

POSSIBLE WORLDS IN HISTORICAL FICTION: DEGREES OF COUNTERFACTUALITY

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Abstract: *The paper argues that possible worlds may be contained within fictional worlds, dynamically reclaimed, dispelled or held in simultaneous possibility. This feature is especially interesting in historical fiction, as it undermines our acceptance of a fixed past as presented by historiographic discourse. It is not restricted to alternative history but is also present in historiographic metafiction and even in more traditional historical novels, as their characters are necessarily involved in minor counterfactual actions and events. Thus, the paper argues that counterfactuality in historical fiction is a matter of degree rather than fixed genre boundaries. Examples of ambiguous counterfactuality are provided from novels such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, and others.*