A Look Into The Historical Novel

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Abstract:

The historical novel— also referred to as 'historical fiction' in this paper— is a popular genre of literature and currently one of the rich areas for research within the fields of literature and literary criticism. Although historical novels are usually densely written and filled with factual details, they can effectively bring a historic period to life in engaging and memorable ways. Historical fiction has received so much attention over the years and it has been greatly discussed by scholars, yet one can hardly find a comprehensive definition for it that includes all the characteristics of the genre. This paper investigates the reasons behind this and analyzes some of the definitions of historical fiction in an attempt to form a working definition for the genre. It also studies whether research guarantees the success of a historical work of fiction or not. The paper also explains the purposes behind the production of historical fiction. Clearly, this genre has a long history in world literature also and to have a thorough understanding of it, one may need to look at its background and key practitioners as well. A section of this paper attempts to do that in detail. Besides all the difference historical fiction has made to the world of literature as well as the lives of its readers, several of its aspects have been criticized by scholars. Looking at the criticism is another way to better understand this particular type of narrative.

Keywords: Historical Novel, Historical Fiction, Novel, Sir Walter Scott, History, Fiction.

1. Introduction:

Giving something to read and also something to learn from, historical fiction can increase one's wisdom and insight. Readers not only acquire knowledge from this genre, but also realize what everything was like during a certain time period and perhaps achieve something that might be of use to them later in life. Historical fiction is now not just a local, regional phenomenon, but it has become, during the postmodern era, a transnational tool for exploring how we should think of nations and what a society should, or should not, look like.[1]

Jerome de Groot believes that historical fiction, having had an explosion of sales and popularity, is now in "robust health, critically, formally and economically."[2] However, when it comes to discuss the genre, it is always challenging to find an adequate detailed definition for it. Defining this type of novel only in terms of how many years ago or how many generations back the story is set will result in the formation of rather simplistic definitions.[3]

This paper is divided into a number of sections each explaining one aspect of historical fiction. It first refers to some of the scholarly definitions of the genre through comparing and contrasting them to one another. Such an analogy also indirectly explains what a novel should possess and how it should have been constructed to be regarded as a successful historical work. Another section of the paper throws light on how crucial it is for historical novelists to do research before writing their work since that can greatly help readers experience the past in a more effective and realistic way. A following section explains—besides entertainment— the various purposes historical fiction can serve such as recording history, promoting national causes and helping nations to be more recognized. Another section of the paper presents a historical background of historical fiction and attempts to bring to light how and when this kind of novel writing first emerged and how it developed. This section mentions some of the writers who first attempted the genre and contributed to its popularity throughout the years such as Sir Walter Scott, a writer often credited to have the paternal role in the formation of historical fiction. This section, apart from Scott, also mentions other English novelists and writers belonging to other nationalities. The final section of the paper embraces the criticism historical fiction has invited over the years. The genre's too many definitions as well as time restrictions has been criticized by several scholars. Besides, the argument whether historical novels can really record history the way it happened is also presented. The paper closes with a conclusion where the findings of are provided.

2. What is Historical Novel?

A historical novel usually concerns itself with periods in human history which are eventful. It also attempts to highlight a transitional period or a certain conflict that stands out among the others and is rich with stories. In his attempt to define this style of novel-writing, the literary critic J. P. Bonanno points out that a historical novel "is set during a period that predates the author's own time, often by a significant number of years."[4] Here, Bonanno does not mention any numbers and only writes "a significant number of years." Although this phrase gives novelists more freedom and less time-related restrictions, it can create ambiguity and bring to mind several explanations in terms of how many years ago a historical novel should go back.

Another literary critic who has come up with his own definition of historical fiction is Joyce G. Saricks. According to Saricks, the events recorded in a novel and the period during which the author lived play a significant role in referring to a novel as 'historical' or not. In *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction,* Saricks defines the historical fiction as follows and puts forward examples to explain his definition.

