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# Alternative Times

*Temporalities in the Alternative Histories of Philip Roth, Martin Amis, and Quentin Tarantino*

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2017

## ABSTRACT

The publication of alternative history fiction increased greatly after World War II, the war itself having become one of the mode's most popular subjects. In recent years several acclaimed authors and filmmakers have constructed their own World War II alternative histories, thus providing the mode with increased academic attention. This study focuses on Philip Roth's fictional memoir *The Plot Against America*, Martin Amis's novel *Time's Arrow*, and Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds*. These texts are also read against more typical instantiations of the mode to demonstrate how they may or may not deviate from an assumed norm. This will be done with particular focus on formulations of temporality as it is represented within alternative history. That time, among other matters, is among this study's central concerns is reflected in this project's structure. In the Introduction existing definitions of the mode are critiqued, and new definitions offered. Thereafter, the study is divided into four parts, with parts one (Pasts), two (Presents), and three (Futures) offering discussions on how these conventional temporal demarcations are portrayed in the primary texts. "Part 1: Pasts" discusses the texts' subversive representations of World War II. This section interrogates whether such subversions of history may open the primary texts to accusations of Holocaust denial and historical relativism. "Part 2: Presents" demonstrates how understandings of the past come to influence understandings of the present. This section is also concerned with how a traumatic past both constructs characters' present identity and may alter their perception of the past from the vantage point of their present. And "Part 3: Futures" discusses how certain characters' ability to rethink the past, or narrate alternative histories, may inform their ability to imagine future possibilities. Before offering a conclusion, "Part 4: Pasts, Presents, Futures" proposes that the primary texts, and alternative histories more generally, destabilise the common temporal nodes as they may be understood within the context of causality. Also, using Paul Ricoeur's theories of narrative time, particularly $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$, and $mimesis_3$, this section argues that past, present, and future proliferate within the context of alternative histories. This is particularly true when understanding the readers' time as read against the time of the text, and also demonstrates how alternative histories may offer ways of thinking about alternative temporalities.

## KEYWORDS

Alternative history; World War II; time; Holocaust denial; nostalgia; hauntology; $mimesis_1$; $mimesis_2$; $mimesis_3$; Philip Roth; Martin Amis; Quentin Tarantino; Hayden White; Paul Ricoeur

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Karl van Wyk
14 June, 2017

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# DEDICATION

*For Kathy and Chris van Wyk*
*and for Trevor Bell*
*with my love*

*The difference between a historian and a poet is not a matter of using verse or prose …. The difference is that the one relates what actually happened, and the other the kinds of the events that would happen. (Aristotle 28)*

# Introduction

> 'I think we're just beginning to wonder what happened, and what didn't happen.' (DeLillo, interviewed by Williams)

## Alternative History: A Definition

It is interesting to study what happened. It is equally interesting to study what did not. If history is one of the means through which we come to understand humanity's attitudes to the past, then alternative history is another. Considering the facts of history is certainly vital for the production of historical narratives, but the mechanics of narrative require some degree of artistry and invention. Through this we may distort the past truths upon which we have come to depend in the construction of meaning. As a creative and discursive study, alternative history begins where this premise ends, and prospers from the osmotic relationship between fact and fiction.

In melding art and historical fact into its narrative, alternative history prompts its readers to consider the exchange between the two, producing fertile ground for academic scholarship both in literary studies and historiography. And as world events unfold, as time continues its forward trajectory, the choice of subject matter for alternative history fiction continues to expand. This study, however, focuses exclusively on select texts that present alternatives to World War II. These texts challenge not only our dependence on historical enquiry for cultural definition, but also how we have come to frame those definitions of cultural and individual identity within specific temporal constructions. The alternative history texts in question are Philip Roth's fictionalised autobiography *The Plot Against America*, Martin Amis's novel *Time's Arrow*, and Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds*. Behind these relatively recent works is a centuries-long line of texts that comprise alternative history fiction, a firmly established mode of representation.

One of the first examples of alternative history may be found in Book IX of the third volume of Livy's *History of Rome*. Here, Livy explores in a deliberate and self-aware narrative, this question:

> Nothing has ever been further from my intention, since the commencement of this history, than to digress, more than necessity required, from the course of narration; and, by embellishing my work with variety, to seek pleasing resting-places, as it were, for my readers, and relaxation for my own mind; nevertheless, the mention of so great a king and commander, as it has often set my thoughts at work in silent disquisitions, now calls forth a few reflections to public view, and disposes me to inquire what would have been the consequence, respecting the affairs of the Romans, if they had happened to have been engaged in a war with Alexander. (94-95)

In this mostly academic narrative Livy considers, through over-qualification and excessive justification, what may have happened had Alexander the Great chosen to conquer what lay to the west of his empire, rather than the east. Livy's clear hesitation in considering this alternative suggests the gravity of the intellectual paradigm shift on which he is embarking, especially as it appears in what is effectively a scholarly work. In its entirety, Livy's work is not an alternative history, but his consideration of a historical alternative, though brief, certainly makes use of the same creative principle that has come to define the mode. While Livy's is an example of one of the first non-fictional academic texts to explore alternative histories, the same trope is found, for the first time in fictional form, in the eighteenth century, and then again a century later.

In 1732 *The Adventures of Robert Chevalier*, authored by Alain-René Le Sage, supposes that Native Americans discover Europe, instead of the other way around. This is perhaps the first instantiation of the mode (Kaye 46), but it does not make this historical alteration the focus of its narrative, as it is the protagonist's life which takes narrative priority rather than the historical backdrop against which the protagonist exists (Le Sage). From the nineteenth century we find perhaps the first example of an alternative history narrative that takes up the entire length of a novel (Kaye 46). In 1836 Louis Geoffroy produces *Napoleon and the Conquest of the World*. In this text Napoleon is seen conquering the Russians and the British (Geoffroy). As one of the first examples of an alternative history, the texts in this study owe much to this work, particularly in its handling of the historical paradigms on which we rely in the telling of history. But it is World War II alternative

histories which are central to this study. It is this moment in world affairs, and specifically the World War II alternative histories that follow, alongside which the primary texts herein may be read more fittingly.

In the 1930s, some years before the war's inception, the United States and United Kingdom produced two significant works of alternative history. Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here* is one of the first fictional texts to consider a burgeoning American fascism inspired by a similar political climate in Europe at the time. While the novel does not deal directly with the war (having been published four years before its beginning), it does consider a 1930s America in which fascism emerges in the country. Since the novel does not reach as far back into the past as most alternative histories, Lewis's text may more appropriately be thought of as one that presents a then-recent historical alternative.

Also from the 1930s comes J. S. Squire's *If it had Happened Otherwise*, a collection of essays, from various authors (such as Winston Churchill and G. K. Chesterton), that entertain a range of alternatives. Some stories include "If Lee Had not Won the Battle of Gettysburg" by Churchill and "If it had Been Discovered in 1930 that Bacon Really Did Write Shakespeare" by Squire himself. In some quarters time has been fairly unforgiving of Squire's collection. This was especially true of historian E. H. Carr's reception of the text nearly thirty years after its original publication, where Carr disparagingly likened these subjunctive pursuits to a "parlour game" (*History* 91). Another interesting opponent of this work is Niall Ferguson. Writing in 1997, Ferguson, who is ironically a great advocate of alternative history narratives, claimed that Squire's work was an insincere and mere tentative dabbling in the mode (10). Ferguson's claims were based mainly on comments made by Squire who, despite acting as editor and having written the introduction to an alternative history, discredited the literary mode by claiming that thinking about alternative history "doesn't help much, as nobody is to know whether it would be better for the world [if events were otherwise]" (viii). For Ferguson, Squire could have exhibited a much more sincere embrace of the mode in which his anthology is set. To be fair, Squire does also suggest that the historical alternatives in his anthology have some value in that they at the very least demonstrate the idiosyncratic perceptions of history, and the political persuasions, of each respective author (vii). Whatever its reception now, Squire's alternative history, and also Sinclair Lewis's contribution to the mode, both published just before World War II, during the years in which fascism became increasingly threatening, were at the

forefront of the surge of alternative history literatures after the war, and have greatly contributed to the prominence of the mode as a whole.

Alternative history's firm presence after the end of World War II coincided with Western literature's interest in postmodern forms. Postmodernism, if we are to understand the term as one which casts light on minority voices as the defiant force against hegemonic and singular metanarratives, mirrors what we may read and acknowledge as some of the basic principles of alternative histories. This is especially true when considering the many alternative causes to the many alternative outcomes suggested by the mode's regeneration of history. That is, alternative histories allow for the reader to recognise that historical narratives are not solely determined by massive movements, but are also driven by small trivialities. Ray Bradbury's short story, "The Sound of Thunder", does well in illustrating this point. The narrative is set in 2055, where Time Safari Inc. has perfected time travel for commercial use. Eckels, the protagonist, pays $10,000 to use this service to travel back to the dinosaurs to hunt a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Before his transhistorical expedition, Eckels is given specific instructions to not disturb or come in direct contact with the environment in any way that is not approved of by the company, because, as one of the guides asserts: "A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion" (Bradbury 336). Time Safari Inc. has already determined that the dinosaurs killed are those that would soon die before they are hunted anyway. This makes provision for any potential hypocrisy one may read into the company's methods.

While the story does not make direct reference to World War II, it certainly hints at telling parallels. In the margins of the narrative we are told of the fascist Deutsche being beaten in a recent election by the more moderate Keith. But when travelling to the Jurassic, Eckels manages to commit a breach of time travel. He panics when faced with a dinosaur, and steps onto the soil even when instructed not to do so, then runs away and steps on a golden butterfly. Upon his return, the reader discovers that the outcome of the election results has been reversed, and Deutsche's fascism dominates.

Of course, Bradbury's golden butterfly recalls the butterfly effect, a recognised term within the discourse of chaos theory which demonstrates that minute occurrences may set off an increasingly complex series of other events leading to considerable consequence. Some alternative histories echo this principle by selecting plots driven by small yet significant moments. In this sense there is a considerable overlap between postmodernism and alternative histories, where

both are interested in (sometimes inconsequential) pasts that challenge dominant metahistorical narratives.

A further investigation into alternative history's postmodern expressions demonstrates an interesting play on one of the movement's most defining features: metafiction. We may understand metafiction as those instances in a text that draw attention to its own construction; it is a text that is self-aware, that is able to introspect. As alternative history affects change to the reader's past, by manipulating historical facts the reader knows not to be true, the alternative history text draws attention to its own fabricated nature. The reader becomes aware that she is reading fiction because the references made to the world in which the reader resides may be confirmed as false. The novel stands as an unambiguously fake addition to the reader's reality.

For example, set in 1952, there is Guy Saville's *The Afrika Reich* that tells of the aftermath of an assassination of German Governor General Walter E. Hochburg. Hochburg resides in Deutsch Kongo, a German colony in Africa, large parts of which have come under German control after Germany's World War II victory. Taking a moment to explain how the characters have landed in such a world, the narrator explains that

> Following Hitler's surprise attack on the Low Countries and France in the spring of 1940, the British Expeditionary Force had been encircled at Dunkirk. For a few brief hours it was hoped that the troops might be evacuated, then came the order from Führer headquarters to smash the British into the sea.… 'The whole root, core and brain of our army destroyed', as Churchill admitted after he was forced to resign as Prime Minister. (Saville 33)

It is from this description we are made aware of the moment at which Saville's narrative begins to deviate from orthodox history. Karen Hellekson refers to this moment, the moment at which historical fact transitions into fabrication, as the "nexus" point (5). It is a moment directly or indirectly referred to in all alternative histories. It is also the moment which draws the reader's attention to the text's falsehood, the text's own postmodern awareness of the lie upon which the narrative depends. And Saville's is but one example of how alternative histories, more generally, foreground their fabrication, their literariness, by demonstrating how their narratives have no literal bearing to the real world despite playing as if they did.

