



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor

I get so excited when I can include a piece of family history in one of my historical short stories. It's fun to discover that I'm not the only one. Juliet Haines Moffard, who will be our featured author on July 19th, ended up with more than a short story. She was able to use one of her husband's ancestors as the main character of her new release, [Captain Redlegs Greaves: A Pirate by Mistake](#). More about her new book follows, with a snippet about the book.

Our featured author this week, Sarah Zama, shares these words in her interview that follows.

"A fellow writer who writes in many different periods has a theory that we should read at least 50 books about our chosen period before we are reasonably ready to write about it."

This was advice that she was given, and luckily discovered that she'd already done this. And it shows. It shows in her writing. It shows in her knowledge. It shows in her blog posts at The Old Shelter. It shows in her Facebook page, [The 1920s Book Club](#). Read what Sarah has to say about historical fiction and her writing journey. She's shared a lot of information with us this week, and her research in this era from a hundred years ago.

Trisha

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Language and Idioms

Was It Even Used Then?

Words and phrase can be something that easily trips up historical fiction authors. Common phrases used today can easily sneak into our period writing. I was caught on this just last week. I brought a snippet from an early 1930's short story to my writing group. In it, the characters went to one of the just-released Shirley Temple movies. One of the members asked, "Would they have called it 'the movies'? I remember my Grandma always talking about going to the 'picture shows'." Yikes! She caught a good one, one that had slipped by me completely.

Granted, some instances are fairly minor and may not raise an issue with readers. But sometimes it can be a glaring problem. I've also seen where readers report that an issue was major enough that they shut the book and don't read any further.

What do you do if you're unsure? One of my favorite sites is the Online Etymology Dictionary. You can search a word for its earliest known use. For instance, if I type in 'heebie-jeebies', I learn:

heebie-jeebies (n.)

1923, said to have been coined by U.S. cartoonist Billy De Beck (1890-1942), creator of "Barney Google."

So, I can definitely use this in my short story set in 1928. While the word most likely wouldn't have been used in 1922, if I'm writing a tale set in that year, I can probably still get by with it. It's going to be close enough to the time period that most readers would still feel as if they're in the time. However, Mittie Ann, the girl that came to Texas in the 1850s in a covered wagon definitely wouldn't have used that phrase.

How Much Period Language to Use

Another part of the language that becomes a balancing act is how much period language to use. M.K. Tod, on *A Writer of History*, in '[7 Elements of Historical Fiction](#)' speaks of using dialogue in historical fiction. He writes:

Dialogue – dialogue that is cumbersome and difficult to understand detracts from readers' enjoyment of historical fiction. Dip occasionally into the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the past by inserting select words and phrases so that a reader knows s/he is in another time period. Don't weigh the manuscript down or slow the reader's pace with too many such instances. And be careful. Many words have changed their meanings over time and could be misinterpreted.

In '[7 Tips on Accuracy and Authenticity](#)', Susanna Calkins, with a Ph.D. in history, talked about how accurate her first novel, *A Murder at Rosamund's Gate*, was going to be. She wrote:

When I was first dreaming about my story, even before I had worked out the plot or characters, I knew one thing for sure: By gum, this novel would be accurate. Every detail, every word, would be accurate. Historians everywhere would use my book in their classes and would revel in my accurate tale.

That idea lasted about two seconds.

Not only would using accurate language make my story unnecessarily pedantic and cumbersome, but many seventeenth-century words and phrases don't translate readily today. Certainly, I could say "The footpad bit the Roger, tipped the cole to Adam Tyler, and then took it to a stauling ken." But I have a feeling modern readers

might not understand that I was saying that a thief has stolen a bag, passed it to a fence, who in turn sold it to a house that receives stolen goods. Unless my editor let me write a companion volume with glossary and explanatory footnotes, this isn't too feasible.

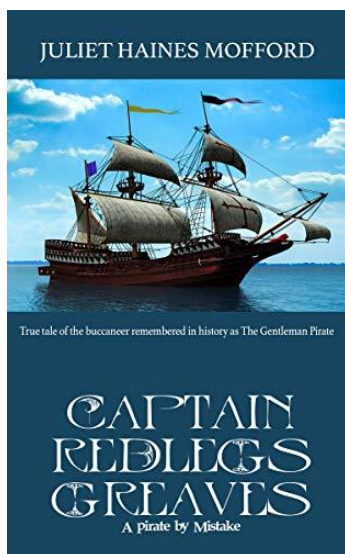
Just as in life, where sometimes an issue becomes a balancing act, so is it in writing historical fiction. We need to use enough language of the times, to help frame the time period and help the reader feel as if they're really there in the midst of the tale, without being so accurate that as Susanna Calkins says, it becomes "pedantic and cumbersome." And, we also want to make sure that the phrases we're using to help set the tone of the story are accurate and of the period we're writing.