> Historical Fiction [is] a novel set in the past, before the author's lifetime or experience. Thus, novels about World War II might be considered Historical Fiction if the author were born after 1945, but Jane Austen's

[1] Susan C. Brantly, *The Historical Novel, Transnationalism, and the Postmodern Era* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.
[2] Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, Group, 2010), 1.
[3] Emily Sutherland, "Book reviews: The Historical Novel by Jerome de Groot," in *Transnational Literature*, v. 2, no 2 (May 2010).
[4] J. P. Bonanno, "Novels, historical," in *Encyclopedia of time: science, philosophy, theology, & culture*, ed. H. James Birx (California: Sage Publications, 2009), 875.

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> comedies of manners are not Historical Fiction, as she writes about the times in which she lived. Through its serious respect for historical accuracy and detail, Historical Fiction enhances the reader's knowledge of past events, lives, and customs.[5]

Like Bonanno, Saricks does not specify how many years should a novelist go back to create the plot of his novel. However, he makes it clear that for a work to be called 'historical,' a novelist must write about a period that predates his own lifetime. To Saricks, Jane Austen's novels—'although they enhance the reader's knowledge of past events, lives, and customs'— could not be regarded as examples of historical fiction because they record Austen's own period and experiences.

The Historical Novel Society has formed its own definition of historical fiction. According to this Society, historical works of fiction "must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events."[6] The second part of this definition supports what Saricks says about Austen's works. However, what distinguishes this definition from the ones presented above is that here there is mentioning of 'at least fifty years' as a time frame for historical novels. Contrary to what has been said above so far, literary critic Sara Johnson believes that a historical novel is a work which is "set before the middle of the last [20th] century… in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience."[7] This definition is clearly more specific than the others. To Sara, the defining element of a historical novel is a plot that unfolds during the first five decades of the 20th century. This new time restriction proves once more that defining historical fiction is problematic and can be very controversial.

Another critic who has written about historical fiction is Lynda G. Adamson. In her preface to *World Historical Fiction*, Adamson provides what she describes as "the generally accepted definition of historical fiction." According to this definition, historical novels are about a period "at least 25 years before [they were] written." This new time frame set for historical novels illuminates the rich diversity of opinion on this type of narrative. It is noteworthy that Adamson believes that her definition is no longer "viable" and announces that "if the setting is in a time earlier than that with which the reader is familiar, it [the product] is historical fiction."[8]

In his introduction to *Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales* published in 1902, Jonathan Nield closely looks at historical fiction and sheds light on various concerns related to it. Nield himself writes that he is not sure historical fiction can be defined or not. However, he says that while some critics refuse to apply the description "historical" to any novel which highlights figures and events contemporaneous with the author, others argue that any novel "based upon its authors own youthful experiences" can be regarded as "historical". Through Nield's work, one realizes that to some critics—Nield does not mention any names— any list of historical fiction must include the 1914-1918 period since that is "one of the most memorable [periods] in the world's history."[9]

[5] Joyce G. Saricks, *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 291.
[6] Quoted by Rob Walters in *Margaret Thatcher and Dorothy Hodgkin: Political Chemistry*, (New York: Satin, 2014), 18.
[7] Sarah L. Johnson, *Historical Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2005), 1.
[8] Lynda G. Adamson, *World Historical Fiction, An Annotated Guide to Novels for Adults and Young Adults* (Arizona, Oryx Press, 1999), 11.
[9] Jonathan Nield, "The Historical Novel: Types and Definitions," in *Library Review*, v. 2 no. 4, (Spring 1929), 209-13.

