

Synopsis

A swashbuckling action adventure 'The Man in the Iron Mask' reunites the legendary Three Musketeers to once again defend the throne of France. When the Musketeers join forces to rescue a mysterious masked prisoner in the infamous Bastille Prison, they reveal a long held secret that could end the King's reign and destroy their enduring alliance.

In a dual role, Leonardo DiCaprio stars as King Louis XIV and 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. The Three Musketeers are played by John Malkovich (Athos), Gerard Depardieu (Porthos) and Jeremy Irons (Aramis). Gahriel Byrne plays d'Artagnan, the famous Captain of the Musketeers.

*Director Randall Wallace
UK release date March 20, 1998
Certificate 12
Running time 132 mins*

History Now and Then

When Alexandre Dumas wrote the stories involving the Musketeers - Athos, Porthos, Aramis and d'Artagnan - there must have been something attractive about the period in which he set his stories. Dumas was looking for a time in history which might have reflected some of the concerns of his own time. He was also looking for stories which would make 'ripping yarns'.

- *Is this the same for historians and historical novelists today? Are the periods and subjects that they study simply chosen because they themselves are interested in them or do they have a relevance? Perhaps an 'echo' of what is happening in the world today!*
- *What about your history studies? Why do you think you are studying the periods in history that you are?*

TASKS

Look at some of the historical novels that are popular at the moment, for example the Sharpe series. How do the periods that they are set in relate to us now? Why should these periods of time have been chosen and not others? Why do we relate to them? What does our choice about the past tell us about now?

Why do you think the director, Randall Wallace, chose to make 'The Man in the Iron Mask' at this time? What values does it show?

FRANCE DURING THE AGE OF DUMAS

During the nineteenth century France underwent many political changes. Napoleon ruled as Emperor from 1804 until his eventual defeat at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. As a reaction to Napoleon's rule, the Bourbon monarchy was re-established by the victorious allied powers, principally Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria. Consequently Louis XVIII ruled from 1814-1824, and his brother Charles X from 1824-1830. Revolution in France in 1830 forced Charles to abdicate, and in the August of the same year Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans,

was persuaded by the liberal monarchists become King of France.

In 1848, revolution again spread throughout France and the rest of Europe. In the February of 1848 Louis Philippe abdicated and France, once again, declared itself a republic. In the December of 1848 Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected President by an overwhelming majority. At the end of 1851 Louis Napoleon carried out a successful coup d'état to extend the power of the presidency declaring himself Napoleon III, Emperor of France, a position he held until 1870 when he was forced to abdicate in favour of a new republic.

TASK

Looking at this brief history of France at the beginning of the nineteenth century are there any themes which might have influenced the story 'The Man in the Iron Mask'? When you have seen the film identify how many of these themes have come through onto the screen. Has the new film version taken on themes which are relevant to the 1990s?

Popular Film - Popular History

POPULAR FILM

Using your knowledge of films make a list of the elements which make a film popular.

- *When you have seen 'The Man in the Iron Mask' make a list of the elements of the film.*
- *Study and compare both lists noting any items common to both lists.*

Now consider the following:

- *What do you think are the qualities which could make 'The Man in the Iron Mask' a box-office success?*
- *The need to make money at the box office will affect the way a novel or book is adapted for the screen. Write down the ways you think Randall Wallace, as the screenwriter, might have achieved this in 'The Man in the Iron Mask'.*

POPULAR HISTORY

Visit a book shop and look in the history section. What are the main historical periods covered by the books on sale? Are there any particular people who are dealt with by some of the books? What type of people are they? What other aspects of history are covered by the books on sale? What does the range of books in the history section tell us about what is popular in history for the average book buyer? Write down your findings.

- *Compare the two sections - popular film and popular history. Are there any similarities?*

WHY ANOTHER VERSION?

'The Man in the Iron Mask' has been filmed several times before. You may have seen one or more of these versions. In the light of the ideas you have considered during the previous activities, why do you think a filmmaker would make a new version in the 1990s?

After Seeing the Film

- *Was there anything which surprised you about the film?*
- *Was there anything which annoyed you about the film?*
- *Did the casting of the three Musketeers and d'Artagnan reinforce your pre-conceptions of these characters?*
- *Why do you think Randall Wallace changed the ending in the film from Dumas'?*
- *Did the ending add more excitement to watching the film?*

CHARACTERISATION 1

In a novel a writer builds up characters through dialogue, actions, descriptions, and thoughts and feelings through interior monologue.