Roberto Bolaño's *Nazi Literature in the Americas* provides an unexpected twist on how alternative history may play on postmodern metafiction. Bolaño's novel is one which alters not the history of World War II, but, as the title suggests, the history of pan-American literature on political matters linked to the war. The novel assumes the structure of a who's-whom encyclopaedia of literature. In this way it is an alternative *literary* history, but an alternative history nonetheless. In the book's table of contents, the authors are thematised into categories that are sometimes functional ("North American Poets") (ix) and sometimes florid ("Itinerant Heroes or the Fragility of Mirrors") (vii). We come to know these North and South American authors through both biography and bibliography, both of which reflect the right-wing politics with which the authors identify and sympathise. There is, for example, Ernesto Pérez Masón ("*b. Matanzas, 1908-d. New York, 1980*") (56), whose long-standing and multiple fights with Lezma, a fellow (fictionalised) author, has led Masón to a Cuban jail. While in prison, Masón writes a book, "*Poor Man's Soup*" (57), containing secret messages, which, once decoded, reveal phrases such as "LONG LIVE HITLER" and "KISS MY CUBAN ASS" (58).

Bolaño's novel is an interesting, though atypical, example of alternative history's reflection of postmodern self-referentiality. Alternative history, generally, is metafictional simply in its deviation from the reader's world: the text alters the facts of history the reader knows to be true, which alerts the reader to the text's obvious construction. In Bolaño's case, this is achieved mainly through a postmodern parodying of the forms of history, where the author throws suspicion on the encyclopaedia as a source of truth. In addition to this, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* demonstrates how the historical impact and significance of both literature *and* their authors are themselves texts that require decoding and interpretation. It is not only the writing of history that requires our attention, but also the scribes of those narratives as they sometimes become players in the stories in which we are implicated. It is in this way that alternative histories, with Bolaño's text in particular, prompt their readers to approach both text and author with caution in their readers' pursuit of historical truth.

Alternative history's growth after World War II seems to have coincided with the publication of other popular World War II postmodern novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (which satirises the European authoritarianism) (Orwell), as well as *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22*, both of which satirise aspects of the war, particularly the overbearing control exhibited in a totalitarian state (Vonnegut), and the senselessness of the war itself (Heller). Indeed, other alternative history fic-

tions may be read through the same postmodern lens, but alternative history portrays these views through acts and forms of wit distinct from other postmodern texts, specifically in its play with history. It is evident, however, that both World War II alternative histories and postmodern depictions of the war more generally, at the very least, encourage different narrative perspectives of the war. And, when considering only World War II alternative history narratives, the differences between narrative perspectives are determined both by nation and by era.

In a detailed and extensive taxonomy of World War II alternative histories, Gavriel D. Rosenfeld shows that after World War II, until the time of the publication of his findings (2011), about eighty per cent of all alternative history fiction was written by American and British authors, about fifteen per cent by German authors, and the remaining five per cent by Russian and French authors (15). Rosenfeld attributes the lack of German alternative history fiction to a specific German attitude to history after the war, stating that

> Germans have not been able to enjoy the luxury of embracing such a playful relationship to the past. Given that the Nazi era brought a great deal of misery to their country, Germans understandably have been reluctant to confront the Nazi experience through a genre of narrative representation whose chief characteristics and underlying motives may easily be dismissed as shallow and merely commercial. (15)

According to Rosenfeld, similar reasons may explain why both Russian and French authors have not experimented with the mode as extensively as nations such as Britain and America (15). Yet even with alternative history's popularity restricted to a few nations, it is still a diverse mode. To order this diversity, Rosenfeld provides us with four identifiable narrative paths that alternative histories usually take when they consider World War II: "1) the Nazis win World War II; 2) Hitler escapes death in 1945 and survives in hiding well into the postwar era; 3) Hitler is removed from the world historical stage either before or some time after becoming the Führer; 4) the Holocaust is completed, avenged, or undone altogether" (13). Tonally, Rosenfeld shows that the mode usually fits into two categories: fantasy and nightmare. In terms of nightmare scenarios, Rosenfeld explains that the author chooses to portray an alternative past which is worse than real history (11). This is, speaking broadly, as Rosenfeld explains, done as a means of promoting a conservative present in which the author justifies the present as the best possible world in light of a much worse past that could have been, therefore arguing to keep the present the same (11). A much more liberal stance is taken by the author

when she presents a fantasy scenario in which the alternative past is better than the real past (11). Here, the author (usually) makes the argument that the present could be much better than it is, and is therefore in need of positive change (11). The fantasy scenario, as described by Rosenfeld, links both ideologically and literarily to utopian narratives in that both motivate for an improved present. Yet the mere representation of a utopia does not always necessarily argue for such an improvement, as Rosenfeld would imply of its use in other alternative histories. Jameson shows that utopias may also be read negatively, as they may imply the political and social limitations of our own existence (*Archaeologies* xiii). To be sure, while both views have their merits, it would be unwise to apply either view broadly.

World War II alternative histories have attracted a variety of authors who have portrayed the mode in a variety of styles. Some contemporary authors, such as Harry Turtledove, write almost entirely in this fictional mode, and do so across several genres. In his *Worldwar* series, Turtledove tells of an alternative history in which invading aliens are the cause for the alteration in 1942. His other series, *The War that Came Early*, lacks this science fiction element, and tells of World War II beginning a year earlier, in 1938. There are also other popular and respected authors who are not specifically identified as among the mode's signal consistent participants, but have produced momentary experimentations therein. Robert Harris, with his *Fatherland*, is such an author. This story revolves around the mystery of the death of prominent Nazi member Josef Buhler, and is set in Germany in 1964, long after Germany has won the war (R. Harris). Also, there is Stephen King's *11/22/63*. In this novel, the reader is introduced to a world in which John F. Kennedy was not assassinated, and completed his term as president (King). King does not use World War II as his subject matter, but the enormous popularity of the author certainly brings increased popularity to the mode.

Then there are the instances of, for lack of a better term, literary novelists who have also experimented with the possibilities of alternative history fiction, an act which, while it may prove valuable in and of itself, also manages to legitimise and promote the mode. Philip K. Dick is such a novelist. In 1962 the author produced *The Man in the High Castle*, which, like Harris's *Fatherland*, imagines the Axis powers winning the war and taking control of America (Dick). With *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Michael Chabon, another lauded novelist, provides an interesting take on an alternative ending to World War II. In his novel we witness millions of displaced Jews making a living in Alaska after much of Europe has been devas-

tated by the war. All these texts form part of an already large body of work that uses World War II alternative histories as a means for considering alternative circumstances. The contributions to the mode are vast.

In recognising the common traits of alternative history, and observing some of the forms the mode can assume, we must at last define the term. Using Darko Suvin's oft-quoted definition of the term may be a helpful start, not only as his definition provides some pertinent groundwork for coming to know what alternative history may be, but, due to some inaccuracies Suvin presents, may also demonstrate what alternative history is not. Suvin defines alternative history fiction as follows:

> Alternative History can be identified as that form of SF [science fiction] in which an alternative locus (in space, time, etc.) that shares the material and causal verisimilitude of the writer's world is used to articulate different possible solutions of societal problems, those problems being of sufficient importance to require an alteration in the overall history of the narrated world. It subsumes but transcends, and eventually supplants, the classical utopian (and anti-utopian) form of static anatomy – pure wishdream or pure nightmare. In its stead, it develops into a running through of extreme as well as intermediate possibilities and outcomes. (149-50)

While this definition serves as a helpful start, there are a few points at which I depart from Suvin's formulation of the term. To begin with, Suvin is intent on observing alternative history as a branch of science fiction (where Suvin uses the abbreviation "SF" to mean 'science fiction', and not the more current 'speculative fiction'). While this may be true of some alternative history texts, it is certainly not true of all. If science fiction is defined, at least in part, as an inquiry into the instances in which humanity and (fictional) technology meet, then Suvin's definition excludes much of alternative history fiction.

To offer a brief consideration of alternative histories that are also science fictions, there is Stephen Fry's *Making History*, in which the protagonist, Michael Young assists Prof. Leo Zuckerman in developing a time-travel machine, and goes back to ensure that Klara and Alois Hitler, Adolf Hitler's parents, are unable to conceive their would-be genocidal son. While history is certainly altered, by incorporating fantastic technology into the text *Making History* operates under a different set of philosophical considerations and narrative rules. Using technology to alter history is far too literal a device to explain the historical alteration when

compared to texts that do not come to rely on this device, which are the kinds of texts, for the most part, that interest me here. This means that while some alternative history fictions may have science fiction leanings, Suvin's definition is too restrictive in this regard. It is also partly for this reason that I will be referring to alternative history as a mode, as opposed to a genre as Suvin's definition assumes it to be when he calls it "a form of SF [science fiction]".

Chris Baldick argues that a literary mode is "An unspecified critical term usually designating a broad but identifiable kind of literary method, mood, or manner that is not tied exclusively to a particular form or genre" (def. 1). "Mode", then, concerns itself with the irreducible mechanics of narrative form, as those identifiable literary characteristics evident in other genres, and is therefore applicable to any genre. A literary mode does not depend on genre for classification; it exists outside of genre. In studying alternative histories, we become aware that these kinds of texts demonstrate a break in the historical narratives we have come to collectively believe as true. Alternative histories express a manipulation in historical time, and by extension narrative time. And since narrative time constitutes such a basic literary quality that traverses genre, it may be more appropriate to classify alternative history as a mode. Believing alternative history to be a genre seems to limit the scope of its contribution to its manipulation of fundamental narrative components such as time. Of course, perceiving alternative history as a mode of representation does not necessarily restrict any alternative history narrative from assuming the form or aesthetic of whatever genre(s) it chooses. Suvin's definition, again, seems to lack this narrative freedom of choice afforded to alternative history.

Other inaccuracies of Suvin's definition of the mode emerge when we consider his claim that alternative history, by design, aims to address "different possible solutions of societal problems" (149). As in Suvin's previous claim, this may exclude some alternative history texts that do not adhere to such a restriction. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 1, the political or a-political interests of alternative histories vary tremendously. Alternative history is a mode which assumes forms more numerous than Suvin's definition allows, and is a definition that requires some supplementation. Yet in considering a definition of *alternative* history, it may be essential to clarify also what is meant when speaking of the study of *real* history.

It seems appropriate to define history as the study and interpretation of the facts of past events. Where we may contend one another's interpretation of those

facts, the facts of history remain unaltered. With this, alternative history may be understood as the self-aware reconfiguration of those historical facts through narrative form. It is of particular importance to qualify that alternative history represents history through self-aware reimagining, thereby using this undermining of historical fact as a method of enquiry to offer new perspectives on familiar past events. In this way, as will be argued throughout, alternative history may be seen as history's complement, rather than its other. Reading the primary texts against this claim may provide for some fruitful discussion.

This work will examine three main texts. Set between June 1940 and October 1942, Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (published first in 2004) imagines an America in which famous aviator and anti-Semite Charles A. Lindbergh is elected president (instead of Franklin D. Roosevelt). In addition to being an alternative history, the novel is also a fictionalised memoir in that it is retrospectively narrated by an adult "Philip Roth" who chronicles his childhood and coincidently shares the author's name.