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New Releases

Captain Redlegs Greaves: A Pirate by Mistake

Juliet Haines Mofford



True tale of the buccaneer remembered in history as The Gentleman Pirate

Experience the daily lives of pirates, follow bold and perilous raids, and survive a terrifying storm at sea in this adventurous tale of a white slave who flees the sugar plantation to become a captain of a pirate vessel.

Based on the life of an actual 17th century pirate and ancestor of the author's husband, this biographical novel is set on several Caribbean islands and aboard ship. Born into white slavery and orphaned, Greaves flees the cane fields and his abusive master for life on the open sea, but by mistake, ends up a stowaway on a pirate ship. Later, elected captain, young Greaves insists every man in his crew honor the Pirate Code.

Greaves scuttled ships and sacked towns along the Spanish Main with ruthless freebooters. Later, retiring on his riches to manage a sugar plantation, Greaves is identified by a former enemy and imprisoned. While awaiting a trial he knows will surely lead to the gallows, Greaves

becomes the sole survivor of a tsunami and is rescued by a whaling ship. The reformed pirate finally returns to Barbados in hopes of finding Clarissa—the woman he loves.

But will she still love him after learning he's a wanted man who pillaged with pirates?



When I think of the Roaring Twenties, I think of Sarah Zama. Her blog posts, her books, and of course her Facebook Group, The 1920s Book Club, epitomize this era. Sarah, what initially drew you to research and write in this time period?

Trisha, first of all, thanks so much for having me as a featured author. I'm so excited to be here!

I do love the 1920s. I think it was a time of great change and excitement, but also of great anxiety and even fear. Is it just me, or does it sound a lot like our times?

In truth, I fell into the 1920s by chance.

I've always been fascinated with the interwar years and the Art Deco period - I blame it on my granny with whom I saw a lot of black and white mystery films from that period when I was a kid.

I suppose it was just a matter of time before I ended up writing something in that period. When I finally took the plunge, in 2010, I was actually thinking about the 1930s, which was familiar to me because of those films.

Back then, I knew nothing about the interwar years, historically speaking. The first book I read on the subject, *The Anxious Decades* by Michael E. Parrish, actually presented the 1920s and the 1930s in the same book. That was my first approach with the decade and when I finished the book I realized the 1920s had touched me far deeper than the 1930s. I was fascinated with the energy of the period, the many shocking changes those people had to face, and maybe, even at that early stage, I sensed that in that challenge those people were so similar to us.

I changed my mind, shifted my project to the 1920s, and never looked back.

You've done a *lot* of research on the 1920s. Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

A fellow writer who writes in many different periods has a theory that we should read at least 50 books about our chosen period before we are reasonably ready to write about it.

It sounds a lot, but when I counted what I had read about the 1920s before I started writing my first project, and what kind of books, I saw I had followed my friend's advice even before I met her!

I first researched the 1920s for my Chicago trilogy and back then I started with the net. I was hungry for information, so I downloaded a lot (I mean 'a lot') of material from the web. I read lots and lots of pages from any kind of site until I started coming across the same information over and over again. That's when I thought I needed to change the game.

Today, I'd never do serious research on the web, I always start from books. It's a lot faster, believe me. True, the web it's easy to peruse, and it answers our questions, but that's exactly its limit. Books give us entire universes. If I want to know when the Cupid Bow was invented, I can enter the question on Google and it will answer that kind of lip makeup was created by Max Factor in the early 1920s, probably for Clara Bow, but maybe for Joan Crawford. You may get some more spare info about makeup in the 1920s, maybe some info about Bow and Crawford, and then a lot of very similar info.

If I want to know about the Cupid Bow from a book, I'll need to get a book about the history of makeup, which will give me a comprehensive idea of how makeup changed over time. Or maybe I'll get a book about the 1920s in general, from which I'll additionally get info about the changing role of women, 1920s fashion, the way makeup changed at that time because of scientific advances. Or I may get a book about youth in the 1920s, which will give me info about how makeup was just a portion of how young people change their attitude towards each other and toward older people. In short, to get to that specific detail, I'll journey through a lot of other information about that time, which will slowly sediment in my mind giving me a comprehensive, global feeling of the era, rather than just an answer to one question.