- *Make a list of the ways the director and screenwriter, Randall Wallace, builds up the characters in the film. Pool your ideas.*
- *Now distinguish between how the acting and the filming contribute to the way the characters are presented. Look closely at the characters of the Musketeers. How is each portrayed within the film? Is there one musketeer who is given more prominence than the others? If there is, why do you think that this is so?*

CHARACTERISATION 2

There are typical character types in many stories, some relying on stereotypes. We have certain expectations about these types: how they will behave, what will happen to them, their role in the story - depending on whether they are active or passive, sympathetic or unsympathetic and so on.

- *List the typical characteristics of the following, adding characters from films you seen and books you have read to each list:*

an active unsympathetic character (female)

an active unsympathetic character (male)

a passive sympathetic character (female)

a passive sympathetic character (male)

an active sympathetic character (female)

an active sympathetic character (male)

Working in pairs select the characters in the film ‘The Man in the Iron Mask’ and put them into categories as active, passive, good, evil and so on. Join another pair and compare your classifications. You may have found some characters hard to classify. If this is so, team up with another pair and compare your classifications and discuss what makes a particular character hard to classify.

- *Compare the characteristics of the characters. Are they typical heroes or victims? Do they conform to our expectations or surprise us?*
- *Choose two contrasting characters and look in more detail at the ways they are portrayed in the film. Think about character type, costumes, facial expressions, gestures, dialogue, attitudes and behaviour. Write down your findings in the table below. Compare and contrast these individual characters.*

Character	Character Type	Clothing	Facial expressions / gestures	Way of Speaking	Attitudes and Behaviour	Comments
Aramis						
Athos						
Porthos						
D'Artagnan						

In looking at the ways in which ‘The Man in the Iron Mask’ compares to other films we need to think about the ways in which historical characters are presented to us in different history books. Think back over some of the historical periods that you have studied recently. What people have been important? Have they been presented to you in same way as characters are presented in films?

A Mystery

On November 19, 1703 in the cemetery of St Paul in Paris, an unknown prisoner from the Bastille, Etienne do Junca, noted in the register of the prison that the dead person “*who was kept masked at all times and whose name is not spoken...*” *still masked with a mask of black velvet died this day at half past ten of the evening.*”

“Masked. “ *.. whose name is not spoken.* “ Two hundred and ninety-five years ago a mystery began. A mystery which to this day has not been solved but for which many possible solutions have been put forward. Who was this man who was secretly held in prison who could not be named? Was he important? What was his role in history? And what has been his role in history since his secret burial so many years ago? And why should his story, or a story about him, be the subject of a new film?

WORDS

The new film, as with Alexandre Dumas' novel, is titled 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. In the historical source we have used above, the mask is said to be made of 'black velvet'. How do we get from velvet to iron? **It's all a matter of words and their meanings.** At one point in history the mask was described as being made out of fur. In French, this word is 'vair'. A printer made a mistake and turned this into 'verre' the French for glass. In French 'verre' sounds like 'fer', the word for iron. Consequently, we have an iron mask - a long way from the original mask made of 'black velvet'.

Words can give us different ideas and different meanings. Let us now look at one French word which has two different meanings. 'Histoire' can mean history and also story, whilst the English word 'history' contains the word 'story'. Therefore, when we talk about 'The Man in the Iron Mask' are we talking about the following:

a story?

a history?

an historical story?

a story based on history?

a story set in a historical period?

- *What would you say are the differences between the five examples given above?*

TASKS

In the film, Aramis says to Athos: "You seek facts when you should be seeking the truth." How does this apply to the different examples given above? What would you say are the differences between facts and truth? How important is this distinction to historians?

Velvet, fur, glass and iron. The first might be closer to the **truth** but we now acknowledge it could be iron. Why do you think that we want to believe that the unknown man wore an iron mask and not a velvet or glass mask? How do these different descriptions give us different ideas about the mystery and the importance of the prisoner?

Behind the Mask

The most heated debate surrounding the story of 'The Man in the Iron Mask' is not what the mask was made of but who actually was **the man** in the mask. Since the middle of the eighteenth century people have argued over his true identity. Below are some of the candidates who have been proposed as the man **behind** the mask.