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3. Researching Historical Fiction

Writing a historical novel can be a tricky experience. Any novelist must pay close attention to the authenticity of his work and make it historical in the right sense of the word. This is achieved through extensive research by the author. Writing historical fiction based only on one's imagination would result in the creation of what one rather finds in history books not literature. It is the skillful combination of these two which secures the production of successful historical novels. J. P. Bonanno explains the importance of research in this field and states that historical novels should involve substantial research by the author concerning the details of the period presented in the narrative.[10]

Hannah Kohler, author of a historical novel called *Catspaw,* offers some advice to anyone writing their own historical fiction. Kohler states that while she was writing her novel, she spent much of her time in the British Library where she was surrounded by many historical collections and she constantly borrowed real information from them. Kohler thinks that going back to historical sources—whether they are memoirs, diaries, photographs, etc.—would help the novelist with plot ideas, inspire him with character voices and assist him visualize life as it was during the period he writes about. However, Kohler warns that research could sometimes delay writing, so a novelist should engage in research only when it can help him "create an authentic rendering of the past."[11] Furthermore, Angela Breidenbach, who is a bestselling author, also encourages research while writing historical fiction. Breidenbach says that if a novelist does not fact-check dates, places, names, etc. and gets them wrong in his narrative, he would later get notes from readers who do know those details and suddenly the work becomes a suspect.[12]

Sometimes, historical novelists provide an explanatory note at the end of their work to show that they have done research. In that note, they usually explain their engagement with the period in question whether it is through schooling or their own reading and research. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) — sometimes considered as the first commonly defined historical novel— could be a good example of this. Scott's extensive notes at the end of *Waverly* include ballads and poetry, political occurrences, biography, culture and customs, classical learning, sword making, and accounts of actual events. Much of this material is written by Scott himself but he also cites various authorities and sources to make his points sound. Scott claims that his work is educational and well-versed in actual events and eye-witness accounts.[13] He also writes— in the General Preface to the 1829 edition of the novel— that he talked to many veterans about their experiences before he wrote the novel. Scott writes:

> I had been a good deal in the Highlands at a time when they were much less accessible and much less visited then they have been of late years, and was acquainted with many of the old warriors of 1745, who were, like most veterans, easily induced to fight their battles over again for the benefit of a willing listener like myself.[14]

[10] J. P. Bonanno, "Novels, historical," in *Encyclopedia of time: science, philosophy, theology, & culture*, ed. H. James Birx (California: Sage Publications, 2009), 875.
[11] Hannah Kohler, "How to research a historical novel," Pan Macmillan Website <https://www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/literary/research-historical-novel-fiction-1960> (Accessed 15 March 2017)
[12] Angela Breidenbach, "Researching Your Historical Novel," The Steve Laube Agency website < https://stevelaube.com/researching-historical-novel/> (Accessed 25 April 2017)
[13] Groot, *The Historical Novel,* 7.
[14] Quoted by William Chambers and Robert Chambers in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal,* v.1, no. 1-52, (Edinburgh, 1833), 7.

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4. The Purpose of Historical Fiction

Historical novels can provide great enjoyment for all the historical facts and fictional stories— among other things— they share with their readers. However, the purpose of this type of novel-writing extends beyond pure entertainment. Historical novelists often mean to use their narratives to deliver certain kinds of messages to their readers, nations, and/or even the world, promote a cause or ideology, and make people familiar with their own or other's histories. For instance, Henryk Sienkiewicz's historical novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero* (1895) has a powerful, implicit Christian message to a society where Christians suffer at the hands of the Roman authorities.[15]

Unfolding the significant purpose of historical fiction, Jerome de Groot believes that writers can use this genre to "raise crucial questions about key literary concepts, fact and fiction, identity, history, reading and writing."[16] Taking history as an instance, one can think of many Victorian novels that record not only the history of England but parts of Europe as well, show what life was like during Victorian era and also narrate historic events that happened back then. Charles Dickens's historical novels, namely *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rouge* are good examples of this.

