

Historical Novels

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The room is dark. A subdued light emanates from an electrical battery. The doctor locks the door and tells his patient, a mute soldier, 'You will not leave this room until you are talking as well as you ever did; no, not before'. He inserts a tongue depressor into the patient's mouth to keep it open, and attaches electrodes to his pharynx. The initial application of electricity knocks the patient backwards, detaching the wires from the electrical battery. The doctor reattaches the wires and applies weaker doses of electricity, all the while exhorting the patient to speak, until eventually he produces a whisper. After more than ninety minutes of continuous effort and application of electricity, the patient becomes tired. The doctor walks him around the room to keep him awake. He prompts the patient to continue talking as he walks. Each whisper is hard-won. Every time the patient produces a sound, his neck muscles contract and his head violently jerks. He tries to escape more than once, but is unable to force the door open. At one point in the 'treatment', he breaks down in tears. The doctor continues to apply electricity until the patient can repeat vowels, letters of the alphabet, days of the week, months of the year and numbers. He continues to apply electricity until the patient can speak without stammering or going into spasms. As the spasms disappear from the patient's neck and jaw, his left arm develops a tremor. The doctor reapplies the electrodes and applies electricity to the arm until the tremor disappears, and then promptly reappears in the right arm. Before the tremor disappears altogether, it has to be chased from the left arm, right arm, left leg and right leg. The 'treatment' lasts four hours in all, before the patient is deemed cured and allowed to leave the room.

This is a true story. The 'treatment' was carried out in 1917 at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic in London by the Canadian neurologist Lewis Yealland (1884–1954); we know his patient only as Case A1. But there are two potential endings to this narrative. In the first version, the patient is pleased to be cured. He exclaims, 'Doctor, doctor, I am champion'. Yealland replies, 'You are a hero'. In the second version, the doctor asks, 'Are you not pleased to be cured?' The patient smiles. Yealland objects to the smile, and attaches an electrode to the side of the patient's

mouth. After a further dose of electricity, the patient does not smile again. Instead, he thanks the doctor and salutes him. The first ending is taken from a historical document, Yealland's medical text *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* (1918), and, so far as we know, accurately describes what happened in that electrical room. The second is taken from Pat Barker's historical novel *Regeneration* (1991), and the events which conclude this narrative almost certainly did not take place.

It is tempting to say simply that one of these stories is true and the other is not. Yealland participated in the events he describes, and wrote his account shortly after Case A1's 'treatment'. Barker was not alive during the First World War. Her version, written nearly seventy-five years after the Armistice, takes advantage of the novelist's licence to embroider and embellish. Yet it is not as easy as it first seems to draw the line between history and fiction. If parts of Barker's story spring from the novelist's imagination, other parts are demonstrably based on historical evidence. The story of Case A1's 'treatment' told in the first paragraph of this chapter could have been adapted from either Yealland's or Barker's text. Until the ending, these accounts are virtually identical in substance and in detail. Barker's account is neither wholly true nor wholly false. To further complicate matters, the integrity of this historical evidence is itself questionable. We have only Yealland's word that Case A1 ever existed, and he clearly recounted this case history to show that his form of treatment worked. Even if Yealland's account is entirely faithful to the facts as he remembered them, Case A1 might have viewed these events in a very different way. Indeed, Yealland's report of this soldier's gratitude following extended and painful electrical 'treatment' is best read sceptically: here the text seems to slip into overt propaganda. Yealland's text is a historical document, but we do not know whether it is true, and parts of it ring false.

This chapter reflects on the aims, methods and achievements of historical novels as mediums for approaching the past. A historical novel is one which 'has as its setting a period of history and [...] attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact'.¹ Consideration of similarities and differences between history and historical novels furthers our understanding of both forms. Historical novelists have an explicit licence to fictionalize which academic historians lack, but in other respects their practice is similar. Both conduct research, use evidence (albeit in very different ways) to support their claims to authentic representation of the past, and attempt to deepen understanding of past lives and events. Both select and interpret evidence, use imaginative reconstruction to obviate gaps or deficiencies in the historical record, and construct narratives which attribute specific meanings to the past. As illustrated by the similar yet divergent accounts of Case A1's 'treatment', it is sometimes difficult to draw hard-and-fast boundaries between history and historical fiction. Precisely because this boundary is permeable and sometimes difficult to police,

an exploration of the relationship between history and historical novels provokes complex questions about power, responsibility and authenticity, the construction of meaning, and the use of history to legitimate or challenge different versions of the past.²

