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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theorize, it seems more worthwhile for the history of Europe's counterfactual historical imagination to turn to Lukács's other great text, one that features somewhat prominently in Gallagher's book—namely, *The Historical Novel*.

Doing so can be, as Gallagher puts it, "an exercise not only in imagining alternatives . . . but also in reflecting on the necessity of imagining alternatives."[1] If the counterfactual mode is invested in constructing possible historical worlds, then what kind of other possibilities of the historical novel come into view when we fictionalize its theorization in literary studies? How habituated are we to Lukács, and, specifically, Lukács's historicism? How might such an exercise, again to quote Gallagher, "deepen our perceptions of actuality by shadowing and estranging them?"[2] How might we deploy such an alternate literary theory to "strip our own [world] of its neutral, inert givenness [of how historical transitions happen] and open it to our judgment?"[3] It is this "givenness" of Lukács that I want to question here.

So, in the spirit of *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, or "Theorizing It Like It Wasn't," let me pose the question: What if C. L. R. James, and not Lukács, wrote *The Historical Novel*? What if James's great text *The Black Jacobins* was the blueprint for an alternate understanding of the historical novel and its ability to narrate historical transition? What if we looked not to Europe for our understanding of historical transition, but to the Caribbean? What if in *Marxism and Form* Frederic Jameson had devoted a chapter to James rather than Lukács? What if at this conference a keyword was "James" rather than Lukács?

At the outset, Lukács's and James's biographies and intellectual trajectories lend themselves to such an exercise. Both men were from the peripheries of an empire. Both of their texts were researched and written away from their homes (Lukács in Tashkent, James in London), and published within a year of each other. Both were close readers of Hegel. Both were adorers of British fiction. And both were discovered and embraced belatedly by the Anglophone academy. But more important, swapping these two thinkers is productive because the story Lukács tells in *The Historical Novel* is incomplete. And James, one might argue, completes it. The historical novel, Lukács tells us, is a child of the French Revolution. This revolution "made history a mass experience," and the historical novel helped create the conditions of possibility for imagining such an experience.[4] James teaches us that what was started in France in 1789 was completed in Haiti in 1804. So what of the children of the Haitian Revolution? What if readings of a novel

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like *Vanity Fair* (which James claimed to be more formative for him than Marx) could be about a revolution across the Atlantic? Or what if our model for the birth of the citizen-subject (and all that it entails) took its cue from slave rebellions rather than an emergent bourgeoisie?

Attending to this other half would arguably expand our sense of historical fiction, what the historical novel looks like, and what it is capable of. Take the protagonists of the classical historical novel, who are thoroughly formed by the social forces they are situated within. Far from middling, James's protagonists are closer to those of romance. For, as he tells us in *The Black Jacobins*, "men make history, and Toussaint made the history that he made because he was the man he was."[5] Toussaint "was self-contained, impenetrable and stern, with the habit and manner of the born aristocrat."[6] He would "ride 125 miles a day," "slept but two hours every night, and for days would be satisfied with two bananas and a glass of water."[7] Middling, Toussaint is not. So what might a historical novel look like when it is populated not by the realist characters Lukács privileges, but heroes like Toussaint?

What makes such an exercise counterfactual is that no such novel exists. And finding such novels is not the point. Rather, considering a radically different account of the historical novel, as fallacious as it might be, is productive because it forces us to theorize the limits of what we know, which is to say, what the Anglo-American academy has come to know and privilege.

Notes

1. Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, 71.
2. Gallagher, 15.
3. Gallagher, 15.
4. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 23.
5. James, *The Black Jacobins,* 91.
6. James, 147.
7. James, 250.

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The Weak Protagonism of Nations

PAUL K. SAINT-AMOUR

I want to begin my remarks by steaming, as a philatelist would a coveted stamp, a single word off the envelope of Catherine Gallagher's *Telling It Like It Wasn't*. The word occurs in the introduction, where Gallagher is establishing the boundaries of her subject by offering a sample counterfactual-historical premise: "If John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated in 1963 and had lived to be a two-term president, the war in Vietnam would have been over by 1968." The Kennedy premise, Gallagher goes on to say, "is not attempting to call the assassination into question or to imply that we should look into it more deeply; it is simply asserting that *but for* the assassination, history would likely have taken a different path. Insisting on this definition of 'historical counterfactual' at the outset should not only clarify the topic but also emphasize that the works under discussion are hinged onto the actual historical record, usually at a juncture that is widely recognized to have been both crucial and underdetermined."[1]

The word I want to lift up is *underdetermined*. Although it occurs only once in the book, it occupies an important role as one of two criteria for the alternate-history "nexus"—the hinge moment where a counterfactual work's narrated history forks away from Our Timeline along an invented Alternate Timeline. Such junctures, again, are "widely recognized to have been both crucial and underdetermined." *Crucial* as in decisive, critical, evoking (by way of Francis Bacon's notion of the *instantia crucis*) the fingerpost at a crossroads, indicating one path over the rest. *Underdetermined* as in not-overdetermined, lacking

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