In his book entitled *On the Historical Novel,* Alessandro Manzoni uses a metaphor to explain the purpose of historical fiction stating that the historical novelist is required to give "not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history."[17] In this sense, the combination of history and literature serves a great purpose that is giving readers a chance to relive the past. Sarah Waters agrees with this statement about historical fiction and states that this type of narrative reminds readers of their historical particularity and simultaneity and requires an active response as well as a sense of otherness at the time of reading. That is why, Waters argues, one has to be reminded that the present moment is temporary and historical fiction, in Waters' words, "at its best can remind us of that".[18] Joyce G. Saricks also points out that the purpose of the historical novel is "bring[ing] history to life in novel form."[19]

It goes without saying that historical novels have a period from history as their setting; that is why, they can convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity to the historical facts- although in some cases this fidelity is only apparent. Thus, one can argue that historical fiction functions like a portal through which readers of various societies and time periods can enter a new realm of life and past experiences. Historical novels can also explore major historical events and personages to show how past generations responded to their surrounding environments. For all these contributions, Jerome de Groot believes that the popularity of novels set in the past is rightly justified and historical novels deserve even more serious attention. Groot supports his claim through commenting on the role of the historian. He writes:

> History is other, and the present familiar. The historian's job is often to explain the transition between these states. The historical novelist similarly explores the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar.[20]

Groot also supports the idea that historical fiction can promote a nation's various causes. He argues that this genre can "consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention."[21] Furthermore, Neil Levine thinks that historical fiction can contribute greatly not only to a nation's history, but also to bearing the cultural heritage and sensibilities of a nation. For instance, in *Notre-Dame de Paris*

[15] Bonanno, *Novels, historical,* 2009.
[16] Groot, *The Historical Novel*, i.
[17] Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*, tans. Sandra Bermann (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 67-68
[18] Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Something new but a bit startling; Sara Waters and the historical novel* (London, Continuum, 2013), 269-287.
[19] Saricks, *The Readers' Advisory*, 291.
[20] Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 3.
[21] Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 2.

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(1831) (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in English), Victor Hugo re-creates an atmosphere of vivid, colourful, and intense 15th-century life and he also associates with it a plea to preserve the Gothic architecture. This work also led to the establishment of the *Monuments Historiques* which is a French governmental foundation that works to protect the historic places.[22]

In addition to evoking the atmosphere of a precise period in a nation's history, historical fiction also examines how a nation transforms from one state into another socially and politically as well. This could be exemplified by Honoré de Balzac's works where Balzac presents a panorama of post-Napoleonic French life.[23] Hussein Arif's novels—*Shar -The City* in English and *Helana- The Nest* in English— are two other good examples to support this claim. Those two novels record the eventful periods of the second half of the 20th century and show and how the Kurds fought and sacrificed their lives to secure their freedom and prosperity. In those works, Arif successfully brings to light several different phases of the history of the Kurds and lets the new Kurdish generations of the nation's social and political progression.

5. First Attempts at Historical Fiction

It is evident that historical fiction is not something new in world literature. It has a long tradition that goes back to 14th century when *Water Margin* by Shi Nai'an first came out in China. Using John Saricks' definition as a touchstone—"a [historical] novel [is] set in the past, before the author's lifetime or experience"— one can call Nai'an's work historical because it narrates the outlaws of the 12th century.[24] Being "very fond of writing novels about people and places of the past," the Greek writers also practiced this genre. For instance, The Iliad, although generally regarded as a work of epic poetry, has the characteristics of historical fiction as well for that fact that it revolves around several historic events such as the Trojan War, the ten-year siege of the city of Troy, and the battles between King Agamemnon and the warrior Achilles.[25] In Europe; however, the historical novel became widely popular during the 19th century Romantic period. The novelist who hugely advanced this genre in this part of the world was Sir Walter Scott who is often regarded as the father of historical fiction. Scott helped historical fiction rise to prominence in the 19th century as a kind of reaction against Enlightenment.[26] Although Scott's role in the development and popularity of this genre is vital, J. A. Cuddon argues that the first historical novel is said to have come from a French writer assumed to be Madame de La Fayette. Lafayette wrote a novel entitled *La Princesse de Clèves* which was published in 1678. Almost all the characters in La Fayette's work- except the heroine- are real historical figures. Cuddon thinks this French work was so influential that the whole genre of historical fiction "appears to have developed" from *La Princesse de Clèves*, "and then via the Gothic novel."[27]