1. The Duke de Vendomois, the illegitimate son of Louis XIV and Louise de Ia Valliere.
2. Voltaire claimed that the candidate was Louis XIV's older brother.
3. The Duke of Monmouth (1649-1685), the illegitimate son of Charles II by Lucy Walters
4. Ercolo Antonio Matthioli, an Italian and secretary to the Duke of Mantua, who attempted to dupe Louis XIV and was subsequently imprisoned. Matthioli is a popular choice.
5. The son of Mazarin. chief minister of Louis XIII. and his queen. Anne of Austria.

6. The bastard son of Anne and the Duke of Buckingham.
7. Fouquet (1615-1680). A French statesman who was imprisoned by Louis XIV in the fortress of Pignerol.
8. Moliere (1622-1673). A great French playwright of comedy. (This is perhaps the most far-fetched theory which argues that Moliere had not died on stage in 1673 as was commonly believed but was jailed at the behest of the Jesuits whom he had offended. Moliere subsequently escaped.) The body buried in 1703 was that of an unknown man.
9. Eustache Dauger. It has been argued by some historians that Eustache Dauget was a minor courtier arrested in 1669 for his part in a conspiracy to overthrow Louis XIII who later served as Fouquet's valet at the prison of Pignerol. The mystery behind 'The Man in the Iron Mask' lies in attempting to establish who Eustache Dauger actually was.
10. In 1932 Maurice Duvivier identified Dauger as Eustache Dauger de Cavoye, the black sheep of a French noble family. (It has subsequently emerged that Dauger de Cavoye died in Paris in about 1683.)
11. In 1973 Marcel Pagnol suggested that Dauger's real name was James de Ia Cloche, Louis XIV's twin brother who had been brought up secretly in Jersey.
12. In 1987 Harry Thompson concluded that Dauger de Cavoye was Louis XIV's illegitimate half-brother.

Over one thousand candidates have been proposed as 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. In searching out his true identity the only facts that historians agree upon is that in 1703 a man died wearing a mask and that he was Eustache Dauger. However, no-one knows **who** Danger was and whether Danger **was** his real name. The mystery therefore lies in attempting to ascertain **who Dauger really was** and whether Danger was actually his real name.

Study the list of possible candidates.

- *Why do you think that Dumas chose the idea of Louis XIV'S brother? How does this add to the mystery and story of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'?*

The Film of the Book of the History

The film 'The Man in the Iron Mask' is based on Alexandre Dumas' novel. Dumas uses history as a backdrop to the events of his story. As history has been 'filtered' in this way, how useful is the final film to the historian?

We could say that the film brings the period 'alive' for the cinema-going audience. If the researchers have done their job well then the 'look' of the film should be accurate. What about the real characters in the film, Louis XIV, for example? Are we given realistic views of these characters or are we simply shown unrealistic characters to fit the needs of a story?

Here are two very short descriptions of real people that we encounter in the novel and in the film of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'.

THE REAL D'ARTAGNAN (?1615-1673)

Charles de Batz-Castelmore d'Artagnan was a Gascon who arrived in Paris in 1640. He enlisted in the King's service and became a lieutenant of the Royal Guard in 1651. Six years later d'Artagnan moved into the Musketeers and by 1667 he had become Captain of the Musketeers. In 1661 he was given the delicate task of arresting Fouquet, a minister of both Louis XIII and Louis XIV and in 1671 Lauzun, the captain of Louis XIV's bodyguard. In 1672 he was appointed acting Governor of Lille. D'Artagnan was killed in action the following year leaving two sons by a marriage which had ended by mutual consent in 1665.

LOUIS XIV (1638-1715)

Louis became King of France in 1643 at the age of five. He was the son of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria and during his minority (1643-1651) the government was carried on by his mother and her chief minister and lover, Cardinal Jules Mazarin. Between 1648 and 1653 some of the nobles rose in the rebellion known as the Fronde, which was suppressed, and Mazarin continued to control the government until his death in 1661. After Mazarin's death Louis acted as his own chief minister working with great energy taking all the important decisions upon himself. Louis was pious and conservative and presented himself throughout Europe as the model of royal absolutism. Popularly known as 'The Sun King', his reign had been the longest in European history and was a golden age for French art and literature.

- *What aspects of these two brief descriptions are used in the film of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'? What changes can you notice? Why do you think that these changes have taken place?*

TASKS

Write two letters, the first from the producer of the film justifying why 'The Man in the Iron Mask' could be seen as a historical film. The second should be a historian's letter explaining why historical films and novels pose problems for the student of history.

Story - History - Film

PART I

What are the differences between reading a novel, reading a history book and 'reading' a story from a film on the same subject? For example, how do we get our information about character from a novel and how do we get this information from a film? Is a character's description important in a history book or does this type of writing have a different emphasis? On average, how long does it take us to read a book compared to how long it takes us to watch a film? List as many differences as you can think of.

