

Dr Paul Wake  
Department of English  
Geoffrey Manton Building  
Rosamond St West  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Manchester  
M15 6LL

0161 247 4667  
p.wake@mmu.ac.uk

**Biographical Note:**

Paul Wake is a Reader in the Department of English Literature at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is author of *Conrad's Marlow: Narrative and Death in 'Youth,' Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance* (2007), and co-editor, with Simon Malpas, of *The Routledge Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory* (2013). He has written on literary representations of the Gunpowder Plot and is currently working on representations of war in contemporary historical fiction.

**Word count:** 6664 (excluding references)

## **‘Except in the case of historical fact’: History and the historical novel**

Paul Wake<sup>1</sup>

*Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*

If, as Beverley Southgate notes, the relationship between history and fiction has ‘always been close but problematic’ (2009, 1) then there are few places in which the problematics of this relationship manifest more clearly than the historical novel. As Alessandro Manzoni put it, the genre ‘calls for a combination that is contradictory to its subject matter and a division contrary to its form’ ([1850] 1986, 72). Concerned with the borderland space in which ‘history meets fiction’ (Southgate 2009), my reading of the historical novel is accompanied by the reading of another borderline case, that of popular narrative history, in the expectation that the proximity of these two modes of writing will allow insight into the workings of both. Drawing on Gérard Genette’s *Paratexts* (1997), my interpretation of the relation between history and historical fiction turns on notions of hospitality, connecting Genette’s work with that of Jacques Derrida in order to outline a model of generic intersection in which historical fiction appears as the malign guest of historiography, for whom the hospitality of historical writing necessarily entails hostility at the threshold. More precisely, I will argue that it is this hostility (hostipitality) that guarantees the integrity of the threshold dividing history and fiction while at the same time calling into question the assumptions underlying the status of fiction as guest and history as host.

**Keywords:** historical fiction; historiographic metafiction; hospitality; mimicry; narrative history; paratext

‘This book is a work of fiction and, except in the case of historical fact, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.’  
James Holland, *Hellfire* (London: Bantam Press, 2011)

‘*The Rising Tide* is a work of historical fiction. Apart from the well-known actual people, events, and locales that figure in the narrative, all names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to current events or locales, or to living persons, is entirely coincidental.’  
Jeff Shaara, *The Rising Tide* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000)

‘This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The incidents and some of the characters portrayed in it, while based on real historical events and figures, are the work of the author’s imagination.’  
Iain Gale, *Jackal’s Revenge* (London: Harper, 2012)

---

1 Email: p.wake@mmu.ac.uk

If, as Beverley Southgate notes, the relationship between history and fiction has ‘always been close but problematic’ (2009, 1) then there are few places in which the problematics of this relationship manifest more clearly than the historical novel, a genre that Alessandro Manzoni would argue ‘calls for a combination that is contrary to its subject matter and a division contrary to its form’ ([1850] 1986, 72). According to such a reading historical fiction, a term described by Toby Litt as ‘an oxymoron’ (2008, 13), captures the tensions inherent in a mode of writing that inhabits the contested territory between the fictional and the historical. While Southgate, writing in the early-twenty-first century, and Manzoni, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, might seem to agree on the complex nature of the relation of fiction and history, their formulations of this relation, and the terminology by which it is apprehended, differ dramatically. For Southgate, ‘history’ is not intended as a synonym for the past but rather denotes the narrative representation of the past, what Alun Munslow calls ‘the-past-as-history’ (2007, 9). Manzoni, by contrast holds to a reconstructionist notion of history that conflates the past with its representation. Understood in these terms, Manzoni’s claims endorse a division of the historical and the fictional, aligning the former with the past ‘as it actually was’ and the latter with the ‘fabricated’, while the problematics of the relationship as suggested by Southgate arises from the difficulties of sustaining just this distinction. Thus while Manzoni separates the historical from the fictional, judging one by the standards of the other, Southgate, as the title of his book suggests, is concerned with the shared space in which ‘history *meets* fiction’ [my emphasis].

Situating itself in this borderland space, my reading of the historical and the fictional, seeks to move beyond the referential basis by which the two modes of writing are opposed –without wishing to suggest that the historical and fictional narratives are one and the same – in order to evaluate a relationship that has traditionally been predicated on the privileging of the ‘historical’. Drawing on Gérard Genette’s *Paratexts* ([1987] 1997b), the argument that follows considers the paratextual materials that accumulate in and around the texts, materials that include authorial names, scholarly footnotes, illustrations, and, of course, definitions of genre. Reading the paratextual materials as invitations to read, invitations that establish ‘proper’ reading practices, my interpretation of the relation between history and historical fiction turns on notions of hospitality, connecting Genette’s work with that of Jacques Derrida in order to outline a model of generic intersection in which historical fiction appears as the malign(ed) guest of historiography, for whom the hospitality of historical writing necessarily entails hostility at the threshold. More precisely, I will argue that it is this hostility (what Derrida calls ‘hostipitality’) that guarantees the integrity of the threshold dividing history and fiction while at the same time calling into question the assumptions underlying the status of fiction as guest/trespasser and history as host.