Another important point to mention is that throughout the 19th century, what is now referred to as the "Historical Novel" was often problematically and pejoratively described as "Historical Romance". According to Jonathan Nield, this type of fiction "was generically flexible…and its subject matter was not worthy of the rationalist and civilising ideas associated with the high realist novel."[28] It is worth noting that over the course of various historical periods, this type of novel has contributed greatly to the lives of the people, and recorded the defining events of their lives; however, the popularity of this genre reached its peak during the Victorian Age in English Literature. John Bowen believes that the historical novel is "By rights… one of the glories of Victorian age." He even goes on to say that except the Brontë sisters, every other Victorian novelist has made at least one attempt on this type of novel. According to Bowen, the

[22] Levine, Neil. "The Book and the Building: Hugo's Theory of Architecture and Labrouste's Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève," in *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth Century French Architecture*, Robin Middleton, ed. (London, 1982), 61.
[23] D. R. Haggis, "Scott, Balzac, and the Historical Novel as Social and Political Analysis: *Waverley* and *Les Chouans*" in *The Modern Language Review*, v. 68, no. 1 (Modern Humanities Research Association, Jan., 1973), 51-68.
[24] Andrew H. Plaks, *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) 210.
[25] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 27.
[26] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Boston: Beakon Press, 1963), 20.
[27] J. A. Cuddon *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books: 1999), 383.
[28] Jonathan Nield, *A Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1902), 97.

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novelists who produced historical fiction do not only include the great names such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Thomas Hardy, but other less famous writers as well such as Anthony Trollope, George Gissing, Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle also recorded historical events in their fiction.[29] It is true that these names are also among the earliest practitioners of historical fiction but Georg Lukács still considers Sir Walter Scott as the first historical novelist who treated history differently and thought it was a suitable framework to help writers establish contemporary narratives. Lukács even argues that the "so-called historical novels of the seventeenth century do not meet the characteristics of the historical novel. To further explain this point, he claims that Scott did not write the first novel with a historical theme, but his novels introduced what he referred to as "the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters [was drawn] from the historical peculiarity of their age."[30] Lukács basically agrees that the 17th and 18th centuries witnessed the publication of novels with historical themes. Yet, to him, those medieval adaptations are described as rather "precursors" of the historical novel. In addition, he argues that these works have failed to explore the phenomenon of the historical novel; that is why he refuses to refer to them as historical in the proper sense of the word. Lukács also addresses; however critically, *Walpole's Castle of Otranto,* which is sometimes mentioned as the most famous "historical work" of the 18th century, and states that even such a work is only historical in terms of theme and costume. He writes:

> The so-called historical novels of the seventeenth century… are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume. Not only the psychology of the characters, but the manners depicted are entirely those of the writer's own day. And in the most famous "historical novel" of the eighteenth century, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, history is likewise treated as mere costumery.[31]

This again proves the defining role of Sir Walter Scott and other 19th century novelists who skillfully shaped the genre. Apart from Scott, who managed to write 27 historical novels over the course of his life, there were also some other contemporary writers who produced historical fiction in their own national literatures. Their works also played a significant role in the popularization of the historical novel in the early 19th century and afterwards. This would be best exemplified by the works of Honoré de Balzac, James Fenimore Cooper, and Leo Tolstoy. However, one feature that distinguished Scott from those writers was that Scott was hugely interested in the European Middle Ages and this influence is easily noticeable in *Ivanhoe* (1819) which encompasses a combination of fictional characters and actual historical events. This work by Scott records the chivalry of the 17th century of England greatly and it contributed to the renewal of the popular interest in the Middle Ages during the 19th century.[32]

[29] John Bowen, "The Historical Novel," in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, ed. (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 244.
[30] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 19.
[31] Ibid, 19.
[32] Richard French, "The Religion of Sir Walter Scott, "in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, v. 2, no. 1, (Summer, 1964): 32–44.