Reading a novel is a solitary experience. The images we form of the characters and events could well be different from those formed by a friend who has read the same book. A history book makes other demands upon us. Are the stories told by these different types of books the same?

When we go to the cinema it is usually in the company of other people who see on screen the same actors,

settings and locations as we do. The interpretations of what the cinema-going audience see will be similar. If the film we are watching has been adapted from a novel the audience are viewing the director's interpretation of the story. However, there is always the possibility that some of the audience will read what they see in a different way from that intended by the director. This will be the difference between a **preferred reading** and a **differential reading**. Can you think of any examples where a person might not read what they see in the preferred way?

- *Do you think that in history books the same thing happens? Think about history writing in Russia and Germany in the 1930s. How might a Communist or a Nazi view history? How would these two views come into conflict? With Dumas' 'The Man in the Iron Mask' might a Republican view the story differently to a Monarchist?*

Machiavelli noted that the populace based its judgement more on appearance than reality: **“for sight alone belongs to everyone, hut understanding to few.”**

Anyone could be forgiven for thinking it a fairly simple task to transfer one medium to another, that is from a novel to a film script. In a film, there are no lengthy descriptions of people and places to contend with. The camera acts as a universal eye showing us each character and location. We don't need to use our imaginations as we do in a novel.

In a book we occasionally have to retrace our steps to check which character is speaking. In a film, we know who is speaking at any given moment. Even if we can't see them we can recognise their voices. We can also gauge from their tone of voice what mood they are in.

PART 2

You have looked at the ways in which these different types of text differ. Can you spot the differences? Below there are three extracts describing 'The Man in the Iron Mask': one from Dumas' novel and two from a history book. What are the differences between the three? Compare these three descriptions with your visual image of what happened in the film. Write your own description of how you would portray 'The Man in the Iron Mask'.

Dumas' description of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'

"Do a bed of green serge, similar in all respects to the other beds in the Bastille, save it was newer, and under curtains half-drawn, reposed a young man. According to custom the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of the curfew, he was bound to extinguish his lamp, and we perceive how much he was favoured in being allowed to keep it burning even till then. Near the bed a large leathern armchair, with twisted legs, sustained his clothes. A little table without pens, books, paper or ink stood neglected in sadness near the window; while several plates, still unemptied showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his recent repast. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, face half-concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not cause any change of position; either he was waiting in expectation, or was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the armchair, and approached the bed with an evident mixture of interest and respect. The young man raised his head."

Voltaire's description of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'

"Some years after the death of Mazarin an event happened which was not to be paralleled and, what is no less strange, is unnoticed by all the historians. An unknown prisoner, unusual stature, young, of graceful and noble appearance, was sent in great secrecy to the Isle of Sainte-Marguerite in the sea of Provence. The prisoner wore a mask on the road, the chin of which had steel springs, which allowed him the freedom to eat with his mask on. Orders were given to kill him if he uncovered himself. He remained on the island until a trusted officer, named St Mars, Governor of Pignerol, was made Governor of the Bastille in 1690. He went to the Isle of Sainte-Marguerite and brought him to the Bastille with his mask on all the way. The Marquis de Louvois went to see him on that island before his departure, and spoke to him, without sitting down, in a manner which showed great respect. This stranger was brought to the Bastille, and lodged as well as he could be in that castle. He was refused nothing that he desired. His greatest liking was for linen of an extraordinary fineness and for lace; he played on the guitar. He had the very best of everything, and the Governor rarely sat down in his presence. An old physician of the Bastille, who had often attended this strange gentleman in his illnesses, stated that he never saw his face, though he had frequently examined his tongue and other parts of his body. He was admirably made said this doctor; his skin was rather brown; the very tone of his voice was interesting, never complaining of his situation, and never disclosing who he was."

Chevalier, the Major of the Bastille at a later date, confirmed the details of the death of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'

"The famous man in the mask, whose identity was never known...was treated with great distinction by Monsieur the Governor and was only seen by Monsieur de Rosarges, Major of the said castle, who had this task along; he was not at all ill, except for a few hours, and died rather suddenly. [He was] Interred at St Paul's on Tuesday, 20 November 1703 at four o'clock in the afternoon, under the name Marchierques: he was buried in a new white shroud which was given by the Governor, and practically everything that was found in his room was burnt, such as his entire bed; and including mattresses, tables, chairs and other utensils, reduced to dust and cinders, and thrown into the latrines. The rest was melted down, like silver copper, tin. This prisoner's room was scraped down to the heart of the stone, and whitewashed anew from top to bottom. The doors and the windows were burnt with the rest."

