This book revisits György Lukács’s *The Historical Novel* (1937) by considering the historical novel of nineteenth-century Britain, France, and Italy, emphasising key authors such as Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac, and Alessandro Manzoni, and by discussing development of the historical novel in relation to drama early in the century and realism later. It also extends Lukács’s seminal work by discussing the historical novel of nineteenth-century Spain, Germany, and Russia, and the historical novel as it continued and changed into the Modernist period and throughout the twentieth century. The stated aims of the work are to set ‘historical fiction in relation to the development of historiography in general’ (1); ‘to restate the case for historical fiction as a major branch of literary fiction’ (2); and to challenge ‘the disciplinary compartmentalizing of literature and history, and the containment of both disciplines into particular national straight-jackets’ (2). The subject of this wide-ranging work is genre specific and comparatist, interdisciplinary and transnational, with potentially significant theoretical and practical implications for pedagogy and research of the novel, historiography, and history.

Part one, ‘The historical novel as genre and problem,’ begins with an exploration of the categories ‘history,’ ‘narrative,’ ‘the novel,’ and ‘romance.’ Such categorisation could provide the basis to better understand the genesis and development of the nineteenth-century historical novel. However, the terms remain vague, along with others such as ‘Romanticism.’ More particularly, in a work that aims to examine the relationship between historical fiction and historiography, with initial emphasis on the Romantic period in Britain, the inclusion of histories (e.g. Hume’s *History of England* [1754-61]), antiquarianism (e.g. by Percy, Ritson), narrative poetry (e.g. by Scott), national tales (e.g. by Edgeworth, Owenson), dramatisation (i.e. historical and otherwise), and other forms, upmarket and downmarket, would add to the discussion. In the following two chapters, important issues and topics common to criticism of the historical novel are addressed: chapter two, ‘History and fiction: the trials of separation and reunion,’ reconsiders the ‘how much history and how much fiction?’ question; chapter three, ‘The German *Sturm und Drang*, historical drama, and early romantic fiction,’ builds upon Lukács. In chapter four, ‘Scottish flowering: turbulence or Enlightenment?’, Hamnett justly locates Scott as a central figure in the development of the historical novel, but given the transnational connections pursued in later chapters it would be useful to more thoroughly relate the immediate and extended impact of the Waverley novels on the novel, publishing, criticism, and reading beyond Britain. Of more concern, to describe *Waverley* (1814) as a novel of ‘self-doubt’ (80) and ‘indignation’ (80) or ‘political intrigue and disguised identities’ (81) as ‘the life-blood of Scott’s fiction’ (81) seems a return to early-twentieth-century notions of Scott as a pure romancer or a genius with costumes and scenery. Similar issues occur in chapter five, ‘Romanticism and the historical novel.’ For example, Hamnett states, ‘The historical novel, with its emphasis on wild scenery and rebels, was ripe for further development by the Romantics’ (103). While Hamnett focuses primarily on the nineteenth

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century, describing the early history of the historical novel in this way disregards the complex historical, political, and sociological portrayals of society in novels during the fifty (or more) years before Scott (e.g. by Reeve, Lee, Porter). Further, the suggestion that the historical novel was developed by the ‘Romantics,’ a term that does not adequately describe Scott and other historical novelists of the period, may be questioned. The result of chapters four and five, then, seems at odds with contemporary criticism describing the Waverley novels (and the historical novel) as contributing to literary analysis of social transformation and modernisation from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. In chapter six, ‘The historians’ response to the historical novel,’ Hamnett directly addresses historiography. Short discussions of Augustin Thierry, Leopold von Ranke, Thomas Babington Macauley, Jules Michelet, and Thomas Carlyle consider the interplay of history and fiction. The final chapter of part one, ‘History and invention in the Italian question,’ continues with similarities, differences, and tensions between historiography and historical fiction by way of Manzoni.

Part two, ‘Internal contradictions and unstable form,’ begins with chapter eight, ‘Was the historical novel at mid-century in crisis?’, which returns to Lukács’s emphasis on the European crises of 1848 and his contention that the historical novel fades away thereafter. Discussion of the ‘serious’ historical novel opposed to historical romance – the former defined as morally and intellectually improving, the latter as merely entertaining – simplifies the changing socio-economic context of publishing, criticism, and reading, and obscures the fact that Scott, for example, wrote historical romances considered to be serious by some (i.e. critics, elites, reformers, etc.) and entertaining by many more (esp. downmarket audiences). According to Hamnett, the historical novel becomes compromised because of the incorporation of entertainment, which somehow comes as a result of Romantic emphasis on the imagination. Analysis of the many ways historical fiction balanced or deployed fact and fiction before, during, and after the Waverley novels (1814-31) for different audiences would be more valuable. Accordingly, book history would help better explain chronotopic literary production and adaptation in terms of material interests, diversified print markets, and the expansion of readerships throughout the century. In chapter nine, ‘Is there a way out? Two experiments in myth and history,’ readings of George Eliot’s Romola (1863) and Gustave Flaubert’s Salammbo (1862) outline problems central to the historical novel. Like chapter ten, ‘Benito Pérez Galdós and the novel of Spanish national identity,’ the following two chapters, ‘The struggle for identity and purpose in the Russian historical novel: from Pushkin to Tolstoy’ and ‘The German historical novel,’ are valuable, dealing with the historical novel in countries less often considered and fostering understanding of transnational literary connections. That being said, uneven emphasis throughout the book on the primary aim noted in the introduction – to set historical fiction in relation to the development of historiography – is evident. This is magnified in chapter thirteen, ‘Modernism and beyond,’ which attempts to cover the historical novel in the twentieth century (seemingly beyond the scope of this work)

3 See, for example, Anne H. Stevens, British Historical Fiction before Scott (New York: Palgrave Macillan, 2010).

with short sub-sections such as ‘The Historical Novel in the Wider World: Responses to Colonialism, Revolution, and the Problem of Independence.’

Hamnett re-emphasises the prevalence of the historical novel in nineteenth-century Europe and addresses key issues of the historical novel. However, the potentially more significant contributions to understanding of the historical novel, in relation to historiography and as a transnational form, through more focused attention to specific works in less often considered countries or by closer investigation of the period from 1848 to WWI, remain open for further development. Also, although (or because) a text-based study of genre and form, more extensive use of book history would help avoid unclear categories such as the ‘general reading public’ or the ‘serious historical novel’, ground the challenge to disciplinary compartmentalisation and national emphasis by tracing the material production, dissemination, and reception of historical novels (and histories) across borders, and enable the inclusion of downmarket forms, lesser-known novels, and non-canonical authors – where the problems and contradictions at the heart of the historical novel may be different, or further complicated. In short, this book covers much ground and usefully points the way to additional avenues of investigation, of the historical novel and historiography, in the nineteenth century as well as before and after, in Europe and elsewhere, by men and women, for a variety of audiences.

David Buchanan

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