Philip speaks of his childhood as one darkened by "Fear" (*Plot* 1), the novel's first word, as he grows up in Newark's Jewish community, situated in the much larger context of an anti-Semitic America. Philip's fears seem cultivated and aggravated by his community's own fears and outrage at the actualisation of the seemingly impossible and unforeseeable having become a reality. In the early hours of the morning, when Lindbergh is elected as the Republican Party's presidential candidate, Philip's Newark's residents bursts in howls of confusion and anger: " 'Hitler in America!' the neighbors cried. 'Fascism in America! Storm troopers in America!' " (*Plot* 17).

Once Lindbergh is elected president, each member of the Roth family processes and reacts differently to the hostile land in which they find themselves excluded as decidedly un-American. Sandy, Philip's older brother, a skilled amateur artist, admiringly produces portraits of his new president. This is done much to the irritation of his cousin, Sandy, and especially his father, who doggedly and at times pathetically clings to notions of American fairness and equality, despite the recent evasiveness of these ideals. During a trip to Washington, when Herman Roth and his family are refused entry into a hotel, and after an altercation with a Lindbergh admirer, Herman is referred to as " 'a loudmouth Jew' " (*Plot* 65). Herman channels his anger into an opportunity to teach his children about the values of equality by "alluding to the tablet bearing the Gettysburg Address: " 'Just read it. "All men are

created equal" ' " (*Plot* 65). Such moments of trite sentimentality provide little or no comfort to Philip.

Philip's Aunt Evelyn, though, embraces the new government, and begins working for Homestead 42, a division of the Office of American Absorption (OAA), a government programme tasked with relocating America's Jews. The organisation is intent of tearing the nation apart, all while under the veil of rhetoric of integration. The Roth family eventually receive their order to relocate with the prospect of "exciting new opportunities to expand their horizons and to strengthen their country" (*Plot* 204). After receiving the letter, Philip feels compelled to visit his aunt at work and ask that his family stay where they are, instead of moving to Kentucky. Aunt Evelyn misreads Philip's request, and believes Philip to mean that his neighbour and school friend, Seldon Wishnow, and his mother, accompany the Roths to their new location. That Philip harbours a hate for Seldon only serves to worsen matters.

Seldon and his mother leave for Kentucky before the Roths. At the same time, Walter Winchell, a radio broadcaster especially popular among Jewish listeners, is assassinated. The death of Walter Winchell, who over the course of the novel gains in political popularity, serves as a catalyst of anti-Semetic violence in "American history['s] … first large-scale pogrom" (*Plot* 266). In the ensuing violence, Seldon's mother is killed, and Seldon is left stranded in Kentucky. Late into the night, Philip's mother quickly arranges for Seldon to be rescued. The boy is returned safely to the Roth household, where he lives temporarily, and Seldon's trauma becomes the cause of great guilt and shame in Philip who feels responsible for his neighbour's hardships.

The novel ends with Lindbergh embarking on a flight and never being heard from again. This unexpected turn in American politics exacerbates tensions in the country. To restore the nation's stability, Roosevelt assumes the presidency, but Pearl Harbour is attacked by the Japanese, and America enters the war a year later than it did on real history's timeline.

In ventriliquising the style of a memoir Roth's text may be taken as an investigation into how this mode comes to influence our reception of history, which, as the novel comes to show, distorts our interpretation of history as a consequence of our expectations of its narrative aesthetic. It is because of this that the "*Plot*" in the title holds at least two meanings. One meaning could refer to Lindbergh's administration's plot to undermine American democratic ideals, which becomes especially evident when Lindbergh begins to fuel anti-Semitic tension, which even-

tually erupts into fascism and violence. Also, "*Plot*" may refer to the narrative Roth constructs which is essentially a lie about what we have come to understand as American history. That is, Roth's novel presents a plot against the narrative we have come to identify as representative of the truth about America. Both definitions goad the reader into questioning seemingly axiomatic attitudes about what they have come to comprehend as *America*.

Though many have appreciated Roth's novel as an interesting play on our perceptions of history, it is also praised as a validation of alternative history as a mode of literary representation worthy of serious academic study. Indeed, as Rosenfeld writes, "The fact that Roth, one of America's most celebrated and accomplished writers, chose to write a work of alternate history … affirms the genre's arrival into the American cultural mainstream … [making it] something of a milestone in that respect" (152).

More so than Roth's *The Plot Against America*, this study's other novel, Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, first published in 1991, is certainly not an alternative history in the conventional sense of the term, a sentiment expressed also by Rosenfeld in his encyclopaedic cataloguing of World War II alternative histories (363). *Time's Arrow, or the Nature of the Offence* (the text's full title) is included here precisely because of its placement at the fringes of the mode. In this way Amis's text offers some expansion on what may be considered alternative history. This also means that some explanation is needed to justify my classification of this text as representative of the mode.

The landscape described by Amis is one the reader inhabits, but, because of a thermodynamic quirk, which goes unexplained, time runs backwards. While the protagonist of *Time's Arrow* is Odilo Unverdorben, the novel is narrated by what seems to be his disembodied, witless, nameless, and sexless unconscious or alter-ego, whom no one can hear save the reader. Because of grammatical constraints, and for the sake of pragmatism, I will be referring to the narrator as 'he' throughout this analysis, though underscoring that this is largely a misrepresentation of a persona who is, importantly, a non-identity (as will be expanded upon elsewhere, but most prominently in Chapter 5).

The narrative begins in America with Odilo's death, who at this point is named Tod T. Friendly (Amis *Arrow* 3-6), and ends with his birth in Germany (Amis *Arrow* 165). Through the narrator's backwards narration, we discover that for much of his life Odilo has assumed several identities so as to evade prosecution for his involvement as a Nazi doctor in Auschwitz and Treblinka. The reader only discovers

Odilo's true identity in the final third of the text, which assumes a much darker tone to the rest of the novel. Many critics found fault in what they perceived to be a tonal disjuncture. Writing for *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani, for example, expresses concern over the "pages and pages of sophomoric humor laid as groundwork for one huge philosophical point" (17). Indeed, as the narrator begins to negotiate the topsy-turvy physics of his environment, the reader may be amused and shocked by descriptions of reverse defecation (*Arrow* 11), pimps who lavish their hookers with wads of cash (*Arrow* 29), or children who are suddenly calmed down when smacked (*Arrow* 26). Kakutani's point is that while readers may appreciate the irony that such backwards narration affords, the death camp scenes and, especially, the quirky particularity of Amis's telling demonstrate that it is "a risky narrative strategy more suited for the short story form than a novel. As it is, the top-heavy jokey part of the book overshadows its somber conclusion, blunting its larger moral ambitions" (17).

As the novel progresses, Odilo becomes stronger, younger, more robust. He works as a doctor in America, implanting foreign objects into his patients and leaving them worse off from when they entered his room. There is also his partner, Irene, who is ignorant of his past and true identity, but hears Odilo, or Tod as she knows him, speaking in German as she sleeps next to him (*Arrow* 21). We realise that these recurring dreams of his former Nazi self are indicative of the trauma that haunts Odilo throughout his post-war existence. Irene eventually and slowly fades out of Odilo's life, and Odilo, who went by Tod Friendly, changes his name to John Young, and continues to work as a doctor in America. As John Young, Odilo's dreams continue to haunt him. Having access to Odilo's mind, the narrator realises that it is the cries of babies that are the cause of his nightmares. From America, Odilo moves to Portugal as Hamilton de Souza where he lives an opulent life, we later discover, from having extracted gold from Jews' teeth and from having stolen their possessions during the war.

The final third of the novel begins with Odilo entering Auschwitz "shortly after the Bolsheviks had entrained their ignoble withdrawal" (*Arrow* 116). In Auschwitz and Treblinka, Odilo does not hide behind pseudonyms and false pretences. He works as a Nazi doctor under the supervision of "Uncle Pepi", the nickname given to Joseph Mengele by his colleagues and the children and twins upon whom Mengele conducts his experiments. The narrator claims that Uncle Pepi's success as a doctor "approached – and quite possibly attained – 100 percent. A shockingly inflamed eyeball at once rectified by a single injection. Innumerable ovaries and

testes seamlessly grafted into place. Women went out of that lab looking twenty years younger" (*Arrow* 134). While working in Auschwitz, the reader finally becomes aware of the specific incident that we would later understand as the cause of Odilo's nightmares.

In the process of bringing back groups of Jews to their homes and villages (which, when reversed we read as taking Jews out of these places), Odilo finds himself in an abandoned textile factory. When reversing the narrative's temporality, we realise that Odilo enters the factory, and hears the cries of a baby who betrays the hiding place of dozens of others hoping to avoid discovery by Nazis in the area (*Arrow* 141-42). It is this baby's cry which becomes the source of trauma for Odilo's later years.

It is also in this period that we discover Odilo's personal life before having entered the war. Odilo, we read, is married to Herta, but their marriage is put under strain with the death of their baby: "The baby is very weak, and the doctors have done all they can. The casket was about fifteen by twenty inches" (*Arrow* 134). Eventually Herta and Odilo enjoy their honeymoon (*Arrow* 152), get married (*Arrow* 153), and court. All the while, Odilo becomes younger. He becomes a child, then a baby in his mother's care. By the novel's end, Odilo has been birthed (*Arrow* 165). From death to birth, in reverse, the novel chronicles the life of Odilo Unverdorben.

It is precisely the backwards narration upon which my labelling of *Time's Arrow* as alternative history relies. The narrator states that the "film is running backwards" and seems the only one to experience the oddity of this reversal and interprets the world accordingly: language becomes garbled as it is spoken in reverse (Amis *Arrow* 7); food is eaten by throwing up (Amis *Arrow* 11); and narratives of the past, with World War II and the Holocaust in particular, become something they are not. Speaking literally, history remains unaltered, and the typical markers of the mode of World War II alternative histories are absent: the Nazis do not win; unexpected alliances between the world's great nations are not established; and the preface and epilogue to the war is as the history books have recorded. History, as we understand it, remains the same, and my classification of the novel as an alternative history depends upon the narrator's perception of history as it moves counter to expectation. It is this backwards narration which informs the narrator's entirely new perspective of what happened, allowing him to believe that what he sees is true. This demonstrates that Amis's text may be understood as an alternative history not necessarily through plot, as readers well

versed in the mode have come to anticipate, but through an interpretation of the facts of history that makes of that history something other than what it is. The most startling example of this, of course, is that the Holocaust is undone as Jews of Auschwitz and Treblinka are created from gas, and are made alive upon the extraction of phenol from their hearts (Amis *Arrow* 120; 128). It is through these narrative idiosyncrasies, and through this witty reversal of meaning, that *Time's Arrow* may be considered, and will be studied as, an alternative history.

The only film considered in this study is Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (released in cinemas for the first time in 2009). More or less like Roth's novel, Tarantino's film presents a typical instantiation of the mode, but unlike the other texts considered in this study, the film presents an interesting tonal shift from the previous two. By incorporating farce into moments that ordinarily do not lend themselves to such portrayals, Tarantino challenges the seemingly prescriptive filmic narrative conventions which have become commonplace in World War II cinema. In some regard, Tarantino's alternative history, with its unapologetic reference to World War II exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s, challenges not only the facts of history but also the more sober and solemn portrayals of the War, especially the kind of World War II narratives that have become popular in recent decades. Unlike films such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Polanski's *The Pianist*, or Eastwood's *Flags of our Fathers*, Tarantino's World War II is funny, excessively violent, and gung-ho.