Reading Between the Lines

Analysing a passage from a novel can help you find out something about the way the story is written and the choices the author has made in creating that story. To adapt the text for another medium, for example, film, you must decide what choices a director might make in transforming the narrative into dialogue and images. Look at the opening paragraph of Dumas' 'The Man in the Iron Mask' and then proceed with the task below.

Opening paragraph from Alexandre Dumas' novel 'The Man in the Iron Mask'

CHAPTER I - Two Old Friends

Whilst every one at court was busily engaged upon his own affairs, a man mysteriously entered a house situated behind the Place de Grève. The principal entrance of this house was in the Place Baudoyer; it was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, enclosed in the Rue Saint-Jean by the shops of tool-makers, which protected it from prying looks, and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin. The man we have just alluded to walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword plainly revealed one who seemed in search of adventures; and, judging from his curling moustaches, his fine and smooth skin, which could be seen beneath his sombrero, it would not have been difficult to pronounce that the gallantry of his adventures was unquestionable. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by a servant armed to the teeth, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active and of an imposing carriage. She concealed beneath a rich toilette and the most exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de 'Enclos alone could have smiled at with impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule, than the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand."

TASKS

Underline the action.

Write down what you learn from the action. This might be about the characters, the setting, the atmosphere, previous events and so on.

Now write down what you have noticed about the way the story is written. Consider the following:

Through whose eyes is the story told? Does the story change pace? Look at the style of writing when dealing with actions, the settings and conversation. How does the writing style differ? What do you learn about the characters? How does the writer emphasise aspects of the story?

Stories

'The Man in the Iron Mask' is the third and last of Dumas' Musketeer novels. One must remember, however, that the story first appeared as a serial in a magazine. As the magazine wanted readers to buy the next issue, writers of serials, such as Dumas, would have to end each episode of the story with a cliff-hanger (a strong element of suspense making readers want to buy the subsequent magazine). In many ways this is not very different to a television series of programmes such as 'EastEnders' or 'Brookside'.

In thinking of soap operas and the ways in which they tell a story we need to bear in mind that they do not simply tell **one** story. In any one episode there might be three or four sub-plots.

- *Is 'The Man in the Iron Mask' simply about the identity of the person behind the mask or are there other stories involved? What are these other stories? How do they link with the main story about the royal twins? What do they add to this main story?*

TASKS

Consider adapting Dumas' novel 'The Man in the Iron Mask' for television. Bear in mind that you will want the audience to return to the programme, after a commercial break and **especially** for the following episodes. How would you divide your television script up into six episodes ending each with a cliff-hanger?

Imagine that you are a historian who has been asked to make a six part television series on a historical subject. By using a period of history that you have recently studied think about how you would divide it into six episodes. How could you make a cliffhanger at the end of each programme? In doing this, how would you have to alter the history to make an interesting series of programmes?

A comparison has been made between the film 'The Man in the Iron Mask' and soap operas. Go back to the historical period that you used in the previous task. How could you divide this up into a plot with sub-plots? How could you entwine the various plots together?

ASSIGNMENT

When creating stories with characters, settings, events with a beginning, middle and end do historians approach this in the same way as a novelist or a filmmaker? Do historians use facts to create narratives which the people of the time would not have seen?

Choose a scene from Dumas' novel 'The Man in the Iron Mask' that is **not** in the film and write this scene as a screenwriter. Why do you think the scene you have chosen was **not** in the film? Consider budgetary restraints on production costs and box-office figures and re-write your chosen scene or another scene **not** in the film. Discuss writing film script adaptations of novels comparing them with television scripts. How do they differ?

Further Reading

'The Man in the Iron Mask' by Alexandre Dumas (*Oxford University Press 1991*)

'The Man Behind the Iron Mask' by John Noone (*Alan Sutton Publishing 1994*)

'The Man in the Iron Mask' A Historical Detective Investigation by Harry Thompson (*Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1987*)

'A History of Modern France' Volume 2:1799-1871 by Alfred Cobban (*Penguin 1991*)

'Louis XIV' by Vincent Cronin (*Harvill Press 1996*)

'The Ancien Regime: French Society 1600-1750' by Pierre Goubert (*Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1973*)