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6. Criticizing Historical Fiction

Despite all the effect historical fiction has left on people's lives, histories and nations over the years, it has not escaped criticism. There are several aspects of the genre which have been criticized by scholars and critics. The first aspect might be the existence of too many definitions of the genre with contradicting aspects. The obvious definition that comes to mind is that historical fiction is simply "fiction set in the past;" however, "readers, authors, publishers, agents, and the press," have their own idea of the genre and define it differently. Sarah Johnson thinks that when researchers involve with the field of historical fiction, they soon realize that it is a field of "controversy and contradiction". Johnson also points out that even the broad definition that defines the genre as "fiction set in the past" invites criticism for two reasons. First, it does not answer the question of whose past are we talking about- the reader's or the author's. Second, it does not mention how far back a novel has to be set to be regarded as historical. This creates ambiguity because people belonging to various historical periods classify the exact same works under different genres. To support this claim, Johnson brings up the example of a reader born in the 1960s who considers novels set during the Second World War "suitably historical" while readers who remember the 1940s may disagree.[33]

Another aspect of historical fiction that could be criticized is that, to some critics, namely Jonathan Nield and Howard Fast, no matter how skillfully a historical novel is constructed, it is impossible for it to reproduce the details that have built up the individual and the general experiences of a society; thus, the work might deceive its readership. Jonathan Nield believes that even if a historical novelist can present his pictures very skillfully, still he is unable to record the facts the way they truly happened. This is why, when we read historical fiction, "we allow ourselves to be hoodwinked" because what we encounter is presented to us in "disjointed fashion." Nield writes:

> The spirit of a period is like the selfhood of a human being – something that cannot be handed on; try as we may, it is impossible for us to breathe the atmosphere of a bygone time, since all those thousand-and-one details which went to the building up of both individual and general experience, can never be reproduced. We consider (say) the eighteenth century from the purely Historical standpoint, and, while we do so, are under no delusion as to our limitations; we know that a few of the leading personages and events have been brought before us in a more or less disjointed fashion, and are perfectly aware that there is room for much discrepancy between the pictures so presented to us (be it with immense skill) and the actual facts as they took place in such and such a year.[34]

In addition, Howard Fast thinks that some historical novels only focus on fiction and fail to highlight the important facts that must be included in the narration. In an article published in 1950, Fast writes that although the era is "an era of many historical novels, few of them good and very few indeed which have more than a nodding acquaintance with fact."[35] Jerome de Groot also highlights another aspect of the historical fiction which has invited criticism and that is changing the historical facts when recorded in the novels. Groot states that historical fiction has an innate ability to trick its audience into being "knowingly misinformed, misled and duped".[36] Sarah Waters agrees with the views presented above and points out that sometimes historical novels even misrepresent history through fiction and the reason for this is that the novelists do not take history seriously and only use it to give their readers a feeling of nostalgia. Waters strongly opposes the misinterpretation of history in historical fiction and thinks that all the issues of authenticity, misrepresentation, reinvention and seriousness must be observed and tackled instead. Waters writes:

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[33] Sarah Johnson. *Defining the Genre: What Are the Rules for Historical Fiction?* Historical Novel Society website, https://historicalnovelsociety.org/guides/defining-the-genre-what-are-the-rules-for-historical-fiction/> (Accessed 25 Oct. 2017)
[34] Jonathan Nield, *A Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales*, (Missouri: E. Mathews, 1911), 24.
[35] Quoted in Sarah Johnson, *Defining the Genre,*
[36] Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 6.