### **The historical novel and popular narrative history**

‘That recent British and Anglophone fiction has taken a historical turn has become an axiom of critical commentary on the contemporary British literary scene’ (Keen 2006, 167). As Wesseling (1991) and Jerome de Groot (2010) have shown us, the historical novel has a long history that predates Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814), and in which the rise of the postmodern historical novel in the 1970s (Hutcheon 1988; Wesseling 1991), and the contemporary ‘historical turn’ to which Suzanne Keen gestures, are but two phases. While much recent critical commentary has been dedicated to the genre in its postmodern iteration, the historical novel demonstrates a range of characteristics and is itself subject to numerous subdivisions, sharing territory most notably with the romance, but also, among others, with adventure narratives, detective stories, and, as is the case in Holland’s writing, military fiction. Making just this point, de Groot concludes his chapter on the origins of the genre by citing Sarah Johnson’s epic *Historical Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (2005),

its 3800 entries, which cover only the years 1995-2004, demonstrating the extent of the genre. In Baker's words, 'The problem is not that historical fiction is too narrow to deserve its own section in libraries and bookstores, but that it's too broad, and that it overlaps with other genres' (de Groot 2010, 50).

Taking into account the diverse body of work accommodated within the category of historical fiction, it is unsurprising that definitions of the genre very often begin by relating the form to other modes of writing (as a subgenre, or as a genre that itself accommodates numerous subgenres). Given the apparent mutability of the genre, a broad definition of historical fiction might be reached, as Harry E. Shaw has suggested, in terms of its relation of a historical past, the genre admitting 'works in which historical probability reaches a certain level of structural prominence' (1983, 22). Such a commodious definition is essayed by the Walter Scott Prize which, in reference to Scott's *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, defines the historical novel as one in which 'the majority of the events described take place at least 60 years before the publication of the novel, and therefore stand outside any mature personal experience of the author' (2013). While this definition might fail to account for an emerging sense of the very recent past as history, its two key elements are the relation to this past (history is distinguished from memory) and the empirical reality of the events on which the narratives are based. The latter point recalls Aristotle's inscription of the respective territories of history/fiction along the lines of 'has been'/'might be' where 'the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be' (2001, 1464). A similar division underpins Dorrit Cohn's influential discussion of the 'fiction/history distinction,' made in *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), in which she postulates 'a referential level of analysis for historical narrative' while 'denying such a level to fictional narrative' (112). Historical fiction, according to the terms of this broadest of definitions, problematizes the Aristotelian 'has been'/'might be' binary, and Cohn's separation of the historical from the fictional, in that it must be referential, if not in whole then at least in part. Thus understood, the historical novel is a curious hybrid which describes the *has-been* alongside the *might-have-been* and, at times, the *certainly-wasn't* (de Groot rightly includes the counterfactual in what he describes as historical fiction's 'evolving set of subgenres [2010, 2]). Moving beyond an assessment of historical fiction on the basis of 'what is fact' and 'what is fiction' (a response to the genre that privileges the historical as the dominant term), opens up a space in which the genre might allow commentary on the nature of historical writing.

As de Groot's *The Historical Novel* (2010) demonstrates, the apparent proximity of historical and fictional writing has generated, and continues to generate, a number of attempts to account for their relation in terms of difference (degrees of similarity) and of supplementarity. Despite the great variety of these accounts, the prevailing response, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, was to regard historical fiction as an adjunct to history capable of offering its own form of historical insight. In the words of Manzoni, 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' ([1850] 1986, 67-8). J. A. Buckley and W. T. Williams, in their *Guide to British Historical Fiction* (1912), describe historical fiction as 'a handmaiden to history proper' (de Groot 2010, 48), Helen Cam, in *Historical Novels*, describes the historical novel as 'a form of literature ancillary to the study of history' (1961, 9) while Ernest Baker, writing in 1968, suggests that '[it] gives us something beyond the scope of the historian' (de Groot 2010, 47). Despite the apparent critical orthodoxy connecting these claims, claims which retain a degree of currency in the twenty-first century, the sense that historical fiction functioned 'to compensate for the incapacity of *antiquarian* historiography to mediate between the past and the contemporary reading public' (Wesseling 1991, 43) is historically contingent. More specifically, accounts of historical fiction are bound up with understandings of historical writing which are themselves 'ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological' (White 1975, xii) and which are in turn subject to change. As numerous histories of historiography demonstrate (see, for example: Breisach 2007; Iggers 1997; Tucker 2011) the thinking and practices of historians are

subject to change over time and with those changes come shifts in the perceived relation of history and fiction. Reflecting on this shifting relationship between historiography and the historical novel, Daniel Aaron argues that, ‘the demise of the old school and its supplanting by so-called scientific historians left a void that biographers and writers of fictional history quickly filled... professional historians welcomed them as valuable contributors,’ going on to note a shift in the late twentieth century by which point the ‘mutually beneficial partnership appears to be breaking up’ (1992). The ‘break up’ to which Aaron refers comes in reaction to the linguistic and narrativist turns in the Humanities in the late-twentieth and early-twenty first century, and manifests as a concern that historical fiction’s supplementarity might turn on its host, ‘a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place*’ (Derrida 1976, 145) or, as Genette puts it in *Palimpsests*, a supplement ‘wholly prepared to substitute for – that is, to displace and therefore to erase – that which it completes’ (1997a, 202).

