but doing so critically can give us a glimpse of the way we take part in—are complicit in—writing the actual story implicit in our choice of counterfactuals.

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Feeling Like It Wasn't

RAE GREINER

IN "Is There a Problem with Historical Fiction (or with Scott's *Redgauntlet*)?"—an essay, as it happens, on Sir Walter Scott's great counterfactual novel—Harry E. Shaw calls on literary critics more fully to register "the remarkable variety of things history can do in novels, by short-circuiting the assumption that the representation of history in fiction is really always doing the same sort of work, or should be."[1] History might be a source of imaginative energy, a sort of launching pad for a book about timeless truths, as in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* ("ultimately about individual sacrifice and transcendence, not about the French Revolution in the way in which Scott's *Waverley* is about the Forty-Five"); or the past might function as "a pastoral," which is to say, as a field onto which authors project the concerns of their own times, as in *Romola* (depicting problems "in definitively Victorian terms and then project[ing them] back on to Renaissance Italy," where they would have been understood quite differently [176–77]). Or history, what Shaw calls "objective history," might be a work's actual subject (180). An historical novel of this last sort tells it like it was, or tries to. But even that novel is only doing so much, only making *a* use of history. Georg Lukács is therefore wrong in thinking that "a

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sufficiently dialectical mode of representation could capture everything" (Shaw 175). No one mode can capture all of even a highly delimited history at once.

A colleague later simplifies things. Some historical fiction is "really about history," he says, and some is not. Some historical fiction is, "in a substantial and significant way, about the past" (177–78). But most of it isn't, as when the past is a screen made to reflect the concerns of the present. Shaw wants to preserve an idea of history as something objectively "out there, confronting us in its otherness," because, he says, we need this sense of history to help us "to see beyond the immediacies of our place in an increasingly homogenized present" (179). Depending on who you are, this stance is either deeply antipresentist or the reverse. But Shaw wants to show that, in a novel like *Redgauntlet*, "the same representative historical character . . . would have been literally a different person sixty years before or sixty years after a given historical moment," because changed conditions alter what persons can be and mean (176). "What rescues the descendent of the Redgauntlets is not a romantic throwback to the heroic, dangerous fidelity of a Blondel," he writes, "but a change of historical context rendering Jacobite activity too old-fashioned to be a serious threat" (188). The times have changed, not the rebels, but that shift renders their fiery cause quaint and obsolete.

Catherine Gallagher's *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, though focused on depictions of what didn't happen, is also about the remarkable variety of things history can do. In novels, yes, but not only there, and not limited to fictional or narrative writing. It too explores the ways in which history can be "appl [ied] . . . to other purposes," can and wants to judge, to be "consequential to the world."[2] Being really about history, substantially about the past, is not, for many of the authors studied here, the aim. The book catalogues a remarkable variety of not truthfully descriptive, not objectively historical purposes to which history can be put: discovering better tactics for warfare; dreaming a better tomorrow; condemning action or inaction; avoiding pain. Not all such uses are laudable, politically or ethically. But sometimes, counterfactualizing sounds quite appealing: it "can contribute to historical knowledge" (26); it helps us to avoid being "mired in nostalgia for a time that never was"; it "aspire[s] to resurrect and redeem sidelined possibilities as guides for the future"; it involves "acts of retrieval and attempts to reanimate unrealized possibilities"; it "bring [s] the concept of justice into history" (50). And so on.

So I wonder: How ought or might counterfactual historical imagining matter to the aims of academic *literary* history—to our scholarship? It

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seems that matter it does not. Absent from Gallagher's book are examples of academic literary history that tell it like it wasn't. Novelists do it. Economic historians do it, as do military historians and amateur Civil War buffs.[3] In chapter one, Leibniz is shown doing it in order to prove the religious philosophical thesis that, of all possible worlds, the one we are in is best. George Orwell does it in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, which Gallagher calls a "long, future conjectural essay," to comment on the concepts of state belonging and national character under the conditions of empire (256). These are purposes strategic, imaginative, political, reformist, religious, ideological, and critical, purposes optimistic and despairing, self-congratulatory and finger-pointing. So: Why don't we do it? Did we ever? Is counterfactualism useful for each of these kinds of historical reimagining and cultural reform, but not for ours?