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> I don't think novels should misrepresent history, unless it's for some obvious serious or playful purpose (though this suggests that we can represent history accurately – something I'm not sure we can do; in fact, I've always been fascinated by the ways in which historical fiction continually reinvents the past). I think we have a duty to take history seriously – not simply to use it as a backdrop or for the purposes of nostalgia.[37]

Despite all the criticism presented above, since Scott's time historical novels have never lost their appeal and they will continue to connect readers to the past and to the passage of time. The genre is increasingly studied on university curricula and discussed at research level; it is also an immensely popular form, with global audience reach. Whether we formally describe the books set in the past as "historical novels," or not- they will continue to function as a wide canvas upon which authors can work.

7. Conclusion

This paper addressed historical fiction and several other aspects related to it. Having looked at several definitions of the genre, it is clear that explaining historical fiction in a single definition is challenging. When it comes to setting a time period for historical novels, scholars have different opinions on how many years ago a novel should go back; however, they all agree in that a historical novel must be set in the past. It is also crucial for the historical novelist to do in-depth research before recording a historical period in his narrative. That ensures a realistic portrayal of the past and would engage readers in a more effective way. As for the purposes behind writing historical fiction, one can argue that this genre is more than sheer entertainment. It could be a great source of knowledge for readers about a time they have not lived in but now have a chance to go back to it and learn from it. Besides, historical fiction can serve other national purposes and play a vital role in the social and political development of a nation.

It is clear that historical fiction has a long history and started several centuries ago. Evidence suggests that the first attempts at the genre date back to 14th century in China but this style of novel writing emerged in English literature in the early decades of 19th century and reached its peak during Victorian period. The man usually accredited with the foundation of this genre is the Scottish historical novelist and historian Sir Walter Scott. Despite the greatness of historical fiction, several aspects of it deserve criticism. For example, the genre's too many definitions can be misleading to readers and result in classifying novels as historical which are basically not. Another aspect of historical fiction that has been criticized is that no matter how successfully a novel brings a past period to life, it still fails to show the events the way they happen the first time.

[37] Cited in Jerome de Groot, *Remaking History, the past in contemporary historical fictions*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 31.

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نظرة إلى الرواية التاريخية

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الملخص:

الرواية التأريخية- والمشار اليها ايضا ب "الخيال التأريخي" في هذه الورقة البحثية- هو نوع ادبي شائع هو حاليا من اغنى حقول البحث ضمن مجالات الأدب والنقد الأدبي. بالرغم من ان الروايات التأريخية تكتب عادة بصورة معقدة وتكون مليئة بالتفاصيل الواقعية، الا انها قادرة على ان تعيد فترة تأريخية الى الحياة بشكل مؤثر وبطرق جذابة وبارزة. على مدى السنوات، حظي الأدب التأريخي بالكثير من الأهتمام وتم مناقشته من قبل العديد من المختصين والباحثين، ومع هذا بالكاد يجد الواحد له تعريفا شاملا يضمن كافة خصائص هذا النوع الأدبي. هذه الورقة تبحث في الأسباب الكامنة وراء هذا النقص وتحلل بعض من تعريفات الخيال التأريخي كمحاولة لتكوين تعريف فعال لهذا النوع الأدبي. كما وتدرس امكانية كون البحث يضمن نجاح عمل خيالي تأريخي او لا. وكذلك تشرح الورقة المقاصد الكامنة وراء انتاج الخيال التأريخي. من الواضح أن هذا النوع الأدبي له ايضا تأريخ طويل في الأدب العالمي ومن اجل ان يكون للشخص فهم شامل له، قد يحتاج الى النظر الى خلفيته وكذلك الى الممارسين الأساسيين فيه. جزء من هذة الورقة البحثية تسعى للقيام بهذا بشكل مفصل. بالرغم من كل ذلك التغير الذي احدثه الخيال التأريخي في عالم الأدب وفي حياة القراء، فأن العديد من جوانبه تعرضت للأنتقاد من قبل المختصين. النظر الى هذا الأنتقاد هو طريقة اخرى للحصول على فهم افضل لهذا النوع المحدد من السرد.

الكلمات الرئيسية: رواية تاريخية، الخيال التاريخي، رواية، السير والتر سكوت، التاريخ, الخيال.

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