Toby Litt’s 1998 address to the *Irish Pages Debate* ‘On Historical Fiction’ struck the keynote of this ‘break up’, declaring historical fiction to be an act of ‘bad faith’ and dismissing the genre as one in which writer and reader ‘mutually establish the ground upon which they are going to meet a bracketed ground in which their pleasure will derive entirely from a vacillation between facticity and transcendence, between what may very well have been true and what can be proven to be bogus, between – in other words – the historical and the fictional’ (2008, 113). For Litt, like Manzoni before him, the vacillation between the ‘true’ and the ‘bogus’ is evident in the term ‘historical fiction’:

The first word is the element of facticity, the *what was* of the world; the second element is the transcendence, the *what might have been* of the world. To yoke the two words together is to create an oxymoron. (Historical fiction is neither historical nor fictional). (2008, 13)

Litt’s position rejects the oxymoron ‘historical fiction’, but the phrase is an oxymoron only if history is equated with truth and fiction is equated with the untrue. To do so would be to understand fiction in the second of the senses suggested by Raymond Williams in *Keywords* where, fiction has ‘the interesting double sense of a kind of imaginative literature and of a pure (sometimes deliberately deceptive) invention’ ([1976] 1985, 134). Litt’s suggestion that historical writing presents the ‘*what was* of the world’, which recalls Leopold von Ranke’s ‘how it essentially was’ [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*]’ ([1824] 2011, 86), represents a positivist historiography that has been systematically challenged by those within and without the discipline (Benjamin [1940] 2003; Braudel [1950] 1980; Carr [1961] 2008). In this, Litt is more the positivist than Ranke who, as Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee note, ‘was fully aware that history does not stop with facts’ (2013, 122) and who described history as both a science and an art (Ranke 2011, 8). This move towards what might be termed a neo-Aristotelian delineation of the territories of history and fiction, finds what is perhaps its clearest expression in David Starkey’s comment that: ‘We really should stop taking historical novelists seriously as historians... the idea that they have authority is ludicrous. They are very good at imagining character: that’s why the novels sell. They have no authority when it comes to the handling of historical sources. Full stop’ (Davies 2013).

The currency of opinions such as those expressed by Litt and Starkey, which evince a desire to establish a solid grounds by which to distinguish the historical from the fictional, might be attributed not so much to the rise of postmodern theory and the attendant rise of the postmodern historical novel, but rather to an apparent convergence of the forms of historical and fictional representations of the past. This convergence might be said to have come about (again) with the gradual demise of the kind of ‘scientific history’ inaugurated by Ranke in the nineteenth-century and pursued in various forms until the mid-twentieth century, and the concomitant rise of so-called ‘narrative’ history, a mode of writing whose ‘return’ was announced by Lawrence Stone in his now-famous essay ‘The Revival of Narrative’ (1979). According to Stone’s account, narrative history is a form of writing distinct from, and emerging from, the work of scientific historians (which he terms

variously structural/analytical/quantitative) whose work dominated in the nineteenth century. It is, 'narrative directed by some "pregnant principle", and which possesses a theme and an argument' (1979, 4), where 'narrative' is taken to mean:

the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots. The two essential ways in which narrative history differs from structural history is that its arrangement is descriptive rather than analytical and that its central focus is on man not circumstances. (1979, 3)

According to this line of argument, narrative history, dealing with 'the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical' (4), supplements scientific history by combining the analytical with the personal. Narrative history, according to Stone's account, emphasises the personal experiences of its often multiple protagonists whose voices are brought together by a single authorial perspective, sharing with memoir and oral history what John Tosh describes as the 'powerfully attractive assumption' that 'personal reminiscence is viewed as an effective instrument for *re-creating* the past – the authentic testimony of human life as it was actually experienced' (2010, 318). While, as Tosh points out, this assumption is problematic for many reasons, the desire to 'enter into the experience of people in the past as fully as possible' (319) perhaps accounts for the appeal of narrative history beyond the academy. As Stone suggests, '[o]ne further reason why a number of "new historians" are turning back to narrative seems to be a desire to make their findings accessible once more to an intelligent but not expert reading public, which is eager to learn what these innovative new questions, methods and data have revealed, but cannot stomach indigestible statistical tables, dry analytical argument, and jargon-ridden prose' (15). Stone's definition of narrative history is echoed in a number of accounts of historical fiction. John Marriott, writing for a readership of practising historians, argues that the novelist 'deals not with the general but with the particular' (1940, 105), Cohn, whose work has been highly influential in literary studies, tells us that 'History is more often concerned with humanity in the plural than in the singular, with events and changes affecting entire societies, than those affecting the lives of individual beings' (1999, 18), while Georg Lukács's claim that 'poetic awakening of the people' is 'what matters' in the historical novel ([1937] 1976, 42) is not dissimilar to Stone's '*mentalité* of the past'. This level of agreement works largely at the level of the subject rather than that of epistemological method, an issue that Stone's article, pursuing its apparently modest aim of charting 'observed changes in historical fashion' (4) rather obscures. Nonetheless, Stone's essay, through its opposition of narrative and science, works to establish the notion of scientific history as 'non-narrative' history. 'No one,' writes Stone, 'is being urged to throw away his calculator and tell a story' (4) a sentiment that is rather neatly undermined by the essay's opening line, helpfully capitalised: 'HISTORIANS HAVE ALWAYS TOLD STORIES' (3).