As a question of heuristics the simplest answer lies in an activity that the book describes again and again: how acts of fictionalizing, fiction-making, came to matter to the work of history during a long period of modernization characterized by a strong tendency to exclude all varieties of rhetoric, philosophy, and poetics from the historical endeavor. The unusualness of history writing making serious use of fictional techniques is reflected in the unusualness of some of Gallagher's key examples, which demonstrate the shared desire of writers of history and of fiction to represent not what was true but what was real, in the sense defined by Hayden White, to include "everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be" (147, emphasis original).[4] In Albion Tourgée's 1878 Civil War novel *A Fool's Errand*, counterfactualism is used in an ironic and metaphorical way to show that what really occurred is more "like" an imagined alternative than the reality that it actually is (Gallagher 109). Here counterfactualism is a mode best able to capture what it means to inhabit a world in which the South lost (true) but it doesn't *feel like it* (real). The historical fact of winning has resulted in a disappointment so acute it is as if reality has rendered that fact inconsequential, somehow wrong. This is one of the many complicated ways that counterfactualism embeds real history with literary effects: ontological reality in such instances requires description by way of fictional means. Here, too, counterfactualism produces distinctly literary characters, persons understood (in Gallagher's words) "not [as] the given data of history, fixed and prior to events, but . . . instead its contingent products" (165)—and so on. Perhaps as literary critics, studying the real, we have all that we need of those.

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Still, in this postfactual moment, the true looms large for me and for other of the contributors here. And so I take Gallagher's book to offer, among its many remarkable formal insights about the relationship of formal choices to narrative possibility—where formal decisions make certain kinds of characters, points of view, and worlds possible (and not possible)—an invitation to literary scholars to clarify the ways in which a given analytic protocol or method might make *a* use of history, thereby precluding others, and so to continue imagining what other uses of history might therefore remain, or become necessary, to us.

Notes

1. Shaw, "Is There a Problem with Historical Fiction (or with Scott's *Redgauntlet*)?", 174. All subsequent references are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, 5. All subsequent references are noted parenthetically in the text.
3. I am collapsing categories of counterfactual writing that Gallagher meticulously distinguishes, between (1) counterfactual histories, nonnarrative, analytic works prominently featuring counterfactual speculations (on war, economic crises, assassinations) and tending "to indicate multiple possibilities that went unrealized rather than to trace out single historical alternative trajectories in detail"; (2) alternate histories, which "describe one continuous sequence of departures from the historical record, thereby inventing a long counterfactual narrative with a correspondingly divergent fictional world, while drawing the dramatis personae exclusively from the actual historical record"; and (3) alternate history novels, which invent "alternative-historical trajectories" as well as fictional characters (3).
4. In his introduction to the forum on the relationship between fiction and history of which Shaw's essay is a part, White glosses Michel de Certeau's claim that history did not become a modern science because it held to representing only what was true. Fiction, by contrast, can represent the real. In "refusing the real . . . history refuses the *possible*," he says, and "it is precisely this refusal that prohibited history from becoming a *modern* science," which is characteristically "more interested in the real than in the true" (147, emphasis original). White distinguishes between the historian's interest in "what *might have* happened in the past, had circumstances or contingencies

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been different from what they actually were," and what is "typically conjured up in literary fictions set in a real past or present": the historian "may wish to identify what were the possible options for an agent acting in a situation offering real possibilities for action," he writes, but "these possibilities are quite different from other, 'unreal' possibilities that may have been imagined by the agent in question" (148, emphasis original). Gallagher's study shows counterfactual history to be a "modern scientific" variety in White's sense, in that unrealized possibility is treated as *the* historically significant phenomenon. Of contemplating, say, what Hitler didn't do, and why he didn't do it—invade Britain (as in *Redgauntlet*, an invasion that never happened)—Gallagher writes: "the question this poses for historians can only be answered by explicit counterfactual hypothesizing" (194). See White, "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality."

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"Is This Real?"

DEIDRE LYNCH

ONE salutary effect of encountering the often bizarre materials—Leibniz's possible worlds theory, war-games played in Prussian

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