History and the historical novel

In what does the difference between history and fiction reside? There are real and important differences between history and fiction, but these are not self-evident, and it is necessary to probe this boundary to fully appreciate the purposes and achievements of either form. History ‘stands for the search for some kind of truth about the past’, while fiction ‘has to do with such claims, descriptions, explanations’ which do not aspire to this kind of verifiable truth.³ This is not a division between objective fact and subjective interpretation. As Kevin Passmore shows elsewhere in this volume, the kind of historical objectivity to which early professional historians aspired is a mirage. There is no part of the research process which is free from selection, interpretation or the human perspective of the historian. History is never a matter of pure ‘fact’, and so this is not what separates history from the more overtly imaginative work of fiction.

There are further difficulties in drawing boundaries between history and fiction. Only fragments of the past survive in the form of evidence. The historian must knit these together into some kind of coherent shape, aware that large hunks will never be recovered, and that it is impossible to know for certain how the extant shards originally slotted together. Attempts at reconstruction are like trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle with no idea how many pieces the set originally contained, and only the haziest idea of what the picture is supposed to look like. Moreover, in organizing evidence into narratives which have a beginning, middle and an end, historians impose meaning and order on the chaos of potentially limitless evidence of past lives and events. This process involves implicit and explicit claims about causation (A led to B because of C) which can be argued, but never ultimately proved.⁴ Some literary scholars and postmodernist historians claim that because historians create narratives out of incomplete and contestable evidence, there is no real distinction between the knowledge claims of history and fiction: history cannot tell a verifiable ‘truth’; it is only one more story.⁵ Many historians accept that objectivity is not possible and narratives are never innocent, but reject this radical conclusion. We maintain there is a difference between history and fiction.

This difference lies in fidelity to the historical evidence. As a character invented by the novelist and historian Wallace Stegner (1909–93) states, a novelist is permitted freely to ‘invent within the logic of a situation’, but the historian is constrained ‘to invent within a body of inhibiting facts’.⁶ Different rules govern the use of evidence in histories and historical novels.

These rules centre on the degree to which it is permissible to deviate from the historical record, and accepted conventions for acknowledging the use of sources. Historians cannot provide definitive accounts of the past, but aim to write *valid* histories. They test hypotheses against available evidence, and revise their claims in the light of these findings. Historians must work within the limits imposed by the available evidence. Speculation is only permitted where there are gaps in the documentary record. Even then, conjectures must arise out of the available evidence and the historian must clearly signal the provisional status of such claims. This is achieved through the scholarly apparatus of footnotes and bibliography, which demonstrates adherence to the documentary record, and allows historical claims to be verified. In practice, historians sometimes unwittingly deviate from these professional standards. It is even arguable that disciplinary conventions such as use of the impersonal voice actually work to disguise interpretation as fact, and to conceal the provisional status of all histories.⁷ Yet these difficulties do not undermine the goal of treating evidence with integrity, and in an open manner. If scholars knowingly depart from these aims, they can no longer be described as historians.

‘Authenticity’, artificiality, and the author’s responsibility to the past

We might then ask a different question: what are the similarities between history and historical fiction? The historical novel is a hybrid form: it is fiction that also owes something to history. The fictional elements of historical novels make them ‘not-history’, but the historical elements also make them unlike other forms of fiction. Historical novelists often conduct substantial amounts of research. For example, Sarah Waters wrote a PhD thesis on historical fiction, and her own novels are meticulously researched. For *The Paying Guests* (2014), a crime story set in the 1920s, she consulted ‘newspapers, diaries, letters, maps, photographs’ and made extensive efforts to ‘get to grips with police procedure, legal process, forensics, fashion, cookery and housework’.⁸ The historical novelist is often ‘an accumulator and sifter and sorter of facts, dates and research’ as well as a storyteller in the more conventional sense.⁹