### ***Together We Stand and Hellfire: Narrative histories and the fictive***

My investigation of the stories told by historians (and novelists) is effected here via an account of the works of British historian and novelist James Holland. Holland's popular histories of the second world war have drawn comparisons to the work of writers such as Max Hastings, Antony Beevor, and Patrick Bishop, while his works of military fiction are well described as belonging to what Elizabeth Wesseling calls the 'classical model of historical fiction' (1991, 27). Holland is of course just one of the large number of contemporary historians whose work is published under the headings of 'history' and 'fiction,' a list which might include writers such as Saul David, Ian Mortimer (James Forrester), Simon Sebag Montefiore, Harry Sidebottom and, of course, Alison Weir, who, as Saul David has remarked 'led the way in 2006' (2010). This focus on a single author producing work in both modes places an emphasis on the role played by the authorial name which,

as Genette tells us, ‘fulfils a contractual function whose importance varies greatly depending on genre’ (1997b, 41). Such variation is played out in the reading of the Holland’s texts which, read together, draw attention to the discontinuities of discourse produced under single name ‘James Holland.’ Thus, according to the analysis that follows, this single proper name is figured as one of potentially many places in which the historical and fictional ‘meet.’

Holland’s *Together We Stand*, an example of popular narrative history in its contemporary manifestation, is an account of the British, and later American, campaign in North Africa during World War Two. Standing at 798 pages, and covering the period from May 1942 to May 1943, Holland’s narrative is written from the viewpoints of both commanders and soldiers and details the campaign from the Battle of Gazala to its conclusion in Tunisia. Opening with the Arcadia conference (22 Dec 1941 – 14 Jan 1942), at which the joint grand strategy under which the US would enter the war was set out, and concluded with the British Eighth and US First Armies coming together (literally and figuratively) in Tunisia, the narrative is governed by the overarching theory, or ‘pregnant principle’, that the battles fought in North Africa inaugurated the ‘special relationship’ between Britain and the US. Published six years after *Together we stand*, and Holland’s novel *Hellfire* is set, ‘between August and November 1942, during the lull, then the Battle of Alam Halfa, and then finally, the Battle of Alamein. In between there are spies, murders, coastal raiding parties behind enemy lines, Polish femme fatales, and ... a real thriller of a plot line’ (Holland, 2011). While the actions of the Axis spy circuit operating in Cairo are historical conjecture, and the murders and femme fatales fictional creations with only the very loosest connection to fact, the key dates and events, four months in 1942, place the majority of the action within a ‘framework of real historical events’ (Holland 2011, 567) that maps closely onto chapters ten to fifteen of *Together We Stand*. Devoid of self-reflexive commentary, *Hellfire* is not an example of what has come to be called ‘historiographic metafiction’ (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Military fiction in the adventure mode, the novel, in line with Keen’s observations of military fiction in general, remains committed to ‘historical accuracy (as judged by historians and witness-participants),’ and its ‘traditional narrative strategies ... do not undermine their own truth claims as postmodern historical fiction often does’ (2006, 176). In this Holland’s work bears comparison to the war fiction of writers such as Michael Asher and Iain Gale, whose novels strive for historical accuracy and which can be distinguished from, for example, the military adventure stories of James Delingpole, whose ‘Dick Coward’ novels combine historical accuracy with a more overtly-metafictional project in which their Flashman-style narratives offer a playful examination of national and personal mythologies.

Given their shared time frame and comparable literary strategies, there is therefore much that connects *Together We Stand* and *Hellfire* in terms of both form and content and it is a straightforward business to trace a line of descent through the two texts to their shared sources. An example from *Together We Stand*:

Albert and his mates were sorely disappointed to learn that they were being transferred from the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, now part of Monty’s *corps d’elite*, X Corps. The 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured, with their jerboa logo, were the Desert Rats, the original core of Eighth Army; 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured’s logo was ‘a silly, meaningless figure of a rhinoceros’...<sup>7</sup> (2006, 317)