Figure 1: Landa as Holmesian detective in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

Vengeance, like many of Tarantino's films, comes to be one of the central character motivations driving the narrative. In the film's opening scene in Nazi-occupied France, Shosanna Dreyfus's family is killed by Col. Hans Landa, the "Jew Hunter", while they lie beneath the floorboards of Pierre LaPadite's home, a French farmer who attempts to hide the family from danger. Shosanna, however, manages a narrow escape. Landa comes to be the film's central villain. He is calculating, unfeeling, and comically maniacal. He is as fastidious as he is unhinged in his cunning. The audience recognises these contrasts upon their first encounter with him. When interrogating Perrier LaPadite about the presence of the Dreyfus family, Landa takes

out his pipe to smoke, as seen in Figure 1. As Landa comes to identify himself as a "detective" (Tarantino *Basterds*), the pipe recalls Sherlock Holmes while Landa tries to interpret the facts at hand to uncover the disappearance of the Dreyfuses. Yet the pipe is also oversized, suggesting that Landa is a character lacking in proportion, and exists outside the parameters of predictability.

Years later we discover that Shosanna, having changed her name to Emmanuelle Mimieux, has inherited her aunt and uncle's cinema, which she co-owns with her black lover, Marcel. While the Nazis remain in France, Shosanna is continually harassed by a young Nazi war hero, sniper Fredrick Zoller, whose claim to fame is that, over three days, he killed more than three hundred Allied soldiers from a single tower. Goebbels, recognising Zoller's success as rich propaganda potential, aims to make a film of the young and handsome soldier's conquests. The propaganda film is entitled *Nation's Pride*.

Persuaded by his infatuation with Shosanna, Zoller suggests her cinema for the film's premier. It is arranged that top-ranking Nazis will be in attendance, including Hitler and Hans Landa, the man responsible for the massacring of Shosanna's family. Reluctantly, Shosanna agrees, though all the while realising that this presents an opportunity for revenge. With Marcel, Shosanna plans to burn the cinema down on the night of the premier.

The film presents a parallel story, one which focuses on the Basterds. We are introduced to the Basterds as they are being recruited for a special mission, led by the American Lt. Aldo Raine.



Figure 2: Raine's neck scar in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

Like Landa, Raine is a character of excess. With a protruding lower jaw, Raine is a man of hyper-machismo. He speaks with a broad southern American accent, and proudly parades a long and ugly scar that stretches across the width of his neck, as seen in Figure 2.

Raine's recruits are a mixed bag of Jewish American soldiers, some of whom appear more muscular and capable than others. In no uncertain terms, Raine explains by shouting to his new recruits what their new mission will comprise: "When you join my command, you take on debit – a debit you owe me, personally. Each and every man under my command owes me one hundred Nazi scalps. And I

want my scalps. And all y'all will get me one hundred Nazi scalps, taken from the heads of one hundred dead Nazis. Or you will die trying" (Tarantino *Basterds*).

After a few years, the British government get wind of the premier of *Nation's Pride* at a Parisian cinema. With the help of German actress Bridget von Hammersmark, who works as a spy for the Allies, the British government recruits the Basterds for Operation Kino (German for 'cinema'). The objective of Operation Kino is to kill all Nazis present at the cinema as they enjoy their film. Of course, Shosanna plans to do the same. Both plots to kill Hitler and other prominent Nazis are unaware of each other, but both plans, for the most part, are successful.

When some of the Basterds enter Shosanna's cinema on the night of the premier, Landa spots Bridget von Hammersmark, a friend. Landa asks to be introduced to her companions, the Basterds, who speak only English but hope to pass themselves off as Italian. Their cover is blown when Landa, who happens to be fluent in Italian, recognises their pretence, but decides against exposing them. Instead, Landa attempts to use the situation to his advantage. He secretly captures Raine and Utivich, another Basterd, drives them away, and begins his negotiation. As neither plan to kill Hitler has been realised yet, Landa threatens to call off Raine's plan if his demands are not met. His demands include American citizenship and a home on Nantucket. Raine receives communication from his superiors to meet Landa's demands so that Operation Kino may continue, which, indeed, it does. The cinema begins to burn down as per Marcel and Shosanna's plan, and the Basterds at the cinema begin shooting at the Nazi audience without reservation, making quite sure that Hitler is among the dead. Tarantino's alternative is that World War II, upon Hitler's assassination, ends in 1944, a year before the war's real end as far as the audience is concerned.

The selection of these primary texts is based, in one part, on the ways in which they may be seen as representative of the mode, and, on the other, on the ways in which they challenge the tropes and aesthetics of the mode to which we have become acclimatised. The texts have been selected to discover how they may stretch and expand upon our understanding of the powers and potentials of the mode. *The Plot Against America* considers the form alternative history may assume when the author writes himself into his own narrative. How is our reading of any history complicated and complemented when the author is implicated in the writing of that narrative? *Time's Arrow* presents another way in which the historical alternative may be framed. In what ways may we consider perceptions of time as determinative of our readings of history? And *Inglourious Basterds*, possibly the

most overtly funny text examined here, challenges its viewers not only in presenting an alternative to real history, but also a tonal alternative of a history typically presented as sacred, especially in recent films of this large and overwhelming subject.

Yet these texts will not be studied in isolation. In drawing certain conclusions about the small sample presented, one would have to rely on the addition of other alternative history texts to assume those conclusions are in any way representative of this vast and colourful mode. It is for this reason that these texts will be read against other more archetypical examples of alternative histories such as Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, and Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, among several others. Drawing upon other texts within the oeuvre is particularly pertinent when considering this project's broader claims about the representations of time in alternative history fiction, one of this project's key concerns.

In its distortion of the facts of the past, it is evident that alternative history complicates the temporality upon which narrative hinges. I will argue that each of the primary texts question what we have come to understand as past, present, and future, and, in their disruption of conventional notions of time, demonstrate alternative history's ability to recall all three narrative demarcations simultaneously in ways that would allow us to consider these temporal markings in unfamiliar ways. This also explains the compartmentalisation of this study into Pasts, Presents, and Futures, the plural form of which suggests, as will be argued throughout this work, the myriad ways in which alternative histories come to compose these supposedly discrete temporal signs. Each Part of this study observes the significance of time as it impacts on our cultural expectations of the concept, and the implications of temporal subversions on character and narrative.

Part 1 concerns representations of the past, and how the texts concerned offer alternatives not only to history as we know it, but also to specific narrative conventions of World War II to which we have become accustomed (Chapter 2). This section also concerns how, in reconfiguring the history of World War II, alternative history may bear some similarity to denialism, specifically Holocaust denial (Chapter 3). Part 2 concerns the present, and how present politics tends to reshape our narratives of the past (Chapter 4), and how the past comes to configure present identities (Chapter 5). Part 3, in its single chapter, attempts to demonstrate how the primary texts' (in)ability to imagine alternative pasts may or may not allow for the imagining of alternative futures. Chapter 7 considers the discussions of what

had gone before. Making use of some prominent theories of time, such as Paul Ricoeur's ideas of narrative temporality, this section offers ways in which alternative history's temporal manipulation may be understood, especially when considering the role of the reader and her time.

Understanding how the alternative histories in question come to challenge our beliefs of past, present, and future relies on an understanding of these texts' reconfiguration of history and the narration thereof. The texts' alternative versions of the past invite us to contemplate how all of time and its forms may be reconsidered. Thus, some careful thought needs to be afforded to questions of historical narration, by which I mean, historiography, which, along with descriptions of postmodern time, are the central issues regarded in Chapter 1, to which I now turn.

# Chapter 1
# Narrating History and Time

> I suggest that the most urgent task of narrative theory is to construct a poetics of nonmimetic fiction that can finally do full justice to the literature of our time. (B. Richardson 38)

## HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

New writing on alternative history often argues for the efficacy of the mode, demonstrating how it challenges various assumptions of history, especially how history is imparted through the writing of that history. The discipline for which these matters are of central concern is referred to as historiography. Reading alternative history through a historiographic lens may prove worthwhile, especially if we are to compare the mode to other forms of history writing, of which Herodotus' *The Histories* is one of the first examples in Western historicism.

Throughout his text, Herodotus makes us aware of his objective in his telling of history, reminding us throughout that his accounts are merely based on others' reports to which he had been privy. He claims the following, for example: "My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it – and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole" (494). Indeed, we witness Herodotus' scepticism in his retelling of the story of the land of the Arimaspians, a nation of one-eyed men who "steal [gold] from the griffins who guard it" (250). After relaying the story, Herodotus makes the claim that "personally, however, I refuse to believe in one-eyed men who in other respects are like the rest of us" (250), demonstrating an objectivity and a scepticism that have become current standards of good historical practice. Certainly, many of the narratives recounted by Herodotus are imbued with fanciful flourishes. Yet not all, despite their dubious relationship to reality, are treated with the same questioning eye. Take, for example, the narrative of giant ants, creatures "bigger than a fox", found "round the city of Caspatyrus" that may be found digging for gold in the desert (246).

Such fantastic accounts, especially when presented as fact, undermine the distrust Herodotus has afforded other parts of his work. It is not a new claim to state that the words of Herodotus cannot be trusted for their authenticity, but they can at least be appreciated as a document that represents the narratives that were circulating at the time (Burn 29). In this way, Herodotus still provides us with an accurate form of ancient history: he presents us with a history of the narratives of his time. However, for this study, Herodotus' work demonstrates value in how fact and fancy abut. Not only do Herodotus' fantastic accounts prompt readers to question sources, they also incite an awareness of the reliance we have on language as a representation of reality, showing how language may easily distort the world.

Herodotus' legacy forms part of what we have come to appreciate from alternative history fiction. Herodotus and alternative history fiction writers are alike in that they both present otherworldly histories. However, despite these two kinds of historical representations being cut from the same cloth, one is fiction masquerading as fact, the other fact masquerading as fiction. While Herodotus presents his work as historical truth, despite the prevalence of his farfetched accounts, some of which he contests, there is a distinct lack of irony in the presentation of his narratives. This same irony is both present in, and defines, alternative history fiction. The irony in alternative history is evident in the reader's understanding that the fiction presented in the text stands in perfect opposition to the fact of the history in which that text exists. When engaging in alternative history, there is an underlying and unspoken contract between reader and author which states that both are knowingly and voluntarily participating in a fiction. Herodotus' text cannot formally be considered an alternative history, let alone an early example of the mode, since this contract is not adhered to. Crude though it may be, his works certainly are important for how it has contributed to a modern understanding of the form history writing may assume. This has become a discipline, in more recent times, for which Georg Lukács has been a key contributor.

Georg Lukács, in his *The Historical Novel*, shows that before the French Revolution, the masses "accepted [history] naïvely as something given" (*Historical Novel* 19). In other words, the masses believed themselves to be authored into history, rather than being the authors of history. In the era before the revolution, history writers divorced their subjects from the history in which they were implicated (*Historical Novel* 19), portraying history as a framework into which narratives of the individual may be placed. In this sense, history becomes a backdrop into which

the players of history are incapable of determining history itself. After the revolution, though, especially in Europe, history became a "*mass experience*", and the people "no longer have the impression of a 'natural occurrence' " of the historical trajectory (*Historical Novel* 23). People discover that history is constructed; it has an agenda. It is through this that the modern historical novel begins to assume its shape. The end of the revolution provided people with the power of national influence, and they now determined the fates of those who assumed absolute control (*Historical Novel* 25). The event witnessed history being written not by those above, with historical narratives forced onto others for reasons of self-validation, but it was written by those below, from the ground up, by the people themselves. In creating history, the populace became authors of their own historical narratives.