That's why today I prefer to start researching from books. Something general at the beginning, then progressively more specific to the story I want to write.

I still use the web, but normally to find very specific topics, articles about details of life. When we look deep into the one subject, that's when the web is still very useful.

Can you tell us about one of your favorite characters from your books and share how the character developed?

Noooo! You're killing me! How can I choose just one? I love all of them! LOL!

But even if I can't choose, I find that antagonists are often the ones that go through deeper change from conception to final version and so I get a very special feeling for them. I don't normally do villains. I find a good antagonist far better than any villain. Yes, they normally emerge as a villain, because that's what the story requests, but as they interact with the protagonist and move into the situation, they become mellow, they lose their vicious edge and become people just like the protagonist, only on a different stance. My antagonists are often scared of something, which is what makes them human to me.

In my current WIP, *The Frozen Maze*, there's one such antagonist who went through a long transformation: Florian.

The Frozen Maze was first written as a short story, and in that first version, Florian wasn't even there. The story was born as a very loose retelling of Snow White set in 1920s Germany, and in that first incarnation, the antagonist was Grete, the main character's step-mother (as you would expect).

Already while writing the short story I realized there was a lot more I could explore through those characters. I knew I was going to rewrite it as a novel, and first of all I decided Grete wasn't a very good antagonist, because she fell into the same theme as the other two women of the story: they all had to face great challenges to adjust to a new way of life after the Great War. So I thought there should be an external character, one not belonging to the family, who would pose a threat.

Enter Florian, who at that stage was a middle-aged businessman from Berlin, associated with Grete (who's a very modern woman and a businesswoman), who mostly exploited her and maybe even deceived her.

I reworked the story, I planned, I wrote backgrounds, I read about WWI, I wrote an AtoZ Blogging Challenge about 1920s Germany, I wrote characters' synopsis... and I realized I wasn't happy with Florian. He was too much of a villain, not the kind of antagonist I wanted.

At the same time, I was discovering Berlin's burgeoning film industry, which was a perfect means of exploring another important theme of the story: what *appears* as opposed to what *is true*. So I thought the antagonist should be a diva, an actress with a very important secret in her past and she should be the manipulative character, which went well with the antagonist in the original Snow White story. But I didn't want to let go of one of the few male characters I had, so I kept Florian... only he became a young man entrenched in the actress's life and with a big secret of his own.

I reworked the entire plot, I worked on the story structure like a mad woman, wrote tens of characters' synopsis and during NaNoWriMo, two years after writing the first short story, I rewrote *The Frozen Maze* as a novel – and totally, completely fell in love with Florian, a flawed character with a good heart, who's made lots of mistakes. I'm having a great time writing him.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

I think historical fiction always poses one particular challenge that other genres don't: we need to shadow our 21st Century self in order to see through the eyes of people who lived in the past.

This is harder than we may think, because we take a lot of things for granted, and just because these things are granted to us, we don't even think about it, we don't see them, in a way they don't exist as a historical element to us, but they might create glaring anachronisms in the story.

For example: if we set a scene in a bar, our modern mind tends to see waitresses rather than waiters serving at tables. In the first draft of my unpublished trilogy, I did put waitresses serving at tables in the speakeasy which is one of the main settings. Luckily, one of my beta readers pointed out that women didn't work in bars as waitresses, even in the 1920s, unless it was a disreputable bar. Because I trusted this reader very much (she was a writer of the 1920s herself) I changed my waitresses to waiters. After this pointer, I noticed that in era stories and footage there is never a waitress when a speakeasy is depicted, but only male waiters.

I've discovered only recently why that was: the position of a waitress in a bar was very tricky. Previous the 20th Century bars were mostly frequented by men. 'Good girls' never put a foot in such places and the women who went there did so normally for business which was catered to men. Serving at tables was a way to approach men and so the underlined text was that while they were offering the bar's service, they were offering themselves too. This went on into the 1920s even when women started frequenting bars and speakeasies (seldom unchaperoned, the way women went around 'questionable' places is more

complex than we generally think) and even into the 1930s, when women working in bars often offered risqué amusement verging on vices, like cigarettes and naughty cards and such, they were viewed as not 'nice girls'.