This passage is typical of the narrative voice of Holland’s narrative history which while ostensibly focalised by an extradiegetic narrator who is readily equated with the flesh-and-blood author James Holland, presents the action as if seen through the eyes of those who were there. In this Holland’s historical writing brings to the fore just the kind of perspectives (internally focalized, free indirect discourse) that Cohn sees as defining fictional narrative, ‘a genre unmistakably distanced from historiography by being focalized on and by the characters present on the scene’ (1999, ix). Paying close attention to the ‘worm’s eye view of the war, through the eyes of small, but key, players on the

ground' (Cogan 2007, 380), Lukács 'mediocre heroes' (1976, 37), *Together We Stand* has been praised by reviewers for giving a sense of 'how it felt to fight in the desert [my emphasis]' (Hastings 2005). In emphasising 'experience', *Together We Stand* eschews the 'massive prevalence of summary over scene' (Cohn 1999, 121) typical of scientific historiography, shifting from narratorial 'telling' to a 'shown' mode and while the text is painstakingly referenced, its 638 endnotes licence a text that displays many 'signposts of fictionality' (109). When the same material appears in *Hellfire* the internally-focalised disappointment becomes an externally-observed grumbling:

The rangers and the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Motor Brigade had been moved, after two years, from the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured, part of X Corps, specifically created by Montgomery to be his main battle strike force, what he termed the *corps de chasse*. It had meant changing the jerboa emblem of the Desert Rats to a new logo, a rhinoceros, and had caused much grumbling among the men who were proud of the jerboa and what it stood for. (2011, 492)

Reading these two passages alongside one another, it becomes clear that in terms of narrative style there is little to distinguish Holland's writing in either mode (both display the kinds of writing that Cohn would point to as 'signposts of fiction'). The significant distinction between the two passages, which are near identical in terms of narrative voice, appears in the inclusion of quotation marks and a reference directing the reader to one of the book's endnotes. This endnote directs the reader to Albert Martin's memoir *Hellfire Tonight* (1996), making it possible to follow the reference back to its source:

Monty really overdid it with one of his changes. Since 1940 2<sup>nd</sup> RB had been part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Motor Brigade, later to be incorporated into the newly formed 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division... Now we were to lose our desert rat sign. We were no longer 7<sup>th</sup>, but 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, forming part of X Corps. And our jerboa was to be replaced with a silly, meaningless figure of a rhinoceros. (1996, 162-3)

The superscript 7 that directs the reader to this passage, an example of what Krzysztof Pomian describes as the 'typographical mark of historicity' (Carrard 1995, 165), alerts the reader to the referential intent of Holland's historiography and answers Cohn's claim that it is 'only when such privately revealing sources as memoirs, diaries, and letters *are* available that a scrupulous historian will feel free to cast statements touching psychological motives' (1999, 118). This notwithstanding, Cohn's distinction between history and fiction in terms of 'the constitutional freedom of fiction from referential constraints' (130), while offering an apparently-sensible 'test' of historical writing obscures the fact that historical fiction is also demonstrably referential, if not in whole then at least in part.

The difference between the two passages then is perhaps not to be found in terms of form or content, but in the signalling of referential intent. As Philippe Carrard explains, the function of references is crucial in 'selecting and modelling a certain type of reading', and enabling the expert reader 'to engage in the dialogue which the author is proposing... to check the references... and compare his or her findings with those of the author' (1995, 140). Carrard's addendum, 'how frequently these controls actually take place is not at issue here' (140) should not be taken to imply that the veracity of the references is not significant but does perhaps indicate that the primary function of these typographical markers is to denote referentiality and to guide reading practices accordingly. 'Controls', as Carrard puts it, function both as checks and measures by which the veracity of a text might be audited, and as a means of control extended by the text over its readers. These controls are put in place by the paratextual materials that accrue to a text – what Genette describes as, 'those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher and reader' (1997b, x). The endnote,

'a disorder of the text' (328), plays on the 'within'/'outside' division, with the peritextual annotation (inside) gesturing towards the epitextual (outside), simultaneously distinguishing between text and reference while inviting the reader to conflate the two. Genette gestures towards such a position with the introduction of the 'factual' paratext, 'the paratext that consists not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received' (7). This brief reference to 'fact', coupled with Genette's assertion that 'every context serves as a paratext' (8), perhaps licenses a reading of paratexts as gesturing 'beyond' source material, beyond even historically-created 'facts', to the past world 'as it actually was' – recalling Roland Barthes' complaint in 'Historical Discourse' that narrative 'becomes at once the sign and proof of reality' (1970 [1967], 155).

Ultimately then, the paratext as 'control' (of which the footnote is but one instance) functions as both promise and invitation. As Genette puts it:

More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text.' (1997b, 1-2)

Such is the nature of the paratextual material of historiography and the historical novel, modes of writing which are in part defined by the demands that they place upon their readers. Genette, like Philippe Lejeune, talks of 'contracts' and 'pacts' between author and reader, and the invitation extended is to enter the text according to its terms. These are readerly texts that are far from Barthes' ideal text, to which access might be gained 'by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one' ([1973] 1993, 5). Of course it is possible to approach a 'readerly' text in a 'writerly' but whether such reading strategies are taken up or ignored, paratextual materials define the conditions of entry into text, identifying and constructing readers (and by extension other entities at the threshold) as benign, or malignant, guests whose presence is tolerated *within limits*.

