



Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel

Alan Robinson

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Interest in the narrative representation of the past, in both historiography and historical fiction, has mushroomed since the 1960s. But discussions among historians and literary scholars have often produced more heat than light. To remedy this situation, this study clarifies theoretical and methodological issues in making sense of the past which all forms of historical narrative share, tracing systematic connections between historiography, historical novels and life-writing.

It differs from other criticism of historical fiction, which usually divides the genre into thematic or formal categories, in focusing on the explicit or implicit historiographical assumptions of historical novelists. In other words, it approaches historical fiction as a form of history in its own right, which confronts similar cognitive and imaginative challenges to those faced by historians. This innovative framework underpins substantial new interpretations of significant recent novels (including works by Pat Barker, Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie, John Fowles, A.S. Byatt and Sarah Waters) and broader discussion of a range of related fiction.

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