

Call for Papers

A Golden Age? Global Historical Fictions and Political Nostalgia

One-Day Online Workshop of the *Historical Fictions Research Network*

28 November 2026 (online in Zoom) ca 8 am to 5 pm (GMT)

15 min talks

The Historical Fictions Research Network, an interdisciplinary and international network of scholars examining historical fictions, i.e. narratives of the past in a variety of popular media, is happy to organise its 2026 one-day workshop on the topic of

“A Golden Age? Global Historical Fictions and Political Nostalgia”.

Globally, the last years have been dominated by a wide-spread feeling of nostalgia, “a bittersweet longing for former times” (Niemeyer 2014: 1), in which the world still seemed to be ‘better’, safer and more colourful than our tumultuous and fast-changing present (see e.g. Bauman 2017; Gaston & Hilhorst 2018; Jacobsen 2020). This feeling has been traced back to ever-faster technological changes and the accompanying feeling of insecurity, as well as to international developments which have severely affected and undermined the existing world order and international co-operation. The emerging feeling of nostalgia is often connected to a very specific period in the respective national past, a “‘prelapsarian’” Golden Age, a mythic, glorious time when the nation was still great (see Hennebühl 2023: 50). Thus, the US-American MAGA movement repeatedly conjures up images of the post-WWII era, when the US had just won a major war and experienced a period of economic well-being (see Krieg 2016). On the other side of the former East-West divide, in the countries of the former Soviet block, there is also a wide-spread longing for the years of Communism, when the world was presumed safer and more just (see Jeffery & Váradi 2026). In the former GDR, this often takes the form of ‘Ostalgie’; while in Russian politics, cherished memories of the Soviet Union are utilised to justify the war against Ukraine. A third international example can be found in India where President Modi’s policy of Hindu nationalism channels ideas of a glorious period of Hindu rule that preceded conquests by first Muslim and then European invaders (see Jaffrelot & Schoch 2021: ch 1).

These examples highlight problems intrinsic to notions of a national ‘Golden Age’: they can be easily manipulated to political ends as demonstrated by the strategies of contemporary populists, who conflate mythic pasts with conservative or nationalist agendas. This evocation of such imagined pasts often consciously excludes those absent from their perceived flourishings - for example, immigrants, people of colour, women, or men not fitting the martial stereotype often associated with the idea of a Golden Age. Additionally, as many of the so-called ‘Golden Ages’ were also times of strong imperialist expansion - the concept also sidelines the experience of those subjugated by the dominant power.

Historical fictions world-wide have long engaged with the idea of Golden Ages, not least because they offer narratives of action, glamour and power that bolster national identities. In Europe for example, stories of the Spanish, Dutch and English Golden Ages of the 16th and 17th centuries are characterised by strong leadership figures, colourful costumes and exciting events whilst also providing comforting familiarity given that these periods remain prominent in school curricula (see e.g. String & Bull 2013; Rodríguez Pérez forthcoming). Conversely, many historical fictions emerging in recent decades have been key to challenging the concept of a Golden Age by foregrounding the experiences of the

marginalised and helping to move postcolonial, feminist or queer perspectives into the mainstream. Historical fictions have thus not only played a key role in drawing attention to the violence, exclusions and injustices inherent to the Golden Ages of popular imagination but have also countered them with alternative visions of fairer, more equal pasts.

These trends, and the role of historical fictions in creating, criticising and undermining the concepts of Golden Ages world wide will be explored in our 2026 HFRN online workshop. Given the global range of the Network, we particularly welcome proposals from beyond countries of the Global North.

Sources cited:

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Retrotopia*, Polity, 2017.

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Hennebühl, Dennis, 'Taking Back Control' of the Nation and Its History? Contemporary Fiction's Engagement with Nostalgia in Brexit Britain, *Intermedia* 21, Brill Fink, 2023.

Jacobsen, Michael Hviid ed., *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, London: Routledge, 2020.

Jaffrelot, Christophe, and Cynthia Schoch, "Hindu Nationalism: A Different Idea of India." *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, Princeton University Press, 2021, pp. 11-30. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1dc9jzx.8>. Accessed 20 July 2026.

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Krieg, Gregory. "Donald Trump Reveals when he Thinks America was Great." *CNN* 28 March 2026, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/26/politics/donald-trump-when-america-was-great>. Accessed 22 July 2026.

Niemeyer, Katharina, "Introduction: Media and Nostalgia", in Katharina Niemeyer, ed., *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1-23.

Pérez, Yolanda Rodríguez, "A House of Mirrors: Historical Reparations in the Educational Setting and the Case of Pérez Reverte's *The Sun over Breda* (1998)", in Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir et al., eds., *Historical Fictions as Reparative Histories. Global Historical Fictions* (Amsterdam: Brill, forthcoming).

String, Tatiana C., and Marcus Bull (eds), *Tudorism: Historical Imagination and the Appropriation of the Sixteenth Century*, *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London, 2011; online edn, British Academy Scholarship Online, 31 Jan. 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197264942.001.0001>. Accessed 18 July 2026.

Paper proposals are due by October 1st 2026. They should consist of a title, an abstract of 250 words max., and a short bio (150 words max). Please submit proposals through our online form:

<https://historicalfictionsresearch.org/online-workshop-2026/>.

Organisers: Series Editors Global Historical Fictions (Brill), Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir, Jerome de Groot, Dorothea Flothow, Siobhan O'Connor, and Stephanie Russo.