The full import of Genette's description of paratexts as *thresholds* offering readers both the possibility of 'stepping inside' and a level of 'control', is realised when it is read alongside Derrida's *Of Hospitality* ([1997] 2000a) and 'Hostipitality' (2000b). Here the threshold is a central conceit:

It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of 'make yourself at home' but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am. There is almost an axiom of self-limitation or self-contradiction in the law of hospitality. As a reaffirmation of mastery and being oneself in one's own home, from the outset hospitality limits itself at its very beginning, it remains forever on the threshold of itself [*l'hospitalité se limite dès le seuil sur le seuil d'elle-même, elle reste toujours au seuil d'elle-même*], it governs the threshold – and hence it forbids in some way even what it seems to allow to cross the threshold to pass across it. (2000b, 14)

Hospitality as 'hostipitality', the combination of the hospitable and the hostile, accounts for the dual function of the Genettian paratext, and permits the extension of the discussion from the flesh-and-blood reader to the other 'entities at the threshold', entities which necessarily include other texts as

potential ‘guests’. Thus different modes of writing come to read one another, always already subject to, the hospitality of the other. As one might expect, the hospitality at the threshold between history and fiction is not the absolute hospitality that Derrida describes as offering welcome to ‘the absolute, unknown, anonymous other... without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names’ (2000a, 25). Far from the Kierkegaardian requirement to ‘forsake all distinctions so that you can love your neighbour’ (1994, 75), this is the hospitality of right (of law) [*hospitalité en droit*] which, as Richard Kearney puts it, ‘requires that each visitor identifies himself or herself before entering the host’s home’ (2002, 11). This hospitality, the hospitality that adheres to the relation between historiography and historical fiction, recognises, and insists upon, difference.

### Shared space: *Hellfire*

The requirement that difference be announced as a precursor to hospitable relations between genres returns us to the paratextual material of Holland’s writings, and to the legal disclaimers with which this essay begins. In these disclaimers fiction announces itself as fiction in order to institute the border that it is seen to transgress, and on which it draws, fulfilling the requirement set out by Richard Slotkin that fiction should be ‘unambiguously identified as such’ (2005, 224). But ambiguity is at the heart of these paratextual materials. *Hellfire*’s concession that it is fictional ‘except in the case of historical fact’, draws the reader’s attention to its not-quite-fictional status, just as the name James Holland works to connect both modes of writing. This ambiguity, which is well described in terms of shared space rather than as a linear border, finds clear expression in the maps that precede both *Hellfire* and *Together We Stand*. *Hellfire* includes four maps, *Together We Stand* thirty-two, and barring minor variations in their symbology they are all-but indistinguishable. Indeed there is little to distinguish these maps from those that appear across the various accounts of the conflict, including the War Office records housed in the National Archives at Kew (WO 234 ‘War Office: North African and Mediterranean Theatres; Military Headquarters Maps, Second World War’). Replicating the discourse of their primary sources, these maps serve as contracts of non-fiction, their invocation of the language of military strategy inviting the reader to align both texts, historical and fictional, with archival evidence of military operations. And yet the maps in *Hellfire* are fictional. As if to confirm Cohn’s suggestion that ‘[t]he potential of fiction to refer to the actual world inaccurately is most obvious when unreal localities are placed in real surroundings’ (1999, 15) Holland’s map of ‘Snipe and Grouse 26-27 October 1942’ depicts elements with no equivalent in history. ‘There was no Grouse, but there certainly was Snipe’ (2012, 571) Holland tells us, ensuring that the non-specialist reader is alive to the fact that the map is divergent from the map of ‘Snipe and Woodcock, 26-27 October 1942’ given in *Together We Stand*. In this Holland’s narrative exhibits a characteristic that is typical of historical fiction, namely an explicit rejoinder to the reader to recognise the divergence from historical fact that recalls the tortured logic of the legal disclaimer to *Hellfire*: ‘This book is a work of fiction and, except in the case of historical fact’.

There is, however, no injunction here to reflect on the problematics of aligning the past with its (already narrativised) residues, an observation that applies equally to the maps in *Together We Stand*. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, ‘[w]e must not therefore confuse the iconic value of a representation of the past with a model, in the sense of a scale model, such as a map, for there is no original with which to compare this model’ (1988, 153). Ricoeur’s choice of words is unfortunate in this context where maps, be they matters of historical record or fictional constructs, are iconic in the purest sense of the word. Unlike the ‘map of the Empire’ imagined by Borges, ‘whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it’ (1999, 325), the cartography on which Montgomery’s battle plans, and Holland’s histories, rely represent space not as-it-was but space as-it-was-perceived – from a specific location (temporal and spatial) and with a clearly determined function.

