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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military academies, books about the presidency of Jefferson Davis—that Catherine Gallagher has assembled in *Telling It Like It Wasn't* is that one obtains a better purchase on the deep weirdness that also informs normal realist novels. That weirdness is central to the realist tradition's historical fictions especially, by virtue of the peculiar manner in which they compound together fictional invention and referentiality and call on readers to traverse the ontological chasms between the two.

Like Elaine Freedgood in her recent work on the ubiquity of metalepsis, Gallagher equips her reader to recognize anew the strangeness of relationships between fictionality and factuality that we usually glide right by. Why don't we, as Freedgood has made students of the novel wonder, find it bizarre to encounter "fictional characters in factual places," such as Daniel Deronda when he is rowing on the Thames?[1] Such instances of breakdown between levels of narration have long since become part of the realist novel's business as usual, but Freedgood halts us in our tracks, inviting us to ponder, as we generally refrain from doing, whether, for instance, it is still the same, the existing Thames when its surface is being stirred up by the oars of a nonexistent being in a book. Freedgood's question about the boundedness (or lack thereof) and the identity (or lack thereof) of nineteenth-century novels' diegetic worlds is close kin to questions that Gallagher's materials prompt her to ask repeatedly. For instance, what principles of identity are we mobilizing when we look at a counterfactual Napoleon who has not retreated from Moscow or who has been victorious at Waterloo and assume that this is still *our* Napoleon? What principle of identity, Gallagher asks, citing the philosopher Bernard Williams's argument about how we parse identity with possibility, keeps "the different life story of the same individual from being read as the life story of a different individual?"[2] What kind of mental gymnastics do we undertake to preserve our hold on one story-world (the familiar one with Napoleon in it) while also shuttling between it and another (an unfamiliar one in which Napoleon's career of conquest never receives these checks)?

Literary scholars will learn a lot from this book about domains of inquiry in which we rarely participate: critical military history, for example, or the history of tort law as mobilized in affirmative action programs of the late twentieth-century United States. We thus learn that fiction and fictionality lead a wider social life in which they are also pivotal to those domains—despite the fact that practitioners of those fields call themselves social *scientists*. But Gallagher's readers also are supplied, especially in her asides and (in the case of those readers who slip inside the parallel

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universe that is found at the back of the book) in her endnotes, with materials that can teach them all over again what it means to read a realist novel. *Telling It Like It Wasn't* illuminates the gyrations we go through in order to let the novel's story unspool, in order to immerse ourselves in the experiences of the characters and in their understandings of what the facts (of the fiction) are. We learn in particular about the rules that we have so successfully mastered as to have forgotten them altogether.

I have been especially provoked by the many moments in this book when Gallagher reminds her audience of the general rules of historical fiction and those rules' continuing influence over even those writers she studies who are willing to play God and break with the given data of history. For my contribution to this roundtable I have made those moments central—meaning to use them to sketch quickly how this attention to how "it wasn't" can reenergize our encounters with the rather more mainstream history of historical fiction.

In Gallagher's second chapter, Sir Walter Scott comes up, as founder with his Waverley Novels (1814–32) of the generic template that will be adopted by one subset of the novelistic counterfactual narratives that emerge later in the nineteenth century. The alternative-history version of the historical novel, Gallagher explains, emulates Scott in setting "the narrative . . . at the time of the putative historical events, which interrupt the lives of the historical characters" (85), doing so while also redefining these events as the nexus from which its defining deviation from Our Timeline originates. The influence of the Waverley template means that in both the canonical form and its counterfactual cousin there is a story to be told—there is plot—because History with a capital H has come tyrannically to invade, as though abruptly surging out of another realm altogether, the normal life that the bulk of the fictional population will want to see restored. In historical fiction proper, our reading matter will be brought to a close by a conclusion that reasserts the value of the unchronicled, unchronicleable everyday, and that returns these normal persons—which is to say these fictional persons—to the obscurity from which they were thrust. (In this fiction's alternate history counterpart, as Gallagher outlines, reestablishing normality often entails both this and, in addition, the various contrivances through which the alternate timeline that branched away from the one defining our historical actuality is made to rejoin it once more.)

In mid-narrative, however, the historical novelist is bound to negotiate between opposing "aesthetic criteria of unpredictability and

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plausibility" (87). He or she has to tell it *like it was*, but has even so to do it in a way that suggests that things could very easily have been different. Scott's narration places readers inside Edward Waverley's head, and, so positioned, we momentarily test out how it would feel to believe—despite what we know about historical actuality—that our side might be about to be victorious. The historical novel, Gallagher explains, is already closely linked to "counterfactuality precisely through the multiple contingent turning points it contains" (87).

Another rule governs historical fiction in Gallagher's account: the fictional characters, she proposes, must not rise to the level of public importance that would enable them to effect changes in the historical record (164). Thus in one especially fine section of *Telling* Gallagher looks at counterfactual novels that involve time travel and proposes that their maintenance of that rule is tied up with the frequency with which they entertain the so-called Grandfather paradox—that familiar looping structure in which time travelers traveling backward have to repair the damage that they have done to the fabric of historical actuality so that their ancestors will still thrive and so that they themselves can get born. She also outlines how these fictions' compliance with that rule does further work, serving to close down the more radical possibilities of historical change and so "chastise" readers' desires for history as it wasn't (165).

This is one way the rules of historical fiction are preserved even in alternate-history novels that flamboyantly refuse to toe the line of the historical record. Conversely, though, there can also be some bending of those rules in works obedient to the demands of factuality and actuality, torsion that can help bring these same rules into heightened visibility. A good text to engage to see that bending in action is Scott's *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century*. As Scott's vehicle in 1824 for a retrospect on his decade-long practice of retelling it like it was and had to be, this novel is the most fictional of the historical fictions we call the Waverley Novels. *Most fictional* means in this instance most boisterously counterfactual: *Redgauntlet* culminates in a third Jacobite Rebellion that (had it been real) would have taken place in 1765. More precisely, it culminates in that counterfactual rebellion's failure to materialize.