Our post-1960s mind may think that a woman entering a man's environment is daring, but if we try to adhere to the era's mind, women who entered men's spaces were considered loose rather than daring. And this is the true challenge: try to avoid our way of thinking to depict the more authentic thinking of the era we've chosen.

Do you have a current historical fiction work in progress? Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

At this moment, I'm revising *Sea Phantom*, a story set in 1921 Milan which I wrote last year. It's about an opera singer who might have gained success in a shady way and it's a very very loose retelling of the Little Mermaid, addressing the power of the voice. I really enjoyed writing it because it was the first time I set one of my 1920s stories in my country (I even considered setting it in Verona, my own town) and it gave me a great sense of familiarity, when all my other stories (some set in Chicago, some in Germany) require me to reach out, to approach a culture which is not my own.

At the same time, I'm translating *Sea Phantom* into Italian, and this is such a weird experience! I haven't written fiction in Italian for some 11 years and at the beginning, I even thought I couldn't possibly do it. LOL! I'm almost done and it's going a lot better now.

My intention is to offer the English version to subscribers very soon, in case you fancy to read it free.

I'm also working at the third revision of *The Frozen Maze*. I hope to serialize this story on my blog starting next Fall. I've always been fascinated with the idea of a serialized story, I've fancied doing it for decades, I'm not joking! Now it looks like the time has come.

As I've mentioned, this is a story loosely based on Snow White and is set in an estate near the Black Forest in Germany in 1924. The first idea came from a psychological analysis of Snow White I read while researching, which analyzed the meaning of the mirror as a tool of both deceit and revelation. It tied in very nicely with the debate that was going on in Germany (as well as in most of Europe at the time) whether the best course of action was to defend the past or embrace the future. Clinging to an obsolete idea of the past, while fearing a future which promised to be very different was at the core of the nationalist movements of the time. The position of women, who were gaining freedom of expression and action, but were feared by many as bringers of uncertainty and even unbalance (because they questioned traditional genre roles) again arched back to Snow White and its discourse of the male's gaze toward women and their power, a gaze that was often distorted by anxiety and fear.

But don't be scared, there's a lot of action and magic too, so if you fancy to give it a go, again for free, do follow my socials and I'll give you a heads-up when the story starts off.

You have an awesome book trailer for your book, *Ghosts Through the Cracks*. The style is reminiscent of the picture shows of the time and you have some excellent clips and photos showing the time period of the 1920s. What was it like putting the book trailer together? Were there any unexpected challenges or triumphs?

I didn't make the trailer myself, it's the work of awesome photographer Crispian Thurlborn (<https://wyldwoodbooks.wordpress.com/>), who also designed my cover. It was great working with him. After I told him what the story is about, we both thought a hint to silent films would be great. Crispian put together a draft of the trailer and I immediately fell in love. He pinned down the mood I was looking for immediately.

We tweaked it a bit with color and black and white, and he even produced a draft with a voice-over, but we both decided the silent film form was better. I was surprised at how easily we tuned in with one another, but then he's a fellow fantasy writer, and that probably helped a lot.

Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?

I like to say that I write Dieselpunk because that's what I do, but I know that most readers will be unfamiliar with the term. So I normally say I write historical fantasy set in the 1920s, which is a very precise description of my stories. But for a more familiar term, I should probably say I write historically set magic realism.

I take the historical part of the 'historical fantasy' very seriously. I always strive to research history as thoroughly as possible and then to portray it in my story as accurately as I possibly can. I'm a firm believer that being faithful to history will make my stories more interesting and more unique.

As writers, we always use 'stock ideas'. These are the ideas we are familiar with and the ones that are closer to our heart. We tend to use these ideas on the one hand because they incarnate what we are eager to talk about, but also because they are so familiar that they don't require any effort in order to use them. When we content ourselves with cursory research, we end up scratching the surface of the subject, summarise it in easy outlines, and in the end, we'll fall back to our usual, comfortable 'stock ideas'. But history is always far more complex than we think, and if we sink our teeth into details, we'll discover a fantastic tapestry of information that will force us to leave those 'stock ideas' behind and go in search of what it truly was. This will likely bring us on unfamiliar paths that will force us to make unusual choices (as authors) and think in a different way. This is why I think that, far from being a constraint, being true to historical facts will feed our imagination, giving us new ideas and narrative solutions.