Historical novelists therefore operate somewhere in the space between absolute fidelity to the historical evidence and complete fabrication. However, there is no standard mode of negotiating the boundaries between fact and fiction. Ian McEwan, whose *Atonement* (2001) is set partly in the Second World War, categorically states that although the historical novelist ‘may resent his dependence on the written record, on memoirs and eyewitness accounts [...] there is no escape: Dunkirk or a wartime hospital can be novelistically realised, but they cannot be reinvented’.¹⁰ A marginally less

forensic approach is to invent only what *cannot* be known, as does Hilary Mantel: 'I will make up the thoughts of a man's heart, but I will not make up the colour of his drawing room wallpaper. I had much rather move the action to his study, where I know what colour the wallpaper was'.¹¹

A more overtly imaginative reconstruction is undertaken by Gaynor Arnold, whose *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) uses the fictional characters of Dorothea and Alfred Gibson to loosely reimagine the lives of Charles and Catherine Dickens. Arnold created new characters, family relationships, scenes and dialogue but nevertheless insists that she 'attempted to keep true to the essential natures of the two main protagonists as I have come to understand them'.¹² This is different order of fictionalization again from Robert Harris' counterfactual novel *Fatherland* (1992), which imagines a world in which Germany won the Second World War. (Counterfactual novels explore alternate histories, using historical events which never happened as the point of departure). Harris inserts into the text both genuine and fabricated historical documents relating to the Holocaust. Even here, he claims some kind of fidelity to the record: 'Where I have created documents, I have tried to do so on the basis of fact'.¹³ There are different degrees and kinds of fictionalization, and the admixture of history and fiction in any historical novel cannot be neatly quantified or disentangled.

This is especially evident in a novel such as *Regeneration*, which contains an unusually high proportion of fact to fiction. The novel explores the relationship between the poet Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) and the psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers (1864–1922) at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, where Sassoon was sent for psychological treatment following a highly publicized protest against the war. Other real-life figures feature in the novel, including the poets Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) and Robert Graves (1895–1985). Many of the patients treated in Barker's Craiglockhart are based on case studies in W.H.R. Rivers' works. The novel opens with the transcript of Sassoon's 'Soldier's Declaration', published in the *Times* in July 1917, and Barker directly cites or paraphrases numerous other historical sources, including memoirs, autobiographies and letters as well as psychiatric texts. One episode which seems highly contrived, when Sassoon helps Owen to redraft his famous poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917), did actually happen: a manuscript of the poem, with amendments in Sassoon's handwriting, is the basis for Barker's imagining of the conversation between the two men.

Like many other historical novelists, Barker professes a sense of responsibility towards the past. She has emphasized that 'it was always very important to me that I didn't change anything about the historical characters, that they actually thought and said what I've said they thought and did on a particular day'.¹⁴ Yet because Barker does not reference her sources in the same way as an academic historian, only a reader deeply immersed in the literature and history of the First World War could separate out fact and fiction in the novel. Barker instead adopts a common practice of historical novelists, and includes an 'Author's Note' at the end of the novel, to 'help the reader' understand 'what is historical and what is not'.¹⁵

This supplies readers with the necessary information to find out more about the novel's historical elements, and therefore the rudimentary tools to assess the validity of the author's interpretation of the events and people described.

The Author's Note usually briefly sets out some historical facts, discusses the degree of departure from the historical record and acknowledges specific primary or secondary sources. It serves as a partial replacement for the footnote in a work of academic history. Footnotes are not usually used in historical novels, partly because such intrusions would prevent immersion in the novel, but also because it is not always possible to draw the line between fact, fabrication and imaginative reconstruction. As Hilary Mantel points out, in her own work, full documentation would require a footnote in 'every line' because there is 'an actuating cause a line, half a line, behind anything I make up'.¹⁶ In the absence of full documentation, the Author's Note gestures towards the responsibilities of the historical novelist and tentatively suggests what is and is not permissible within the historical novel. It indicates that the author has invented, but within certain bounds; and a more reflective historical novelist can use it to acknowledge both the incompleteness of the historical record and the provisional status of her version of events, as 'a proposal, an offer' to the reader, rather than a definitive statement.¹⁷ The Author's Note simultaneously conveys the authenticity and the artificiality of the historical novel as a genre.¹⁸