It is from this that Lukács shows that the historical novel in its modern form shows how its subjects define and are defined by the socio-political specificity of the era in which they are a part (*Historical Novel* 19). The same may be said of alternative history fiction if we are to read the mode as one in which the author liberates the facts of history from both historians and those with an assumed political privilege over their time. The mode also shows history as that which may be controlled, manipulated, and (mis)interpreted by anyone with creative will. This ability lies in the power of the author's imagination where history and narrative meet. The encounter between history and narrative is a much-theorised proponent of historiography, with Hayden White as one of its main contributors, but, of course, not its only one. Roland Barthes was among the first to write on the subject.

Roland Barthes's "The Discourse of History" remains one of the most notable texts that addresses the relationship between history and narration, or the relationship between history and the telling of history. It is in this text that Barthes makes us aware of the *seemingly* objective quality of the retelling of past events. In retelling history, Barthes explains that "the signs of reception or destination are commonly absent" (131). Put another way, the reader, as Barthes understands this figure as "reception or destination" of history writing, is not actively written *to* by the writer. The historian writes as if in a vacuum, offering the impression that the work is sound in and of itself, rendering discursive interpretation irrelevant. The facts of history are as they appear.

Barthes also argues that the writer writes as if she herself is absent, or that "history seems to *tell itself*" (131). As if by magic history is presented as history ought to be presented, and as it can only ever be presented. History speaks for itself, and

in this process again silences reader and interpreter. It is these dual lacks of author and reader which lead, as Barthes explains, to the perceived objectivity of history, to the perception that the historical text requires no additions or subtractions from either author or reader (132). Barthes's thesis is one that is shared by many theorists of history, most notably Hayden White, who is perhaps the most cited advocate of this argument. However, where Barthes, later in his career, transitioned from structuralism to post-structuralism, White, while occasionally changing his stance on some key matters, continued to rely on structuralism to define and refine his arguments on history and narrative.

In his "Introduction" to his anthologized *Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White proposes one of his most famous arguments: tropes (which White isolates to metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony) stand collectively as "the shadow from which all realistic discourse tries to flee. This flight, however, is futile; for tropics is the process by which all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyse objectively" ("Introduction" 2). According to White, presenting history realistically is a doomed task. He shows that historical realism inevitably relies on one or a combination of these proposed tropes, all of which describe the metaphorical nature of historical narrative. The impossibility of literal historical representation is an argument championed by other prominent historiographers, such as E. H. Carr.

In *What is History?* Carr claims that "The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate" (*History* 6). The objectivity of historical writing seems "very hard to eradicate" because, just as we have learned from Barthes, the type of discourse employed by this style of history writing seeks to obscure the presence of reader and writer. If the text is written as if without a writer, then it assumes the status of having been organically formed; if it is written as if with no intended reader, then there can be no opportunity for interpretation, critique, or response. White's formulation of what he terms Absurdist and Normal critics further elucidates the false assumption of history's objectivity.

Normal critics, according to White, are those who "continue to believe that literature not only *has* sense but *makes* sense of experience" ("Absurdist Moment" 379). Such critics are less sceptical of the role of language as a tool to understanding the world and explaining it. Standing counter to this position are the Absurdist critics who, as White explains, doubt the ability of language to provide an accurate depiction of reality ("Absurdist Moment" 379-80). According to the Absurdist critic

we cannot be sure of history because of language's lack of fidelity in its telling of this history. Language and history are irreconcilable. Qualities of language, therefore, determine the division between Normal critics and their Absurdist counterparts, with White placed somewhere in the middle of the two.

White argues that he "has never denied that knowledge of history, culture, and society was possible", and that he has "only denied that a scientific knowledge, of the sort actually attained in the study of physical nature, was possible" ("Introduction" 23). He inhabits this space between a belief in the ability to have complete knowledge of a historical event and having no knowledge of history, and adopts elements from both Normal and Absurdist critics to formulate his argument regarding the narration of history. If we rely on, as White would see it, language as a somewhat malleable tool to come to know something, especially history, then we have to approach historical accounts with a degree of scepticism. White provides a thorough explanation of the ways in which we use language to come to know history, or, at least, come to know it within the constraints of language.

For White narrative falls into four modes of emplotment (romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire), four modes of explanation (idiographic, organicist, mechanistic, and contextualist), and four modes of ideological implication (anarchist, conservative, radical, and liberal) ("Interpretation in History" 307; *Metahistory* 29). He applies this matrix to the study of history as he claims that most historical narratives fall into one or more of these categories, and asserts that while there may not be as many ways of interpreting history as there are historians, there are, at least, defined modes in which historians operate (*Metahistory* 29). This means that if metonymy, synecdoche, irony, and metaphor are the inescapable tropes reflected in the historian's *language*, then it is in one of these categories, explained above, into which the historian's *narrative* falls. Further, it is this narrative, whatever may have been chosen by the historian, that provides both structure to a historical event, and insight into how a historian interprets an otherwise chaotic and value-neutral occurrence (White "Historical Text" 84). One must also be aware that utilising poetic tropes when ascribing a narrative to historical fact may distort one's perception of these facts and the value we place on them. Thus, while it is reasonable to agree that World War II is an indelible fact on the western world's timeline, it is the persuasion and fluidity of language that determines how we perceive the victors, how we value the events of the war, and the degree of importance we ascribe to various aspects of the war. From this there emerges an interesting

interplay between historical fact and poetics that are the twin engines of the historical narrative. This is a characteristic of historical representation that White also ascribes to the study of visual forms of history, a noteworthy, though small, facet of White's work, and is especially relevant given the filmic aspect of some of the texts considered herein.

When writing of the differences between written and visual historical analyses, White argues that when comparing the reading of visual and written historical material historians should be cognisant of the idea that "the analysis of visual images requires a manner of 'reading' quite different from that developed for the study of written documents", and that "[T]he representation of historical events, agents, and processes in visual images presupposes the mastery of a lexicon, grammar, and syntax … quite different from that conventionally used for their representation in verbal discourse alone" ("Historiophoty" 1193). Plainly, the distinction between an analysis of a written history and that of a visual history is a distinction hinged on an appreciation of the aesthetics of that history. Considering the differences in aesthetics of this or that medium is certainly one of interest, yet the same kinds of analyses, analyses that are more invested in the fact that history is being *re*presented at all, whatever the veneer, should guide the readings of historical narrative. Indeed, White argues that all telling of history, visual or written, are products of consideration, selection, and necessary manipulation, but "It is only the medium that differs, not the way in which messages are produced" ("Historiophoty" 1194). Historian and documentarian Robert A. Rosenstone agrees, arguing that all historical narratives are "shaped" (Rosenstone 1180); White says it is "constructed" ("Historiophoty" 1195). Both visual and written historical accounts should (and will, throughout this work) be treated as both equally valid and reliable sources of historical representation, where analysis will differ only in demonstrating sensitivity to the aesthetic of that historical account.

Returning focus on written historical narratives, the other mode of representation which is of interest in this project, especially regarding Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, is the biography, of which much has been theorised. In *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács explains the variety of forms the biography may adopt. In his description, Lukács demonstrates that some biographical forms provide truer and more authentic insight into the subject's life than any other form may. To explain this point, Lukács uses Lenin's *State and Revolution*, a biography of Marx, as an exemplar of his thesis. Lukács describes Lenin's account of Marx as a "straightforward manner of presentation", a description on which Lukács elabo-

rates by describing the qualities of which it is not composed. Lukács explains how Lenin does not describe Marx "walk[ing] diagonally up and down his room, … his desk littered with books and manuscripts" (*Historical Novel* 308). While "this would all be historically true," as Lukács opines, it would not "bring us any nearer to Marx's great personality" (*Historical Novel* 308). Lukács describes such descriptions as more akin to art, the qualities of which include "subtle description, plastic representation, forceful irony, satire" (*Historical Novel* 304).

To bring readers closer to Marx, to provide a "really good historical portrait of an important figure" (*Historical Novel* 304), Lukács favours the "scientific means" of representation, which entails a "deep and very generalized *analysis* of an epoch" (*Historical Novel* 304). This scientific representation, specifically, means that the writer establish the "large objective connections" between a subject and her greater political and social environment, that the writer provide an account of the ways the subject fits into the grand scheme of things (*Historical Novel* 305). For Lukács, Lenin's success in capturing Marx in *State and Revolution* may be attributed to the author's ability to "sum up the major viewpoints of the European revolutions of the nineteenth century in a theoretically brilliant, lucidly outlined and popular way and this enables us to cast a glance … into the intellectual workshop of the founder of scientific socialism" (*Historical Novel* 309).

The above does not make any claims about what may or may not constitute historical accuracy, and only comments on the quality of historical representation. For Lukács, "it is *only* by scientific means that [history] can be adequately presented" (*Historical Novel* 304), no matter the historical accuracy of such a work. An author may merely provide the facts of a subject's life, but doing so in a manner other than through scientific means will "never give us the real context" (Lukács *Historical Novel* 306). By "real" Lukács does not mean true or accurate; the word seems more a qualitiative evaluation, and describes historical texts that are relevant, interesting, or noteworthy. Though in other parts of his text, Lukács does provide some inight into the ways in which history may become distorted through narrative expression.

When writing on the possiblity of narrative to reflect art, Lukács is sceptical of art's ability to always mirror reality with complete fidelity. He shows that in the rare instances when no changes to reality are required in the narrativisation of that reality, it still remains that all that came before and after that real moment "will have been decisively altered" by virtue of the mere representation of the fact, that "these alterations will transform the artistic quality of the biographical epi-

sode" (*Historical Novel* 303). This implies that no adaptation of reality into narrative may ever be accurate, though this seems of secondary importance to Lukács, who is more concerned about the "quality of the biographical episode" in such alterations of reality. Of course, in a project which, in part, concerns itself with representations of truth, the alternative must be studied alongside the historical truth itself. The two are inseparable. History becomes distorted through the writing of that history, and is an argument which extends further to the reading of that history. Both the writing and the reading of historical representation seem vulnerable to inaccurately capturing the 'truth' of the matter, and is a premise also reflected in Roberto Bolaño's *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, to which we return.

Bolaño's novel, a parody of a literary encyclopaedia, contains a literary category entitled "Magicians, Mercenaries and Miserable Creatures". Under this there is an entry for fictional author Harry Sibelius: "*b. Richmond, 1940–d. Richmond, 2014*" (129). Bolaño describes Sibelius's novel, "*The True Son of Job*" (128), as one in which "Germany, in alliance with Italy, Spain and the Vichy government in France, defeats England in the autumn of 1941" (129). Bolaño places a World War II alternative history within his own alternative history of prominent pan-American writers of the right wing. Sibelius's novel is described as a response, of sorts, to the work of English historian Arnold J. Toynbee, particularly his book *Hitler's Europe*. As groundwork for his alternative, Sibelius quotes the following passage, in full, from a chapter of Toynbee's book entitled " 'The Elusiveness of History' ":

> 'The historian's view is conditioned, always and everywhere, by his own location in time and place; and, since time and place are continually changing, no history, in the subjective sense of the word, can ever be a permanent record that will tell the story, once and for all, in a form that will be equally acceptable to readers in all ages, or even in all quarters of the Earth.' (130)

The narrator of Bolaño's text explains that Sibelius may understand Toynbee's words differently to Toynbee himself: "… [T]he British professor's aim is to testify against crime and ignominy, lest we forget. The Virginian novelist [Sibelius] seems to believe that 'somewhere in time and space' the crime in question has definitely triumphed, so he proceeds to catalogue it" (130-31). In misreading Toynbee's argument, Sibelius ironically undermines his own. In other words, Sibelius's misreading of Toynbee's extract (which warns against misreading) serves as an example of Toynbee's point, thereby reinforcing it. Bolaño's Sibelius has demonstrated that though the facts of the war remain unchanged, language, and

the form those historical facts assume, may come to distort one's perception of truth. In its approbation of right wing politics, Sibelius's novel uses language to bend history as it occurred, and attempts to influence the readers' measurement of the politics within the historical narrative which we believe to be true. It is also through this imaginary author that Bolaño seems to distinguish his own project from Sibelius. That is, through his own novel, and especially in his description of Sibelius's alternative history, Bolaño demonstrates the linguistic considerations to which we must be aware when reading alternative histories (or even orthodox histories) within a certain aesthetic. Another example of this may be found in the opening pages of Len Deighton's *SS-GB*.