For example, one of the main characters in the first book of my unpublished trilogy is Sinéad, an Irish midwife. I wanted her to have a very basic form of magic, bound to nature and embedded in the life of a countryside community. So I made her a healer who works with herbs and a seer who reads runes, because – let's face it - that is what we are more likely to think about when we think Irish traditional culture.

But as I researched and talked to other writers, I discovered that runes-reading was not at all a traditional practice and that a country girls would in fact probably never have heard of it, since it was a practice introduced by those scholars that in the 1800s resurrected medieval tradition... in their own ways.

One of the writers I discussed this with suggested that if Sinéad was going to read anything, it would probably be bones. This posed an unexpected difficulty: while in her native environment Sinéad would have bones readily available when she finds herself in Chicago, how does she go about finding the bones she needs? This sparked a totally new subplot that I'd never previously envisioned, involving Chicago meatpacking industry, Sinéad's alternative medicine, an exploration of her relationship with the old ways and what other people may think of her if they discovered she believes in 'magic', all of which eventually

tights in to Sinéad's original character's arc. It all became a lot more interesting and it allowed me to explore parts of the story and character's traits I hadn't imagined in the first draft.

But I also like to be close to the fantasy side of it. I like 'magic' to be an integral part of the story like Tolkien imagined it. Not just a nice addition, but an essential element that will advance the plot and will affect the characters. I like to base this kind of magic on actual myths, legends and traditional practices, which does help to make it integral to the historical setting.

This is what my stories are all about, history and magic in equal parts.



Check out this fabulous book trailer for Ghosts Through the Cracks:

<https://www.facebook.com/SarahZamaAuthor/videos/1002907253432682/>

You can find Sarah Zama's books here:

Smashwords <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/611064>

Kobo <https://www.kobo.com/gb/en/ebook/give-in-to-the-feeling-1>

BookBub <https://www.bookbub.com/books/ghosts-through-the-cracks-by-sarah-zama>

You can connect with Sarah here:

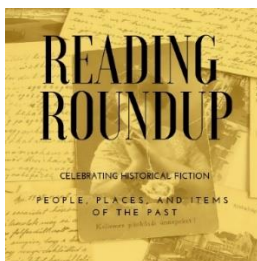
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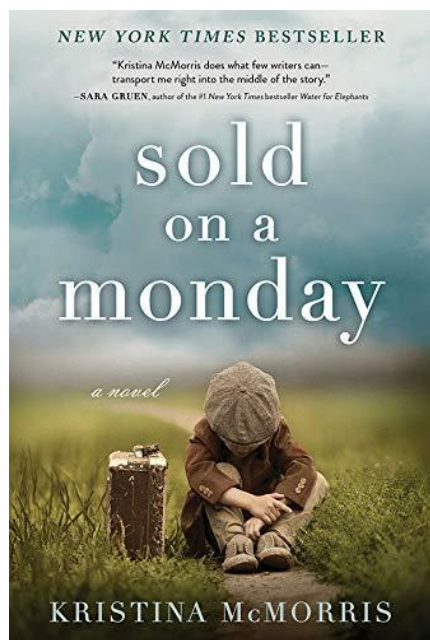
BIO: Born and raised in Verona (Italy), Sarah has always lived surrounded by books, so it may be a sort of karma that she ended up being a bookseller and an indie author. A fantasy reader since a kid, a Tolkien nerd almost as long, she's always been fascinated with history and old black-and-white mystery films, which may or may not have had a way in her involvement in the dieselpunk community. "Ghosts Through the Cracks" is her first published novella. She's currently working on more historical fantasy stories set in the 1920s.



The 1930s

Sold on a Monday

Kristina McMorris



2 CHILDREN FOR SALE

The sign is a last resort. It sits on a farmhouse porch in 1931 but could be found anywhere in an era of breadlines, bank runs and broken dreams. It could have been written by any mother facing impossible choices.

For struggling reporter Ellis Reed, the gut-wrenching scene evokes memories of his family's dark past. He snaps a photograph of the children, not meant for publication. But when it leads to his big break, the consequences are more devastating than he ever imagined.

For struggling reporter Ellis Reed, the gut-wrenching scene evokes memories of his family's dark past. He snaps a photograph of the children, not meant for publication. But when it leads to his big break, the consequences are more devastating than he ever imagined.

Inspired by an actual newspaper photograph that stunned the nation, *Sold on a Monday* is a powerful novel of love, redemption, and the unexpected paths that bring us home.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at texasrishafoye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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