The explicit authorial interjection of the Author's Note has another important function. It highlights that the novel is 'a cooperative effort, a joint venture between writer and reader'.¹⁹ The meaning of any text, fiction or non-fiction, is partially created by the reader's expectations, previous knowledge and mode of reading. A student who diligently reads the footnotes of a scholarly article has a deeper understanding of the author's intention and methods than one who scans it for 'facts'; a historian of the First World War responds to *Regeneration* very differently from a reader with no previous knowledge of the historical events related in the novel. The Author's Note claims authority through invoking the author's scholarly credentials, but it also admits and reinforces the reader's agency by assuming active reading strategies, including the possibility that the reader will want to undertake further research.²⁰ Historical novelists who use Author's Notes in this way demonstrate respect for the intelligence and discernment of their readers, who are assumed to be capable of understanding that the historical novel is a form of fiction.

Showing the workings and working in the gaps

Readers approach histories and historical novels with a set of assumptions that govern their responses to the text. These suppositions are rarely articulated, but formed out of inchoate beliefs about the historical discipline,

prior knowledge of the period or topic, and expectations attached to each form. In turn, authors make working assumptions about what readers already know or what they will expect. The reader of historical novels is often 'presumed to have some historical knowledge and therefore gains a certain power over the narrative to the extent that the novel cannot shock or challenge events'.²¹ For example, in a novel such as A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009), which traces the lives of several families between 1895 and 1919, the reader knows there cannot be a happy ending for all the boys approaching maturity in 1914. This knowledge shadows innocent Edwardian summers: the reader understands these events in a way denied to the fictional participants, as a prelude to tragedy. The effect of the historical novel often depends on this collusion between reader and author.

Yet historical novelists can also exploit the reader's apparent foreknowledge to confound expectations. Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) tells the story of the months preceding the execution of Anne Boleyn in May 1536 from the point of view of Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540), Henry VIII's chief minister. The story of Anne Boleyn's fall, packed with intrigue, romance and betrayal, has been endlessly retold in academic and popular histories, historical novels, television programmes and films. If British schoolchildren learn nothing else about Tudor history, they know that Anne Boleyn's name comes early in the sequence of Henry VIII's six wives. Readers open *Bring Up the Bodies* with the reasonable belief that there will be no major plot twists.

Mantel breaks this pact. The most genuinely shocking moment of *Bring Up the Bodies* occurs about halfway through, when Cromwell is disturbed at his work by a messenger announcing that the king is dead. This is a feint, we think: Henry VIII did not die in 1536, Mantel's Henry cannot be dead. But then Cromwell runs and sees the body; the great noblemen of England cluster round the corpse. Suspense is maintained for a few pages, until Cromwell notices that the king is breathing and sends for physicians. In the meantime, the reader has been jolted into an unexpected uncertainty. It is a clever trick on Mantel's part, but serves several serious purposes. Most immediately, it emphasizes the precariousness of Cromwell's own position, and the danger to his own life without the king's protection. It also, however, provokes awareness of how easily those familiar pasts might never have happened: with Henry's death in 1536, perhaps no sixteenth-century English Reformation and no first Elizabethan Age; certainly no childhood chant of '*Divorced, Beheaded, Died, Divorced, Beheaded, Survived*'. Suddenly, everything is flux. Mantel subverts the more usual method of the historical novelist, and instead of relying on the sense of inevitability to achieve her effects, emphasizes the contingent and provisional nature of history itself.

Mantel has described her territory as a historical novelist as the 'off-the-record area', the happenings 'on the back stair and the words behind a hand, that which cannot by its nature make its way onto the record'.²² Like many historical novelists, she works 'in the gaps of history, in the spaces between

knowledges, in the lacking texts, within the misunderstood codes'.²³ Where Mantel differs from many other historical novelists is in her belief that historical novels cannot be written in an 'unselfconscious manner [...] It seems to me we're best to show our workings, discuss our problems with the reader'.²⁴ *Bring Up the Bodies* is littered with asides on the problematic status of historical evidence, 'the silences of history, the erasures and the gaps'.²⁵ Mantel's account of Henry's 'death' imaginatively reconstructs the immediate aftermath of a jousting accident in which the king was injured in January 1536. In Mantel's version, Cromwell deliberately suppresses the truth about the seriousness of the accident; he emphasizes to those around him that a fiction must be maintained, that 'this never happened'. He destroys evidence relating to the king's injury, and reflects that in the future, it will only be known that 'on such a date, the king's horse stumbled'.²⁶