Deighton's novel, published first in 1978, is an alternative history set in 1941, two years after the end of World War II, in which Germany has defeated the Allies (1). Like Robert Harris's *Fatherland* and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Deighton's *SS-GB* is told as a thriller. And also like Harris's and Chabon's texts, Deighton's novel focuses on a few detectives who are tasked with solving the murder of a high-profile victim who is found dead in the novel's opening pages, and is somehow linked to influential government officials.

The reader of *SS-GB* is introduced to Deighton's narrative with what appears to be a facsimile of an official war document. Complete with smudged stamps and six blotchy signatures, the document, written in English and titled in Gothic script "Geheime Kommandosache", is dated "18.2.41" (Deighton xiii-xiv). The document signals the official end to Germany's conflict with, and defeat of, Great Britain, with its first point unambiguously stating that "The British Command agrees to the surrender of all British armed forces in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland including all islands and including military elements overseas" (Deighton xiii). Deighton wittingly constructs this document to lend ironic credibility and legitimacy to the false history that follows. While doing so, we are also faced with a simultaneous undermining of the faith placed in such scraps of paper tinted by an air of officiousness. Deighton's pastiche of the fake document comes to stand as a warning of the validity of such aesthetically appropriate records.

Alternative history demonstrates that the relationship between art and reality, or art and history, is one which is not easily teased apart. Indeed, the basic tenets of alternative history come to depend on a recognised version of history that the mode alters for imaginative play. The implication is that truth is partly a matter of perspective, that the discovery of truth lies not solely in the historical fact, but also in the way that history has come to be interpreted. Also, the mode destabi-

lises the belief that any written account of history stands as a true representation of a past reality. Since it is only text that has come to act as a stand-in for history, alternative history narratives seem to suggest that these documents are themselves untrustworthy and open to reinterpretation and revision.

## A Brief History of Postmodern Time

Conceptualisations of time have morphed considerably over the centuries. Much of the focus in this section will be to describe and discuss some of the forms of literary time by which we may begin to understand the broader temporal representations found within alternative history. Time, as it is manifested in alternative history, as I will show, is quite clearly postmodern. To understand in what way it is framed by postmodern temporal forms, it is necessary to describe how alternative history does *not* conceive of time; it is necessary to describe the kinds of conceptualisations of time against which alternative history may be described.

For centuries, Newton's description of time, which describes time as linear, dominated the west's idea of the concept. This imagining of time by Newton is, today, referred to as absolute time. Newton, in an oft-quoted definition of time, describes this kind of time in the following way: "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without regard to anything external …" (13). What is implied in Newton's delineation of time as "absolute" is that time is complete within itself, and impervious to the influences (physical or perceptual) of anything else in the universe, as suggested by the latter part of the extract. Time acquires a godlike stature, acts rather than is acted upon. It is unresponsive and self-sufficient. Writing less than a century before Newton is Shakespeare, whose portrayal of time may be found in his sonnet, "123", quoted here in full:

> No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change;
> Thy pyramids, built up with newer might,
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
> They are but dressings of a former sight:
> Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
> What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
> And rather make them born to our desire

Than think that we before have heard them told:
Thy registers and thee I both defy,
Not wond'ring at the present nor the past,
For thy records, and what we see doth lie,
Made more or less by thy continual haste:
This I do vow, and this shall ever be,
I will be true despite thy scythe and thee. ("123" 1-14)

The speaker adopts a resolute and defiant tone as a response to time as controlling and omnipotent. The speaker personifies time, and so it assumes a vulnerable human form, which may be read as an act of resistance against its dominance. Time is made mortal, and its impenetrable abstraction neutralised. By the speaker's will, time, now, is no longer grandiose and godlike. This humanising of time makes it prone to attack, which the speaker sets out to do with enthusiasm.

The speaker shows time is a mere copycat as the great structures of the world, the construction of which is attributed to time's "might", are similar to those that have come before ("123" 2-4). Time is also identified as a trickster: the speed at which time travels (if we are able to entertain the idea of time travelling at one universal speed) distorts what we see as past and present ("123" 12). The irony of the speaker's defiance and indignation, however, is remarkable.

The speaker's vitriol may be taken as an ironic indication of time's power over the speaker. The speaker unknowingly defines his existence by the confines of time as the speaker shows that his "dates are brief" ("123" 5). The inevitability of time's power bypasses the speaker. Further, in the couplet, the speaker proclaims that his mission will last forever: "and this shall ever be" ("123" 13). Once again the speaker's challenge against time is framed and determined by time itself, which only reinforces the very power against which the speaker attempts to contend. This idea of the power of time bears similarity to Newton's ideas of the concept, which are to appear almost a century after Shakespeare's.

Russell West-Pavlov, in his book *Temporalities*, shows that Newton's absolute time may be thought of as a container in which events behave as in a play, a play within time wherein events are seemingly connected both logically and seamlessly: "The notion of history as a diorama allows us to imagine what it would be like to stand in the place of time itself, separated from events, arranging them in sequential order like dominos or counters on a table to create a logical sequence of cause and effect" (37-38). As West-Pavlov's explanation suggests, space and time are separate; they are thought of and function as discrete phenomena. With this un-

derstanding of time and the workings of the universe, the study of history is made accessible: history, in this sense, is neat, characterised by a temporal flow that is uninterrupted, forward-moving, and straight.

Three hundred years after Newton, if we may take so bold a leap, is Einstein's theory of relativity, which, as West-Pavlov explains, showed that time and space must be thought of as a unified and singular concept, where the measurement of one depends on the measurement of the other (40). That is, the measurement of time depends on the measurement of the site at which that time is being measured, which must also be done in relation to other sites of time measurement. Measuring time in this way is relative. After Einstein, time loses its Newtonian singularity and omnipotence. Time becomes messy and segmented. Einstein's complication of Newtonian time cannot solely be attributed to physicists, but to philosophers, too. Heidegger's influential work in *Being and Time* appears twenty years later. In this text Heidegger attempts to describe our subjective experience of time, and map humanity's placement therein. On these matters, Heidegger writes the following:

> [Birth and death] *consists of* a sequence of Experiences 'in time'. But if one makes a more penetrating study of this way of characterizing the 'connectedness' in question, … the remarkable upshot is that, in this sequence of Experiences, what is 'really' 'actual' is, in each case, just that Experience which is present-at-hand 'in the current "now" ' …. Dasein traverses the span of time granted to it between the two boundaries, and it does so in such a way that, in each case, it is 'actual' only in the "now", and hops, as it were, through the sequence of "nows" of its own 'time'. Thus it is said that Dasein is 'temporal'. In spite of the constant changing of these Experiences, the Self maintains itself throughout with a certain selfsameness. (425)

Heidegger begins this passage by describing more conventional temporal experiences of time in relation to being, where the subject submits to an existence framed by time. He then subverts this view of the subject in time by showing that Dasein, defined loosely as the sense of self that is fully aware of its own existence, a self that is self-aware, mediates between moments in time, both through what has been and what is, all the while maintaining a sense of singularity of self. Like Einstein, Heidegger disrupts our placement in time and our relationship to it. Einstein demonstrates how time is no longer defined by a Newtonian absoluteness, but by fracturing, or relativity. And Heidegger shows how time can no longer be

thought of as singular as well, but, in addition, how the self has become disjointed (while still, in some way, maintaining a kind of wholeness) in a fractured state of time. Heidegger considers this notion of the fragmentary nature of time further as he applies this philosophy to how history has been figured in everyday speech.

At the beginning of a chapter titled "Temporality and Historicality", Heidegger muses on history as it is colloquially understood, and illustrates the ironies and dual meanings that underlie the use of simple phrases when referring to the historical. He begins by observing the use of the term history as a signification of the past:

> Here 'past' means "no longer present-at-hand", or even "still present-at-hand indeed, but without having any 'effect' on the 'Present' ". Of course, the historical as that which is past has also the opposite signification, when we say, "One cannot get away from history." Here, by "history", we have in view that which is past, but which nevertheless is still having effects.… Thus 'the past' has a remarkable double meaning; the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time;… and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand 'now' – for instance, the remains of a Greek temple. With the temple, a 'bit of the past' is still 'in the present'. (379)

In these few ways Heidegger demonstrates that time and history are not as neatly defined as we would have believed, or as graspable as common usage of the term would suggest. Heidegger shows that history and time, at least in the ways in which we have come to experience these terms when occupying real space, if we are to divide them into past, present and future, must be thought of more as composites of each other more so than discrete and unaffected entities. Alternative history, especially the texts considered here, effects a similar complication of our understandings of time (as I will argue in more detail in Chapter 7). Throughout our experience of time, then, are moments of disruption of temporal perspective and subjectivity, especially in relation to history.

In addition to physicists and philosophers, poets were experimenting with similar ideas during the same period. Writing nine years after Heidegger, T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" demonstrates ideas about the multiplicity of selves in a multiplicitous time network. This is demonstrated most notably in the opening lines of the poem:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind. (1-15)

Eliot represents the slippery nature of time and our struggles with how we come to understand time and history. The poem's opening lines express a philosophical and meditative tone in understanding the mechanics and flow of time. Eliot begins his poem by demonstrating how time is all at once condensed and expansive: the future contains both present and past as it relies on both for its existence, and the past contains the future as we understand the past, by definition, as necessarily leading to something after (1-3). Time folds in on itself as it becomes simultaneously disintegrated and whole.

As in the language of alternative history, in the middle of the stanza the narrator entertains the possibility of other pasts, though exercising caution while doing so (6-8), and also suggests the futility of this act as it will remain a "perpetual possibility" (7). Eliot further demonstrates that these kinds of speculations, never innocent, are determined largely by our present understandings: "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (9-10). This meditation on the nature of time, especially speculative times, precedes a dramatic tonal shift in the poem. Eliot illustrates the effects that entertaining such thoughts may have on a life. When the speaker wonders about action *not* taken ("Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened" (12-13)), she defines her past negatively, contemplating what was not, rather than what was. Eliot introduces and builds on speculating about history as it did not happen, or non-history, or even alternative history. History, as the opening lines of the poem suggest, is not impenetrable, but malleable, which seems the cause of the poem's tone of lament, regret, and desire, qualities most evident in modernist text. And in Eliot's text, these modernist qualities seem both to determine and are determined by a particular construction of time.