Palimpsest in form, the maps that precede the two books operate on multiple levels, diagramming the interpenetration of narrative and history and suggesting a number of common features. The first level is the terrain, this is geography interpreted in military, as well as historiographic and narrative terms. Holland's map of 'Snipe and Grouse, 26-27 October 1942' in *Hellfire* shows an area marked by points of strategic importance ('Kidney Ridge', 'Snipe', 'Grouse' and 'Woodcock') alongside the deep minefields that feature as a crucial aspect of the man-made topography of the war in North Africa. This information is overlaid by a detailing of the disposition of men and materiel at a single moment in time. The instant thus captured is supplemented by indicators of the future (now past) movement of these elements through the inclusion of arrows denoting the geo-temporal movement of key military elements. As Roger A. Beaumont notes in a rare article on fiction in the journal *Historical Affairs*:

Neat charts and maps festooned with the arrows and phase lines of hindsight suggest that someone, usually the commander, knew what was happening at the time, in contrast to Admiral Fletcher's observation that: 'After the battle is over, people talk a lot about how the decisions were methodically reached, but actually there's always a hell of a lot of groping around'. (1975, 70)

In line with Beaumont's comments, the paratextual maps in *Hellfire* and *Together We Stand* demonstrate the organising principles, plotting and *emplotting*, inherent in both fictional and historical narratives respectively. In other words, these maps include what readers of narrative theory might recognise as beginnings and endings, encapsulating both the geographical and temporal start and end points of the narrative in a single image. Thus, while the addition of an imagined location (Grouse) signals the absence of 'historical fact', these maps also offer a form of commentary on the nature of the 'historical fact' which, as White tells us, is necessarily 'written from the standpoint of someone who knows how events of a specific present turned out, is a past which no one living in the past could ever have experienced' (2012, 55-6). Understood in these terms, cartography as a means of capturing the world is suggestive of the fictive at work, while also indicating a necessary distinction between the fictive ('a discourse that is imaginatively created' [Munslow 2007, 134]) and the fictional ('non factual' [Munslow 2007, 13]).

The relation that pertains between these maps might, if one subscribes to a 'history first' account of historical fiction, be likened to Roger Caillois's description of mimicry 'psychasthenia,' 'a disturbance in the perception of space... accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life' ([1935] 1984, 28-30) and in which the identity of the mimic is surrendered or consumed. Extended to historical novels more generally, Caillois's account of mimicry, which centres on the relation of organism and environment, might suggest an aspiration to the status of history on the part of the fictions that take the past as their subject. But reading the mimicry of the historical novel as camouflage, or '*convergence*' (Caillois 1984, 18), elides the complexity of the relation between fictional and historical discourse. As Jacques Lacan puts it, mimicry 'is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled' (1978, 99). The act of 'becoming mottled' comes to describe both fictional and historical discourse as they relate to the 'mottled background' of the knowable past, neither form recreating the past as it was but both offering representations of the past recognisable as such from the perspective of the present. As Nelson Goodman notes in *Ways of Worldmaking*, 'Motley entities cutting across each other in complicated patterns may belong to the same world. We do not make a new world every time we take things apart or put things together in another way; but worlds may *differ* in that not everything belonging to one belongs to the other' (1978, 8)

Understood in these terms, mimicry comes to modify the model of generic hospitality by questioning the privilege of the historical, countermanding the dominant narrative that situates fictional representation as ancillary to historical representation. Accordingly, this mimicry-across-

genre is better described along the lines set out by Homi Bhabha, whose discussion of colonialism in 'Of Mimicry and Man' affords mimicry a more active dialogic status than Caillois's model in which 'the phenomenon is never carried out except *in a single direction*' (1984, 30). Here mimicry is 'a double vision' in which 'the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence' ([1994] 2004, 125-6). Just as for Bhabha 'neither the coloniser nor colonised is independent of the other' (Loomba [1998] 2005, 149), so to the identities of history and fiction are mutually constituting. Such a move is inherent in the Derridean notion of hospitality which entails an oscillation in which it is 'the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage—and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host' (2000a, 125). Mimicry along the lines set out by Bhabha's work includes a similar movement – as Rei Terada tells us, 'mimicry tips the hand of its non-originality and implies the non-originality of that which it mimics' (1992, 1) – suggesting the possibility of rethinking the well-established concept of the border separating history and historical fiction in terms of a mutually-constituting shared space.

### **Acknowledgements**

In the writing of this paper I benefited greatly from the support of my colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University and my fellow members of the International Society for the Study of Narrative who responded with great generosity to an early version of this paper at the 29<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the ISSN in Cambridge, Massachusetts (March 2014).

### **Disclosure statement**

There is no conflict of interest in relation to this work (either personal or institutional).

