Almost History: A Novel

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Historical novel: Historical novel, a novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical. It may focus on a single historic event, as does Franz Werfel’s Forty Days of Musa Dagh (1934), which dramatizes the defense of an Armenian stronghold. More often it attempts to portray a broader view of a past society in which great events are reflected by their impact on the private lives of fictional individuals. Since the appearance of the first historical novel, Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley (1814), this type of fiction has remained popular. Stories populated with memorable characters are the best way to contextualize and immerse myself in that past. What follows is pretty much a mish-mash of titles that have recently taught me about the past. Due to space limitations, I have only provided brief descriptions; check them out on Goodreads for more information.

The Freedom Maze by Delia Sherman This novel tells the story of a 13-year-old girl time traveling from 1960 to 1860. It is a truly moving and intriguing look at the lives of slaves in Southern plantations, as well as the relationships between whites and blacks in the South at the start of the 1960s. I found a blurb for it on Amazon by Jane Yolen, which is quite fitting, because this book reminded me of The Devil’s Arithmetic.