This is fiction, but it is also a warning about the process of historical research: we cannot trust the evidence, because records can be manipulated, expunged or mislaid.²⁷ Some things are never written down at all, and as Mantel repeatedly reminds us, there is much which cannot be revealed by a written document: the formal score sheet for a jousting tournament records touches on the body,

but the marks on paper do not tell you about the pain of a broken ankle or the efforts of a suffocating man not to vomit inside his helmet. As the combatants will always tell you, you really needed to see it, you had to be there.²⁸

Any knowledge of the past is a subjective reconstruction, even when based on the available evidence, because that evidence is itself always partial and open to interpretation. A historical novel always plays with the provisionality of the past, but few historical novelists 'show their workings' in quite the same way as Mantel. However, it is equally true that although most historians are quite aware of the limitations of different forms of evidence, and agree that there is an unavoidable element of subjective reconstruction in their histories, it is still relatively uncommon to discuss problems of the nature of historical knowledge outside the pages of specialist works on historiography and historical theory.

Safety or subversion?

Because historical novels are set in the past, they come with a ready-made sense of difference, of something which is strange and other. To this extent, 'the subversive potential of the form is innate within it at all points'.²⁹ Yet this potential is not always realized. Critics argue that all too often, historical novels regurgitate 'safe' versions of history. One variant of this critique is that readers seek out recognizable pasts, which confirm their preconceptions

about specific historical events, people or periods. A related argument is that historical novels often ignore the ‘different mindsets, different morals, different values’ of past ages, and put forward a version of the past as no more than the present dressed up in mutton-sleeves and hoop-skirts.³⁰ These criticisms can be usefully illuminated by a discussion of responses to two novels set in the First World War: Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* (1993) and Barker’s *Regeneration*.

Birdsong is the story of a fictional character, Stephen Wraysford, at different points in his life before and during the First World War. An excerpt from one review, reproduced in the Vintage paperback edition, tells us that the novel tackles with ‘unusual power’ the ‘grim horrors of trench warfare, the murderous first day on the Somme, the loony schemes of the general staff, the pains and fears of ordinary men and their officers, the letters to and from home, the incomprehension of the war back home’.³¹ Readers’ reviews on Amazon echo this view of the novel as a painful, compelling and essentially accurate representation of a futile war.³² Historians of the myth and memory of the First World War argue this perception of authenticity is mistaken. Audiences primed by endless popular representations of the war confound easily assimilable images – ‘poets, men shot at dawn, horror, death, waste’ – with the definitive ‘truth’ of the war, to the exclusion of counter-narratives which might challenge these tropes. In this view, novels such as *Birdsong* tell readers nothing about history, but rather reflect and reinforce the ‘dominant myths of the culture that produced them’.³³

Different accusations are levelled at *Regeneration*. It is claimed that Barker’s book is loaded with ‘modern baggage’, tells us more about ‘1980s “counselling culture”’ than about the relationships of soldiers and psychiatrists in the First World War, and transposes ‘the authentic whingeing note of the 1990s’ onto wartime events.³⁴ Barker is viewed as projecting contemporary concerns onto her wartime protagonists. Yet it is possible to doubt *Regeneration*’s status as an absolutely faithful account of the events it describes, without accepting the substance of these criticisms. Siegfried Sassoon *did* embark on a well-publicized protest against the war in 1917; he *was* treated at Craiglockhart War Hospital by W.H.R. Rivers, a psychiatrist noted for his pioneering use of psychotherapeutic techniques; this relationship *did* cause both men to reappraise, in complex ways, their views on the legitimacy of the war.³⁵ All this is well documented. Barker tells a story which resonates with contemporary concerns about the traumatic consequences and ethical implications of war, but this is an act of selection – the story of Sassoon and Rivers, from all the other historical episodes which might be imaginatively reconstructed – as much as interpretation. The heart of the story is not a fabrication.