### **References**

- Aaron, Daniel. 1992. "What Can you Learn from a Historical Novel?" *American Heritage Magazine* 43 (6): 55-62. <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/what-can-you-learn-historical-novel>
- Aristotle, 2001. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by R. McKeon. New York: The Modern Library.
- Asher, Michael. 2009. *Death or Glory: Part One: The Last Commando*. London: Penguin.
- Barthes, Roland. 1970. "Historical Discourse." In *Introduction to Structuralism*, edited by Michael Lane, 145-55. New York: Basic Books.
- Barthes, Roland. (1973) 1993. *S/Z*. Translated by R. Miller. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Beaumont, Roger A. 1975. "Military Fiction and Role: Some Problems and Perspectives." *Military Affairs* 39 (2): 69-71.
- Benjamin, Walter. (1940) 2003. "On the Concept of History." In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-40*, translated by H. Zohn, edited H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings, 389-400. Cambridge Mass and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994) 2004. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 1999. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by A. Hurley. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Braudel, Fernand. (1950) 1980. "The Situation of History in 1950." In *On History*, translated by S. Matthews, 6-22. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Breisach, Ernst. 2007. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press.
- Caillois, Roger. (1935) 1984. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." Translated by J. Shepley. *October* 31: 16–32.
- Cam, Helen. 1961. *Historical Novels*. London: Historical Association.
- Carr, E. H. (1961) 2008. *What is History?* London: Penguin Books.
- Carrard, Philippe. (1992) 1995. *Poetics of the New History: French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cohn, Dorrit. 1999. *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cogan, Charles. 2007. "Together We Stand: America, Britain, and the Forging of an Alliance – By James Holland." *The Historian* 69 (2): 380-2.
- David, Saul. 2010. "Tall Tales from History: Are Historians Best Placed to Write Historical Fiction?" *The Independent* August 13. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/tall-tales-from-history-are-historians-best-placed-to-write-historical-fiction-2050891.html>
- Davies, Serena. 2013. "David Starkey: It is 'Ludicrous' to Suggest that Historical Novelists have Authority." *The Telegraph*, May 11. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10049866/David-Starkey-it-is-ludicrous-to-suggest-that-historical-novelists-have-authority.html>
- de Groot, Jerome. 2010. *The Historical Novel*. London: Routledge.
- Delingpole, James. 2007. *Coward on the Beach*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1967) 1976. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2000a. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Translated by R. Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2000b. "Hostipitality." Translated by B. Stocker and F. Morlock. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 5 (3): 3-18.
- Gale, Iain. 2012. *Jackals' Revenge*. London, Harper.
- Genette, Gérard. (1982) 1997a. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Translated by C. Newman and C. Doubinsky. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Genette, Gérard (1987) 1997b. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by J. E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodman, Nelson. 1978. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.**
- Hastings, Max. 2005. "A War by Air, Sea... and Sand: Max Hasting reviews *Together We Stand* by James Holland." *The Telegraph*, May 7. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3642086/A-war-by-air-sea...-and-sand.html>**
- Holland, James. (2005) 2006. *Together We Stand. Turning the Tide in the West. North Africa 1942-1943*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Holland, James. 2011. *Hellfire*. London: Bantam Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Iggers, Georg G. 1997. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Iggers, Georg G., Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherje. 2013. *A Global History of Modern Historiography*. Abingdon: Routledge.**
- Johnson, Sarah. 2005. *Historical Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.**
- Kearney, Richard. 2002. "Strangers and Others: From Deconstruction to Hermeneutics." *Critical Horizons* 3 (1): 7-36.**

- Keen, Suzanne. 2006. "The Historical Turn in British Fiction." In *A concise companion to contemporary British fiction*, edited J. F. English, 167-187. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.**
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1994. *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Forms of Discourses*. Translated by H. and E. Hong. New York: Harper.
- Lacan, Jacques. (1973) 1978. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Lukács, Georg. (1937) 1976. *The Historical Novel*. Translated by H. and S. Mitchell. London: Penguin Books.
- Litt, Toby. 2008. "Against Historical Fiction." *Irish Pages* 5 (1): 111-115
- Loomba, Ania. (1998) 2005. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Routledge.
- Manzoni, Alessandro. (1850) 1986. *On the Historical Novel*. Translated by S. Bermann. Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Marriott, John. 1940. *English History in English Fiction*. London: Blackie & Son Ltd.
- Martin, Albert. 1996. *Hellfire Tonight: The Diary of a Desert Rat*. Lewes: The Book Guild Ltd.
- Ranke, Leopold von. 2011. *The Theory and Practice of History*, edited by Georg G. Iggers. London: Routledge.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1988. *Time and Narrative: Volume 3*. Translated by K. Blamey and D. Pellauer. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Shaara, Jeff. 2007. *The Rising Tide*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Shaw, Harry E. 1983. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and his Successors*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Slotkin, Richard. 2005. "Fiction for the Purposes of History." *Rethinking History* 9, (2/3): 221-236.
- Southgate, Beverley. 2009. *History Meets Fiction*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Stone, Lawrence. 1979. "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History." *Past and Present* 85 (1): 3-24.
- Terada, Rei. 1992. *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Tosh, John. 2010. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.**
- Tucker, Aviezer, ed. 2011. *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- von Ranke, Leopold. 2011. *The Theory and Practice of History*, edited by G. G. Iggers. London: Routledge.
- Walter Scott Prize. 2013. "Walter Scott Prize." *Borders Book Festival*. Accessed September 9 2013. <http://www.bordersbookfestival.org/walter-scott-prize>
- Wesseling, Elisabeth. 1991. *Writing as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V.
- White, Hayden. 1975. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- White, Hayden. 2005. "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality." *Rethinking History* 9 (2/3): 147-157.**
- White, Hayden. 2012. "Historical Fictions: Kermode's Idea of History." *Critical Quarterly*, 54: 43-59.**
- Williams, Raymond. (1976) 1985. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised ed. New York: Oxford University Press.