Here, as the final sequence of *Redgauntlet* commences, is how things stand with one of the two fictional protagonists who staff this historical novel, a character known hitherto by the name of Darsie Latimer: "His station in society was changed from that of a wandering, unowned youth to the heir of a noble house possessed of such influence and

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such property that it seemed as if the progress or arrest of important events were likely to depend upon his resolution."[3] This sentence catches Darsie at the moment when, his true identity and birthright recovered, acknowledged now as Sir Arthur Darsie Redgauntlet, he appears to be on the verge of crossing the ontological divide between fictional character and historical personage. Since, in his newfound condition, this character commands the loyalty of five hundred men, his agency appears to have been scaled up. He operates now, he believes, though just for a time, in the sphere of collective rather than individual action.

As the narratologist Hilary Dannenberg observes, recognition plots like the one Scott mobilizes in *Redgauntlet* play out in a way that obliges readers of these works too to recognize the existence within a single narrative of competing story-worlds. The recognition plot thrusts its protagonist from one ontological constellation—the one he or she has considered actual—to another, alien one. Prompted by this line of inquiry, we might ask of Scott's hero a version of the question we asked of the alternate-history Napoleon: "Once placed in a new world, is this character recognizably the same as that of the other world"?[4]

A better analogy for Darsie's status, though, may be one *Redgauntlet* offers itself: it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the in-between state Darsie occupies at this moment resembles that permanently occupied by pretenders, those shadowy almost-ran historical figures who lurk in the shadows of many a historical fiction, all striving to compel the "world to acknowledge them, a challenge that parallels the novelist's own."[5] For the important event (to be advanced *or* "arrested") that Scott's narrator mentions in the passage above is the third Jacobite rebellion, which would, were it successful, turn Charles Edward Stuart, the particular royal pretender who (like History itself) keeps intruding into this fiction's diegetic world, into an acknowledged, legitimate Prince.

But that Jacobite rebellion of 1765 is, in the event, a nonevent. Nothing happens in *Redgauntlet*, and it is Scott's achievement to exhibit here the nothing that is happening. He stages that voiding of possibility in an idiom that deliberately calls attention to the ontological status of fiction, to how it represents a kind of play, a game without consequences. When the Hanoverian general who arrives on the scene in the novel's penultimate chapter hails the assembled Jacobites, he refers to "'your gathering together in this obscure corner, for a bear-baiting or a cock-fighting or whatever other amusement you may have intended'" (394). General Campbell pointedly omits, as Ian Duncan has observed, to recognize "the Jacobite conspirators as historical agents," an omission that

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ushers into being the state of affairs it assumes.[6] Henceforth, as even the elder Redgauntlet, Darsie's fanatical uncle, understands, their "'cause is lost for ever'"—yet again (397).

Astonished at the clemency Campbell exhibits as he relegates him and his co-conspirators to sub- or nonhistorical obscurity, Redgauntlet wonders out loud, "'Is this real?'" (396). Well, *it is*—the Hanoverian regime is sincere in its show of mercy. And yet in another sense *it is not*: as Scott brings down his fiction's curtain, he is arranging, I suspect, for that question to do double duty, slyly using it as well to ventriloquize the response of the naïve novel reader who hasn't mastered the navigation between frames of reference that his realist fiction requires, and needs some assurance that the answer is *no*. (No, neither Darsie Latimer nor Sir Arthur Darsie Redgauntlet ever lived. No, this Jacobite Rebellion of 1765 never happened.)

Is this real? In her earlier scholarship on the rise of fictionality as a defining feature of the novel, Gallagher demonstrated how charged that question could be—how much cultural work it took before realist verisimilitude could be accepted as a form of truth (so that the answer could be *yes and no*), and what kinds of reference realist fiction had to renounce and what corollary kinds it had to embrace for that to happen. The acuity and precision Gallagher models as she ponders in *Telling It Like It Wasn't* the conceptual category of the counterfactual are trained on a very different set of materials, works that (unlike *Tom Jones* or *Middlemarch* or even *Redgauntlet*) rarely receive attention in literature classrooms, and yet *Telling It Like It Wasn't* seems to me to extend this earlier work even so, and to brilliant effect. As I've aimed to demonstrate, by inviting us to track how writers have tracked what never happened (but might have, if only . . .), Gallagher now refines novel-readers' sense of history and fiction and of their opposition and intermingling.

Notes

1. Freedgood, "Fictional Settlements," 398.
2. Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't,* 12. All subsequent references are noted parenthetically in the text.
3. Scott, *Redgauntlet*, 334. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
4. I cite Hershinow's excellent application of Dannenberg's scheme to the Waverley Novels' generic ancestor, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones:*

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see her "When Experience Matters," 52. See also Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, 52.

5. On pretenders and historical fiction, the *locus classicus* is Maxwell, *The Historical Novel in Europe*: I quote 124.
6. Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 246.

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Counterfactual Literary Theory

NASSER MUFTI

THE occasion for this collection of responses to *Telling It Like It Wasn't* is a conference titled "Novel Theory." Given this conjuncture, it seems only obvious to pose the question: What does a counterfactual theory of the novel look like? Of course, there is no single theory of the novel, but there is a book and a thinker most closely associated with the phrase, "theory of the novel," and that is Georg Lukács. And while *Theory of the Novel* is the obvious text to revisit to counterfactually historicize and/or

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