

and in the process pushed the boundaries of filmmaking while commemorating the achievements of British arms during the Great War.

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CATHERINE GALLAGHER. *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. \$105 (cloth).
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What if Napoleon had invaded Britain, or Hitler won the war? What if Alfredo di Stefano had signed for Barcelona instead of Real Madrid? The compulsion to counterfactual speculation informs every level of familiar exchange, from elaborate historical theories to pub talk. It shows no signs of diminishing in a world recently shaken by seemingly avoidable outcomes like the electoral victories of the Brexiteers and of Donald Trump. The project of Catherine Gallagher's *Telling It Like It Wasn't* is particularly timely right now as our politicians, for their own ends, unashamedly cultivate uncertainty over what is and is not a fact.

Gallagher claims that an appetite for the counterfactual exploded in the 1970s, so it shares an approximate chronology with the New Historicism in which she played a part, and which also showed an interest in secret histories (2)—another name for the anecdote—and a sense of the importance of “petites causes” (24). A further regeneration of speculative histories and novels came in the 1990s, with the breakup of the Soviet Empire and the emergence of a reunifying Germany along with the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain (139, 233). The remarkable development and dissemination of computer technology and gaming protocols adds to the mix. An invasion force or a handy tank battalion can now be conjured up with a tap on the keyboard.

It was in the war games of Clausewitz and his kind that the counterfactual rubber began to hit the virtual road. Among the protagonists was Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd (c. 1718–1783), an entrepreneurial Welshman whose career will likely be as unfamiliar to many as it was to me: he is one of the first of many cases in which Gallagher has exhumed the lives and writings of the largely unremembered as critical exponents of her subject. She analyzes counterfactual history through the work of three French writers, Louis Geoffroy-Château (1803–1858), Charles Bernard Renouvier (1815–1903), and Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), about whom little has been written. The story of the counterfactual novel is also peopled by only a few familiar names—George Orwell and Hannah Arendt among them—along with extended expositions of the work of those who have not figured in the critical or historical canon.

Gallagher's ambition is admirably broad. She attempts a formal taxonomy of the genre (and its subgenres), with inspirations from philosophers and narratologists, and she lays down a new framework for categorizing the various options open to novelists and historians. Throughout, the application of thinking in the alternative to projects of social and political justice and potentially restorative legislations—“morally meaningful public action” (65) and “remedial legal thought” (132)—is made central to the argument. These novels and histories are part of an ethical project, most obviously so in the speculations about present-day race relations in the light of American history and reimagined Civil War narratives. Gallagher convincingly argues that speculative history has always been and still is at the core of Civil War debate, both in novels (Edmund Lawrence, Frank Williams, Ward Moore, Harry Turtledove) and in

popular and academic histories, some of which manage to conclude that Black Americans would be better circumstanced today had the South won the war. Even Winston Churchill, we learn, tried his hand at an alternative Civil War story.

Roughly half of the book is given over to the American Civil War scenario, where there is little room for doubt about the stakes involved: modern racism, the evolution of capitalism, and the course of foreign policy, for example. The other half will be of particular interest to readers of this journal, and it is the one that Gallagher herself finds especially rich for a study of “counterfactualism in general” (191): British imaginings of different outcomes for World War II. The key period, in this telling, is 1940–41, when Britain is on its own (or says it is—the empire and the American alliance will pull it through), and when the rhetoric of the finest hour and of the many indebted to the few is deployed, somewhat against the evidence then and now: apparently it never was likely or probable that Hitler would invade, but the idea was a great motivator (208–10). Churchill figures here again, this time as an astute rhetorician. The 1940 publication of *Guilty Men* by a collective that included Michael Foot was a clever rewriting of a prewar pacifist mainstream as a minority group of cowardly appeasers (196–97). Gallagher sees this as a key contribution to the staging of the national character as defined by “the reliability of behavior in unsettled situations” (205)—most of us always were anti-Nazi and always will be. The cultivation of a national-character model persists in books and television shows by Comer Clarke, David Lampe, and Norman Longmate. These unfamiliar contributors to the image of being British are a timely reminder, at this particular moment of efflorescent if deeply insecure nationalism, of the longer history of British exceptionalism that the Brexiters could (and still can) draw upon for their self-image. It is only one among the ironies of this playlist that the plucky domestic resistance to Nazi occupation imagined in some of these narratives (we shall fight in the sewers, in the rabbit burrows) garnered its technological credibility from the British army’s expertise in counterinsurgency developed in the effort to inhibit national liberation movements across the empire (224). That same exceptionalism was also available to assert a fundamental resistance to fascism by the British people, a cautionary response to the appearance of the National Front in the later 1960s.

Gallagher suggests that historians’ counterfactual speculations seldom disturb the boundaries of “well-established states,” while novelists favor the prospect of “collapsing states” (239). The summer of 1940 saw the publication of the jointly authored *Loss of Eden*, wherein the people destroy themselves in a sort of “slow-motion suicide” (245), an attrition of the will to resist that eerily prefigures the future that Michel Houellebecq’s *Submission* (2015) recently and controversially imagined for modern France. National character does not save the day but transforms into apathy and inertia. Orwell’s *The Lion and the Unicorn*, from the same period, also warns against the temptations of opting for what looked like the quiet life, as do the film *It Happened Here* (1964), the miniseries *An Englishman’s Castle* (1978), and the responses to Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. (Those of us living through the time of Trump might take note.) The book ends with an extended discussion of the affair of the Hitler diaries and of Robert Harris’s *Fatherland* (1992), both a summation and a new variation of the genre, and a novel that sets out to deploy the counterfactual to remind us of the horrors of our own real history, read here as a directive not to ignore the culpability of former Nazis. So ends this impressive and thought-provoking book. We can predict, counterfactually or not, that there will be no future shortage of examples of what Gallagher writes about, and that it will thereby remain timely in the time to come.

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