Many critics have attempted to formalise and delineate such temporal literary forms across diverse modes of representation. Such definitions may prove useful as the study progresses. One of the leading thinkers about the nature of time, and its function in narrative, is Paul Ricoeur. In his essay, "Narrative Time", Ricoeur notes that narrative, whether fact or fiction, "escapes the ordinary notion of time conceived of as a series of instants succeeding one another along an abstract line oriented in a single direction" ("Narrative Time" 174). Ricoeur's explanation of this thesis is founded on our expectations when reading. By the time we reach a narrative's end, we expect that the conclusion makes sense (that a conclusion be acceptable more so than predictable) based on the information that has come before (Ricoeur "Narrative Time" 174). In this way we are able to undermine the conventional understanding of the movement of time as moving in a single direction because we are able to move forward in time through the story, and are able to appreciate the conclusion retrospectively. Ricoeur explains that this backward movement through the story "is the paradox of contingency, judged 'acceptable after all,' that characterizes the comprehension of any story told" ("Narrative Time" 174). The novel is not only appreciated read forward in time. The novel is not solely appreciated 'in time' as such, but afterwards, and, in this way, disrupts one's conceptualisation of time as moving forward.

Bakhtin offers some interesting additional insight into our pursuit of understanding the relationship between time and narrative in ways that deviate in fundamental ways from Ricoeur's thesis. In his essay, *Forms of Time and the Chronotope of the Novel*, Bakhtin, in speaking of conventional narrative forms, states that reader and narrator occupy different timescapes: "… [B]efore us are two events – the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself (we ourselves participate in the latter, as listeners or readers); these events take place in different times (which are marked by different durations as well) and in different places" (255). Bakhtin explains that the act of reading assumes the reader's occupation of two different timescapes: that of the real world and that of the narrated work. Despite this temporal duality in which the reader is happy to participate, Bakhtin asserts that these timescapes themselves do not overlap. Of time within the narrative, Bakhtin puts forth that "the basic temporal sequence of the novel – although it is, as we have said, irreversible and integral – is nevertheless a closed circuit, isolated, not localized in historical time (that is, it does not participate in the irreversible historical sequence of time, because the novel does not yet know such a sequence)" (119-20). The flow of time referred to here is dif-

ferent to Ricoeur's understanding of the directionality of time in narration. Ricoeur shows that when appreciating the form of the narrative the reader must work backwards from the end; the text is, in some ways, understood when conceived of backwards. Yet Bakhtin deems narrative to be irreversible as it does not exist in the same temporal environment as that which is outside the text. In other words, the text does not operate by the same mechanics of historical time, which, by definition, reverses time in one's backwards observation of events.

Despite their differences, both these positions problematise our common ideas of the discourse of temporality. Bakhtin disrupts assumptions of unidirectional linearity by suggesting that the study of history is inherently one in which time is reversed. And Ricoeur suggests that any act of reading is characterised by the reader's tendency to go back to the start once having reached the end, showing that reading encompasses an appreciation of time's dual directionality. While Bakhtin and Ricoeur provide profound insight into the nature of time within narrative, we must consider formulations of time in postmodern narrative that further disrupt conventional time in its contextual temporal representations, particularly as I will argue throughout that alternative history represents another instantiation of postmodern time.

As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth demonstrates in her work, *Sequel to History*, "postmodern narrative language undermines historical time and substitutes for it a new construction of temporality that [she] call[s] rhythmic time. This rhythmic time either radically modifies or abandons altogether the dialectics, the teleology, the transcendence, and the putative neutrality of historical time" (14). According to Ermarth, historical time "may be the most powerful value confirmed by the narratives of Western, especially Anglo-American, culture; it informs much of what we tell ourselves about individual and collective life" (20). Ermarth further states that western thought has used such constructions of time to measure and evaluate one historical event against another with the intention of reinforcing its own knowledge claims (20). It is also a temporal form that styles itself as "neutral and homogeneous". This description seems analogous to Newton's notions of absolute time (13), which is conceived of as unwavering and concrete in its form.

Postmodern temporal forms serve to undermine the timescapes upon which this phenomenon, historical time, as defined by Ermarth, is based. For Ermarth, postmodern representations of time, especially as they play against understandings of more conventional historical time, is no longer based on

> the time of history, the time of project, the time of Newton and Kant, the time of clocks and capital.… In short, postmodern temporality makes temporality itself part of a system of value and emphasis. The sentence read *is* time and time is a sentence ….
>
> Postmodern narrative denies the dissociation of art from life, making the act of reading and interpretation the subject of the book.… To read any text, whether or not it is a printed book, is to participate; it is to continue to undergo the warps and deformations that never-neutral life always entails.… To read is to interpret and to interpret is to reinvent, or coinvent, the text. (21-23)

Postmodern temporality, Ermarth seems to suggest, disrupts the elementary relationship between author and reader. In creating an environment in which both reader and author adopt the position of author, historical time loses its sway. In postmodern temporality, time itself becomes a function of the reader's ability to speak back to the text, and meaning is discussed rather than dictated. Meaning becomes situated between reader and author, and the to-and-fro of meaning-making echoes the disorderly timescape observed in the context of the postmodern text. It is also within this framing that we may begin to understand the mechanics of time in alternative history texts. In undermining the reader's understanding of how the past functions, and what we typically value from the past and its representation, alternative histories splinter off in new and unexpected directions, creating new meaning of the past in the process. The opening pages of C. J. Sansom's alternative history novel, *Dominion*, exemplifies this point.

The novel is prefixed by the author's brief exordium: "*All events that take place after 5 p.m. on 9 May 1940 are imaginary*" (Sansom n. pag.). The novel spends its first three pages recalling history as it occurred, or at least constructing a narrative of true history. The reader is placed in London, in the Cabinet Room in 10 Downing Street, thirty minutes before Sansom's alteration. Churchill arrives late to a meeting at which Margesson, Chamberlain, and Lord Halifax are present. We are told that, the night before, Chamberlain had lost the confidence of both Conservatives and Labour, that his "leadership could not survive" (1), and he decides to resign from his position as Prime Minister.

There is the suggestion of a coalition government, but Chamberlain is aware that Labour would only agree to this under a new Prime Minister. He leaves it to Churchill and Halifax to decide between themselves who would assume the role of Prime Minister. And after some discussion we hear various clocks strike 5 o'clock, the moment at which Sansom's alternative diverges from real history: "The car-

riage clock struck five, a high, pinging sound. As it finished Big Ben began booming out the hour" (3). At this point Halifax nominates himself for the position, and after some brief deliberation, Churchill quietly concedes. Halifax quickly assigns Churchill a post in the " 'smaller War Cabinet [as] Minister of Defence' " (3). Churchill accepts, believing that if he were "in charge of the war effort, perhaps he could dominate Halifax in all but name" (4). The next chapter takes place twelve years later, in November 1952, on Remembrance Sunday, where a parade dedicated to veterans of the Great War fills London's streets. We read that Hitler is present at the ceremony, sitting next to the King (10), and that twelve years earlier Halifax had "surrendered after France fell" (8), thus ending the war between Germany and Britain in 1940. Halifax's war efforts had failed.

The moment at which Sansom's history deviates from real history, the moment at which we read of Big Ben's "booming", we are reminded of the famous opening image in Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *Mrs Dalloway*, which uses the same language to describe Big Ben's strike: "… [O]ne feels in the midst of the traffic … a suspense … before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (2). Woolf's time is at once strident and liquid. Big Ben commandingly "boom[s]" across London, exploding its time across the city. But once this time is released amongst the Londoners, it becomes formless, "dissolv[ing]" in the air, thereby losing its sense of singularity. In his use of the same language as Woolf, in describing Big Ben's "booming", Sansom recalls this formless sense of time, this portrayal of time as in some ways multiplicitous. And in portraying real history as a precursor to the alternative, Sansom suggests that time may be thought of as multidirectional as it splinters off at acute angles from the expected trajectory. In this way Sansom's alternative history also suggests an alternative temporality, one marked by a formless plurality.

*Dominion* is but one example of the ways alternative history seeks to disrupt the past. Yet Sansom's text still serves as a useful introduction into alternative history's temporal subversions. By definition, all alternative histories demonstrate a reconfiguring of the past in some form. Both reader and author are aware of the real history that exists outside of the text, and the author serves to reconfigure that which is there to begin with. In alternative history, time returns to accepted history specifically by referring to it (however overtly). But this return cannot be described as a *mere* return since returning, in its basic form, suggests that the narrative that was there before will be lived through once again, will be retold, or

repeated. Alternative history's return to the past is limited in this sense as it breaks away from one version of the past to create another. Both versions of the past reside in the reader's mind: the reader appreciates the alternative *as* an alternative for she is aware of the accepted past against which the alternative speaks (demonstrated in quite literal ways in Sansom's novel). Alternative history time portrays time as numerous and layered, or palimpsestic, which notions of postmodern time does well to begin to explain, though other temporal formulations from Ricoeur may prove useful in my analysis, especially towards the end of this work.

# PART 1: PASTS

# Chapter 2
# The Form of History

> So very difficult a matter is it to trace and find out the truth of anything by history, when, on the one hand, those who afterwards write it find long periods of time intercepting their view, and, on the other hand, the contemporary records of any actions and lives, partly through envy and ill-will, partly through favour and flattery, pervert and distort truth. (Plutarch 214)

## ROTH'S PLOT AGAINST THE AESTHETICS OF MEMOIR

Through retelling, or perhaps untelling, the past, alternative history unsettles our familiar historical landscape. Simply, this provokes us into considering how the past may have been different had certain causes led to different effects. Of equal importance, the mode not only points to new historical possibilities, but also provokes readers to question the conventions of historical narration, or historiography. Our understanding and acceptance of the past, alternative history seems to say, is a mixture of fact and interpretation. It is in the interplay between the two in which alternative history exists. The primary texts herein add to this discourse by inviting the reader to interrogate the form history assumes, an interrogation which, in turn, may prompt an awareness of our reception of history.

The form of a historical narrative, and the genre(s) through which the author wishes to tell it, serve as the points of entry into our understandings of the history being told. These choices influence our reactions to the historical narrative. When considering the form of a historical narrative, we are presented with certain questions: how does the form dictate what history remains in the narrative and what is discarded?; how do our assumptions about the genre inform our reception of that history?; what kinds of tropes, specific to that form, distort our reading of that history?; if the author's choice of one form over another is ultimately arbitrary, as

Hayden White suggests (*Metahistory* 26), does this mean that all history is relative? The primary texts in this study provoke these questions in vastly different ways.

To begin with, Roth's *The Plot Against America*, in its mix of alternative history and pseudo-memoir, is unique not only among the other primary texts in this study, but also when compared to alternative history texts more generally. Both modes of representation in Roth's text inform and complicate the other.

By placing his pseudo-memoir alongside an alternative history that is grand in its sweep, Roth's text seems also to be an exploration of the politics of narratives both small and large. To be sure, this combination of intimate and grand narratives is by no means novel. In the canon of European literature, this form may be witnessed as early as *The Odyssey*, in which, after the destruction of Troy, we follow a single character, Odysseus, on his journey back home to Ithaca (Homer). And it may be found in a text as recent as the *His Dark Materials* trilogy in which young Lyra Belacqua traverses multiple universes in search of her father (Pullman). However, Roth's choice to place this old narrative practice (the personal on the backdrop of the grand) within an alternative history invites the reader to investigate the opposite ends of the narrative scale that historical narratives may adopt. It is also an invitation to the reader to question the foundations of the truth upon which personal and global historical narratives rest.