Far from anachronistically replicating present-day attitudes, for some audiences, historical novels open up alternative ways of viewing familiar episodes. *Regeneration* offered perspectives notably absent from most popular representations of the First World War available at the time of

its publication: it was set on the home front rather than in the trenches, it focused on the aftermath of battle rather than combat, and issues of class, gender and sexuality loom large for its characters. Barker writes *against*, as well as with, the clichés of First World War historical fiction. In doing so, she exploits the potential of the historical novel to provide a voice and a role for those marginalized in mainstream historical narratives, and therefore to challenge prevalent understandings of the past.³⁶ Barker did not take the lead in reinserting marginalized individuals and groups back into history: as her Author's Note demonstrates, she drew on the work of academic historians who had already charted this terrain. However, historical novelists are able to transmit new approaches to the past to wider audiences than academic historians, whose works are often read only by specialists. Moreover, the historical novelist's licence to fabricate allows Barker to do something which historians cannot: to make those silent in the historical records speak, even if imperfectly, and not with their own voices.

If the past survives into the present only in fragments, then these fragments disproportionately represent the lives and experiences of those with power. It is part of the condition of powerlessness to leave fewer traces on the world. Among marginalized groups, there is a hunger for knowledge of a past which must always remain incomplete, because the archive itself is near-empty. The fictional genealogies provided by historical novels are not substitutes for a documented past, but under such circumstances offer ways of imagining the past, of grounding an identity, which may not be readily available in other forms. This is a political rather than historical achievement, but then again, history itself is never neutral. Barker's political act is to invent a working-class officer, Billy Prior, who vocally challenges the class-based assumptions of early twentieth-century psychiatry in ways which few historians seem to have considered, or dared.³⁷ Along different lines but perhaps with similarly political intentions, Sarah Waters writes about past sexualities in ways which deny the ahistorical transposition of today's rigid sexual categorizations. This opens up the historical proliferation of different ways of being. Waters argues that historical fiction is most productive where it problematizes the very categories with which sex and gender are constructed.³⁸ Historical fiction can gesture towards the infinite potential of identities experienced in the past, and yet to be realized in the future.³⁹

Conclusion

There are important and real differences between history and fiction, but there is no clear and self-evident boundary between historical 'truth' and historical fiction. The professional historian has a responsibility to represent the past as faithfully as possible: to consult an array of available

evidence, to adjudicate between the claims of different sources, and to leave a trail of footnotes for other scholars to follow in assessing the validity of specific interpretations and arguments. The historical novelist can alter the past, invent new characters and imagine different endings to familiar stories. Within the confines of the form, this does not mean an irresponsible attitude to the past, but operation within looser constraints, according to less well-defined rules, with an overt licence to fictionalize which is forever denied to the professional historian, and without the requirement to verify specific facts or interpretations. Consequently, professional historians and historical novelists claim different kinds of authority for their versions of the past, and readers approach their texts in very different ways. It also means, however, that historical novelists perhaps operate most effectively when they exploit the gaps in the historical record, and offer interpretations of what can never be known for certain. Historical novels might replicate stereotypical views of the past, or dress up the present in old-fashioned clothes, but they can also fulfil an important political function in imagining dissident histories, or bringing alternative perspectives on the past to new audiences.

With this in mind, let us return to the scene of the electrical room in 1917. This time, we are not ghost witnesses present at the actual scene. Instead, imagine yourself reading Barker's disturbing account of the torture of this mute patient, horrified by the brutal exercise of medical power over a traumatized soldier. Now imagine yourself some years later, equipped with the training of the professional historian, reading Yealand's dispassionate explanation of his treatment methods, couched in the language of scientific objectivity. What does the historian make of each version of events? One is, at best, only partially true; the other is, at best, a partial and polemical description of what happened. But these narratives do not have to be taken in isolation. Barker puts flesh on Case A1's bones: she gives him a name and the possibility of agency, of sullen resistance rather than abject gratitude. These imagined possibilities underline the injustice of Case A1's treatment: but it is the historical document which reveals the depth of this powerlessness, in its revelation of the extreme limitations of a historical record that will never give up his name, far less what he thought as he lived, suffered and died. This is the most shocking truth, and it speaks to the value of historical novels as an adjunct to historical research. Case A1 and all the other silent millions of history deserve imaginative reconstructions of their pasts, which cannot be recovered; but even more, they demand that historians never stop trying to halt the slide into oblivion, to tell the stories which might be told.

