Milch wrote Hickok rather accurately to history, there are characters on Deadwood like Al Swearengen (the camp's wealthy saloonkeeper) who are in many ways different from how they were in real life.

Seger's (2010) views on character writing could also help to explain why there are certain deviations or series-original content in Hickok's scenes on Deadwood. As Seger (2010: 194) argues, "characters drive the story forward". A minor example of this could be why there was no mention of Hickok having bad eyesight in the series, as his character was involved in two scenes where he had to shoot a man who tried to kill him. Had Hickok's eyesight also been compromised in the series, these scenes still happening could have conflicted with the story's sense of realism. A larger example of this could be why Hickok resides in a hotel in the series. The hotel is also used by other major characters in the series and allows for a 'natural' way for Hickok to interact with them. For example, Hickok has multiple scenes where he is having breakfast at the hotel buffet, which lead to him encountering other inhabitants of the camp. This for example is how Hickok becomes involved in the previously mentioned murder investigation involving the widow and her husband.

The need for characters to drive the story forward could also explain some of the other additions and deviations to Hickok's character. If Hickok is to have many scenes where he plays poker in the series, it would make sense to involve Jack McCall in these scenes. As McCall is to later murder Hickok, this expanded history between him and Hickok could make the audience better understand why he resorted to murdering Hickok. This would have probably been considerably harder if McCall's only presence in the series was one poker game with Hickok before the murder, like it was in history. This style of combining characters and story moments can also be seen in Hickok's series-exclusive relationship with Seth Bullock. As Bullock is one of the series' most prevalent characters, him getting scenes with a fellow lawman in Hickok gives the audience a point of view on Bullock that might not have otherwise been there. This change also organically introduced Bullock to Hickok's friend, Charlie Utter. Through Hickok, Bullock and Utter became friends in the series, which is a relevant part of the story in all three seasons as well as 2019's Deadwood: The Movie.

The question why certain features of Hickok's character were kept or changed for the series is not particularly relevant for the purposes of this thesis. As reflected by Novothatko in her work (2021), there are no sources that specifically indicate

what historical literature the series' creators used. Therefore, it is not possible to do a genuine study on how the series used adaptation to create their story. The purpose of the analysis was to draw similarities and differences between Hickok in the literature and in the series. How one interprets and speculates on this analysis is beyond the scope of this research.

Prior research on HBO's Deadwood could be argued to have in some ways neglected the character of Wild Bill Hickok. While he gets brought up in works such as Faragher's paper (2007), I have not found a single piece of research that was dedicated to analyzing his character. This could be due to the fact that, despite his historical significance, Hickok only appears in a small portion of Deadwood's total episodes. Likewise, as addressed before, the Deadwood series inspires a variety of research topics outside televisual character studies, whether it be on the series' use of the English language, gender roles or production design. In this sense, this thesis will provide a new perspective on the analysis of Deadwood based on its historical backdrop.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to compare James Butler Hickok's character from selected historical literature to his fictional representation on HBO's Deadwood. Based on the analysis , it can be argued that James Butler Hickok who appears in the cited historical literature and the Hickok who appears on HBO's Deadwood are very similar to one another. Based on the analyzed aspects of Hickok's character, the differences to history are very minor, such as the color of his eyes or him becoming friends with people he (apparently) never met in real life. The discussion segment of the thesis speculated that the few deviations could have been done for the purposes of the story Deadwood's creators were trying to tell. Based on my research, this is the first time someone has done a study comparing historical literature's Hickok to the one represented in the Deadwood series.

As the purpose of this thesis was to explore the differences and similarities between the historical and series versions of Hickok, it can be seen as being successful in its intended research. If one were to do a longer and more thorough version of this research, they could perhaps attempt to analyze the excluded aspects of Pearson's model: speech patterns and biography. The former could perhaps be analyzed by comparing available sources of 19th century Illinois (Hickok's home state) dialects to Hickok's speech on Deadwood. For the latter, one could do more research on the exact chronology of Hickok's short time in the Deadwood camp and analyze how it compares to the series.

This thesis can be readily used as a resource in several different fields, such as American history or televisual studies. It could be used as reference if one were to do their own research comparing Hickok's character from historical literature to a fictional piece of media other than Deadwood. It could also be used if one were to do the same kind of study on historical figures that appeared on Deadwood other than Hickok. One could also cite this thesis when generally working on adapting historical characters into fiction. The analysis section of the thesis works as a pseudo-outline of what aspects of Hickok were utilized in the making of his character on HBO's Deadwood.

From the perspective of history, this thesis contributes to the field in providing a look at how Bill Hickok's character is viewed by fiction and media in the 21st century. From the perspective of televisual studies, the thesis gives an example how Pearson's model (2009) can be used to do a successful character analysis even if the aspects of speech patterns and biography are removed. Finally, the thesis provides a breakdown of how HBO's Deadwood wrote, used and represented the character of Hickok in a way that was very accurate to history.

PRIMARY DATA

Audiovisual data:

 Deadwood, Season 1 (2004). Home Box Office. Creator: David Milch.

  Episode 1: *Deadwood*

  Episode 2: *Deep Water*

  Episode 3: *Reconnoitering the Rim*

  Episode 4: *Here Was a Man*

  Episode 5: *The Trial of Jack McCall*

  DVD/Blu-Ray bonus featurette: *An Imaginative Reality*

Literature data:

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