The Battle Of Thermopylae: Representation In Cinema

The film plays an important role in retelling history. The film is perhaps more like these records of daily life than it is like the documents that record great events. Motion pictures provide an experience to feel first-hand what it is like to put yourself in the shoes of certain situations. The movie, 300, directed by Zack Snyder, had quite a box office success, grossing over $450 million. The results 300 earned was not only because it was based on a graphic novel, but surely some people were interested in the historical significance. The movie and the graphic novel keep the same violent nature of the battle with Persia, yet display it in a manner that is more appealing over a simple retelling of the historic battle. 300, in short, is the battle of Thermopylae. A war in which an alliance of Greek city-states went to war with the Persian King Xerxes. Even though movies are meant to be a source of entertainment, when combining historical events, they have an opportunity to be educational and inform about the occurrence.

Through the power of movie magic, they can recreate a battle that happened in 479 B.C., a completely different time period, but produce it in 2007, and have no set end to people watching it. 300 is based on Frank Miller’s graphic novel and history. The graphic novel and the film are based on the last stand of King Leonidas and the 300 Spartans to defend the rear of Thermopylae as long as they can before their ultimate demise. From the opening scene, the viewer can sense that they are going back in time, becoming one living among Sparta. In a historical context, the battle between Xerxes and Greece at Thermopylae had more than 300 Spartans, as the film had shown, Athens took part by going after Xerxes army from the sea bringing down Persian forces. The film showed the duties Athens serves in the battle at Thermopylae is portrayed by a storm. Several of the ships are ruined, giving King Leonidas and his Spartans a fighting chance on the field to win the war. The film is about the strong 300, thus it would not have been as satisfying to the viewer knowing that the 300 Spartans had a much less dramatic role than show on the screen. People would rather watch 300 Spartans take on and brutally slaughter 20,000 Persians than an actual war. Even though some wide stretches are made in the historical context, the film is rather accurate in its delivery on Leonidas last stand against Xerxes. In the film, a hunchback dwarf reveals a path to Xerxes, causing betrayal towards Leonidas and the Spartans, leading them to their downfall. The Greek traitor is Ephialtes, Ephialtes showed the Persians a small path around the allied Greek position, for the reward of gold and status, subsequently leading them to be defeated at Thermopylae. The film accurately presents the events for the most part, aside from the physical characteristics of some, allowing 300 to to have more historical content than would otherwise be believed. Through their hardships, it inspires Greece to unite. The artistic style of the movie, which mostly used green screens, follows along with the action that is represented in the comic book version of it.

Although the general idea of the movie was inspired by history, there were still some discrepancies that were not factual. The true traitor Ephialtes, a shepard, was most likely not a disfigured hunchback. Miller chose to change Ephialtes' appearance to emphasize the eugenics that is introduced in the beginning of the film. This is underscored in the movie when Ephialtes tells King Leonidas that his family fled Sparta to avoid having to murder him, as it was policy in Sparta to murder babies with birth issues. In the movie, the soldiers were fighting practically naked without any real armor on their bodies to protect them. Real Spartans utilized body

armor. In history, all Spartan soldiers had plumes on their helmets. Yet in the movie, they “gave a plume to Leonidas, to make him stand out and identify him as a king” (Miller). A plume’s function was to make the soldier seem taller and scary, while giving a little bit of royal appearance. Other than that, plumes were not very functional. The movie shows a brave Queen Gorgo, who guides her husband on both matters, political and military. During the film, a Persian messenger offends the Queen after she speaks her part during a discussion. The Persian felt that the Queen, as a woman, should not speak about those matters. The depiction of Spartan women’s role is accurate. Actually, the producers of the movie (and the actors) stated they did not consult primary historical sources while filming. The writings of the Greek historian Herodotus, whose work was valuable but biased, was the inspiration.

Capturing enough true historical content while keeping it sufficiently engaging for an audience is a challenge. Though often criticised, 300 tries to please the viewers, mention enough history, and follow the comic book. The creative forces behind it took a lot of effort and displayed a movie that was going to be hard from the beginning.