Study Questions

- What is the role of selection and interpretation in history and in historical novels?
- Why does it matter that historical novelists are not required to 'show their workings' in the same ways as professional historians?
- Is it fair to say that professional historians are 'objective', but historical novelists are not?
- In what ways do the aims and achievements of historians and historical novelists differ, and in what ways are they the same?

Notes

- 1 'Historical Novel', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/267395/historical-novel>. Accessed 26 May 2015. For an alternative definition, see R. Lee, 'Defining the Genre', Historical Novel Society: <http://historicalnovelsociety.org/guides/defining-the-genre/>. Accessed 26 May 2015. There are many different types of historical novel. For reasons of space, this chapter concentrates on literary fiction by authors who perceive research as an important part of their remit as historical novelists.
- 2 For further discussion some of these problems in relation to the history and literature of 'shell-shock', see T. Loughran (2012) 'Shell Shock, Trauma, and the First World War: The Making of a Diagnosis and Its Histories', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67.
- 3 Adapted from B. Southgate (2009) *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited), p.190.
- 4 Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, pp. 32–3. For an extended discussion of these issues, see M. Fulbrook (2002) *Historical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 53–73.
- 5 See K. Passmore (2010) 'Poststructuralism and History', in S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore (eds), *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic).
- 6 W. Stegner (1971) *Angle of Repose*. Quoted in Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, p. 38.
- 7 H. Sword (2012) *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press), pp. 39–40.
- 8 S. Waters (6 June 2015) 'I Wanted *The Paying Guests* to Be Sexy Without Being a Romp', *Guardian*, Review Supplement.

- 9 H. Mantel (2010) 'A Kind of Alchemy: Sarah O'Reilly Talks to Hilary Mantel', in H. Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (London: Fourth Estate) [1992], p. 4 [repaginated matter at end of novel].
- 10 I. McEwan (27 November 2006) 'An Inspiration, Yes', *Guardian*. Quoted in J. de Groot (2010) *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 172.
- 11 H. Mantel (17 November 2011) 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation', *Novel Approaches: From Academic History to Historical Fiction Conference*: <https://librconference.wordpress.com/2011/11/21/hilary-mantel-and-david-loades-in-discussion/>. Accessed 16 January 2016.
- 12 G. Arnold (2008) *Girl in a Blue Dress* (Birmingham: Tindal Street Press), Afterword.
- 13 R. Harris, *Fatherland* (1992). Quoted in de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 172.
- 14 P. Barker (2000) Interview in 'The Making of *Regeneration*', DVD extra, *Regeneration* (dir. Gilles Mackinnon, Artificial Eye). Quoted in de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 104.
- 15 P. Barker (1992) *Regeneration* (London: Penguin) [1991], p. 251.
- 16 Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation'.
- 17 H. Mantel (2013) *Bring Up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate) [2012], p. 483.
- 18 For an extended discussion of this issue, see de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 6–9.
- 19 Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, p. ix.
- 20 de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 4.
- 21 de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 8.
- 22 Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation'.
- 23 de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 182.
- 24 Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation'.
- 25 Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation'.
- 26 Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, p. 206 and p. 209.
- 27 Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, p. 481.
- 28 Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, pp. 194–5.
- 29 de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 4.
- 30 Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades in Conversation'.
- 31 Valerie Cunningham in *Country Life*, reproduced in S. Faulks (1994) *Birdsong* (London: Vintage), front matter.
- 32 D. Todman (2005) *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London and New York: Hambledon and London), p. 121.
- 33 Todman, *The Great War*, p. 160.
- 34 B. Shephard (2002) *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914–1994* (London: Pimlico), p. xx; B. Bond (2002) *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's*

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- 35 E. Showalter (1987) *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* (London: Virago), pp. 178–89.
 - 36 For an extended discussion of the dissonant space of the historical novel, see de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 139–82.
 - 37 Barker, *Regeneration*, pp. 96–7.
 - 38 L. Doan and S. Waters (2000) ‘Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History’, in D. Alderson and L. Anderson (eds), *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press).
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Further Reading

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