The memoir is a long-established literary tradition with extensive theoretical underpinnings. Because of its close association to autobiography, we turn to Philippe Lejeune's list of the four necessary qualities of an autobiography to ascertain a similar sense of what we mean when speaking of memoir:

1. Linguistic form: (a) narrative; (b) prose.
2. Subject treated: individual life, personal history.
3. Situation of the author: author (whose name designates a real person) and narrator are identical.
4. Position of the narrator: (a) narrator and protagonist are identical; (b) narration is retrospectively oriented. (193)

Lejeune assures us that "Any work is an autobiography if it fulfils all of the conditions indicated in each of these categories" (193). Our classification of Roth's text, though, is slightly complicated by Lejeune's disclaimer that memoir, into which Roth's text may fall, differs from autobiography on point 2. However, Lejeune does not provide detail about why or how memoir differs from autobiography, so we are left to infer. Perhaps it is because autobiography requires the expansion and temporal stretch which memoir lacks. Where autobiographies are an account of

the author's entire life (or at least a significant chunk of it), memoirs tend to focus on a specific moment, usually childhood. This distinction may be of little consequence here as what concerns us is Roth's adherence to the truth of his life, no matter the timeframe. Roth's text is clearly neither autobiography nor memoir to begin with, but Lejeune's four-point definition maintains its use as it provides a framework in which Roth's work may be read. Interestingly, Lejeune himself does not ascribe dogmatically to his definition as he demonstrates an awareness of the liberties authors may take in their autobiographical writings, showing that these qualities be "*mainly*" fulfilled to be considered autobiography, except points 3 and 4(a) from which there can be no deviation (Lejeune 193). He concedes that "The forms of the autobiographical contract are quite varied, but they all manifest an intention to 'honour the signature' " (Lejeune 202), where Lejeune's " 'signature' " refers to the assurance from the author of the truth of the content. Roth's text is at least in part a play on such well-established ideas of the narrative forms authors adopt in the telling of their lives.

We are alerted to Roth's deviation from this mode not only when we recognise inconsistencies when comparing *The Plot Against America* to his real personal history (published in Roth's other true autobiographies such as *The Facts* or *Patrimony*), but also when we read that Lindbergh was president (*Plot* 1). It is through this misrepresentation of history that Roth begins to, by Lejeune's terms, dishonour this signature: if he is recounting his life in a fictitious past, then his protagonist must be fictitious, too, and therefore cannot be the same as Roth himself.

Of course, the pseudo-memoir or fictitious autobiography is not Roth's invention. Other authors have produced works in this mode before. Over recent decades more popular examples of such literary play include *The Enigma of Arrival* (Naipaul), the novel-poem *Another Life* (Walcott), and, more famously, the trilogy *Scenes from Provincial Life* (Coetzee *Provincial Life*). However, it is the historical alternative embedded in Roth's text which sets it apart from other pseudo-autobiographies, and may be unique in this regard, at least in novel form. Yet *The Plot Against America* is by no means the first time Roth has produced an alternative history, or perhaps something like it.

Early in his career, Roth published " 'I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting'; or, Looking at Kafka", a hybridisation of essay and short story. The text imagines that Kafka does not die in 1924 at the age of 40, but, at the outbreak of the Holocaust, somehow escapes to Palestine and then America. The text is divided

into two parts. The first takes the form of an essay in which Roth explores Kafka's many failed sexual relationships while also drawing comparisons to his career as an author whose novels are never published during his lifetime. The second part takes the form of a short story, and, like *The Plot Against America*, Roth inserts himself and his own biographical material into this narrative. In this second part of Roth's piece, the year is 1942 and Dr. Franz Kafka finds himself in New Jersey, Roth's home state, working as a Hebrew schoolteacher instructing Philip and his friends in their Jewish neighbourhood.

In this part of Roth's text, Philip, also the narrator, considers himself the class clown and nicknames his outlandish European teacher "Dr. Kishka", which Philip explains is "the Yiddish word for 'insides' " and refers to his teacher's "sour breath, spiced with intestinal juices by five in the afternoon" ("Kafka" 291). Feeling guilty for thinking about an otherwise decent man in such degrading ways, and discovering that this lonely foreigner lives solitarily "in a room in the house of an elderly Jewish lady", Philip organises that Dr. Kafka join his family for dinner one Friday evening ("Kafka" 292). Philip's father takes to this enthusiastically and even plans to use this as an opportunity to introduce Dr Kafka to Philip's spinster aunt, Rhoda ("Kafka" 293). Despite a long though successful courtship, Aunt Rhoda and Dr. Kafka fail at establishing any meaningful bond. Philip, through his youthful confusion, asks his brother, Sandy, why their relationship has failed, to which Sandy succinctly gives a reason "that is no answer and enough answer …: 'Sex!' " ("Kafka" 300).

Though it borrows key elements from the mode, Roth's text is strictly not an alternative history, especially when compared to *The Plot Against America*, a much more faithful commitment to the form. Occasionally in "Looking at Kafka", Roth qualifies the historical alternative presented by demonstrating that it is not a sincere rewriting of the past. Using the phrase "had he lived" in the first part of his text, Roth seems not wholly adhered to the fictionalised second, more narrative, part of Kafka's life in America. And towards the end of the second part of the text there are instances in which quite literal references are made to Kafka's real history. When the reader learns of Dr. Kafka's death (3 June, 1954) in the newspaper obituary, Philip laments the literary works which never came to be: "He also leaves no books: no *Trial*, no *Castle*, no Diaries" ("Kafka" 301) and "all trace of Dr. Kafka disappears" ("Kafka" 302). In imagining Kafka's literary history as it did not happen, and in doing so referring to how it did, Roth holds the possibilities of alternative history at arm's length. But this does not make Roth's text any less

complex than, say, *The Plot Against America* in its considerations of history and time because of this.

Though Roth's "Looking for Kafka" is not as immersed in alternative history as Roth's *The Plot Against America*, there is some interesting overlap in the kinds of historical considerations to which both works gesture. Where *The Plot Against America* speaks towards the narrative exchange between political and personal historical accounts, "Looking for Kafka" seems preoccupied with literary history. At a significant moment in the essay-cum-short story, Philip witnesses an odd turn in Aunt Rhoda which seems sparked by her being in a relationship with Dr. Kafka. There is talk of Aunt Rhoda returning to the stage, an occupation she once enjoyed years ago before Philip's birth. It is a history to which Philip was never privy and so presents itself as confusing and uncharacteristic of the person he believes he knew completely. Sandy tells Philip of this period in Aunt Rhoda's life, but Philip cannot conceive of it having once happened: "To me this period of history is as difficult to believe in as the era of the lake dwellers …; people say it was once so, so I believe them, but nonetheless it is hard to grant such stories the status of the real, given the life I see around me" ("Kafka" 298).

The reader may find it ironic that Philip is unable to imagine a history other than the one he inhabits since the character himself exists within a historical alternative, but, of course, does so unknowingly. Philip also suggests that to imagine other histories requires, in Kafkaesque terms, entertaining narratives outside of the real. The implication, in operating within Philip's parameters, is that the narrative with which we are presented is one that may be read as a typical example of a realist text. This estimation is based entirely on Philip's level of comfort and familiarity of the world in which he is placed. Yet despite Philip's failure of the imagination of historical alternatives, the reader is nevertheless required to make these same leaps. The reader resides in a different set of historical premises to those being narrated. The text, therefore, seems to suggest that the real in realism extends only as far as the name. Roth's *The Plot Against America* is similarly realist in tone, but there is nothing real about the plot. This is true of the political *and* autobiographical material of both *The Plot Against America* and "Looking at Kafka". Both texts seem to unsettle the forms of autobiography by using the form ironically. Both seem sceptical of the overreliance placed on the aesthetic of truth rather than the truth itself. In other works Roth explores similar issues but with the additional consideration of other matters pertinent to *The Plot Against Amer-*

*ica*, namely, the confused and confusing relationship between author and protagonist. Roth's 1990 novel, *Deception*, explores this point.

*Deception* is composed almost entirely of dialogue where two adulterers play the protagonists. Philip, the male protagonist who is also an author, explains to his mistress, a thinly veiled stand-in for Roth's then-wife English actress Claire Bloom, the difficulty of establishing truth, or non-truth, in a piece he has written about himself: " 'It is *not* myself. It is *far* from myself – it's play, it's a game, it is an *impersonation* of myself! Me *ventriloquizing* myself. Or maybe it's more easily grasped the other way around – everything here is falsified *except* me. Maybe it's *both*' " (*Deception* 184). Similarly, the protagonist explains his frustrations about critics' and readers' interpretations about the instances in which the author does or does not refer to himself in his work: " 'I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography, I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction, so since I'm so dim and they're so smart, let *them* decide what it is or it isn't' " (Roth *Deception* 184). Both extracts suggest the slippery nature of autobiography, especially as it is sometimes thought of as fiction's opposite. At the very least, the quotes suggest that fiction may be read into fact and fact into fiction, that the two, partly determined by the reader, are not altogether distinct entities. Roth's other work, *The Facts*, presents another interesting case about the potential slippages between both fiction and fact and author and text.

*The Facts* is probably the closest Roth has come to writing an autobiography. In this text Roth chronicles his life story from childhood well into his adult life and writing career. Significantly, the novel is bookended by letters between the author and his fictional alterego: Nathan Zuckerman, a character, among many, that Roth uses as a proxy for internal investigations into his, Roth's, career, his personal relationships, his celebrity, his Jewishness, his sexuality, his Americanness, and his past. The novel opens with a letter to Zuckerman from "Roth" (*Facts* 10), as the author signs off, stating his intentions in writing this piece:

> I was depleted by the rules I'd set myself – by having to imagine things not quite as they had happened to me or things that never happened to me or things that couldn't possibly have happened to me happening to an agent, a projection of mine, to a kind of me. If this manuscript conveys anything, it's my exhaustion with masks, disguises, distortions, and lies. (*Facts* 6).

Soon after, in the same letter, Philip, if we are to think of him as character not creator, seems to undermine this proposal. Wherein the passage above the narra-

tor claims to be "exhaust[ed] with masks", the passage below suggests that distorting the truth upon recalling the past is inevitable:

> I recognize that I'm using the word 'facts' here, in this letter, in its idealized form and in a much more simpleminded way than it's meant in the title. Obviously the facts are never just coming at you but are incorporated by an imagination that is formed by your previous experience. Memories of the past are not memories of facts but memories of your imaginings of the facts. (*Facts* 8)

This extract may serve as a fitting introduction to many Roth novels chronicling the events of his many alteregos, especially *The Plot Against America*. Roth seems to imply that it is through the creative process that we construct the past, where personal memory, a creative memory, aids in the manufacturing of history. The personal past, according to Roth, "never just [comes] at you", it does not lay in passive dormancy anticipating discovery, but requires active creation on the part of the subject to whom the past refers. *The Plot Against America* operates in the same way, connoted by the alternative history in which it is set, a mode of representation of which imagination and innovation are its most basic and necessary components. In imagining both an alternative personal history, as well as an alternative metahistory, *The Plot Against America* demonstrates that the facts of both oneself and nation are susceptible to misremembering and intrusions of invention.

Earlier it was suggested that Roth's alternative memoir and alternative history inform and speak to each other. That is, misremembering history results in misremembering personal history, and misremembering personal history informs our assumptions of the historical narrative in which that personal history is set. In reworking the facts of history, both individual and national, *The Plot Against America* seems to call into question the reliance we place on personal and seemingly objective national memory. In other words, when narrating history, Roth's novel may suggest that the creative process, which begins in the structuring of that memory into narrative, is complicit in the construction of lies and misinformation that becomes part of that narrative. Lying about the past, then, begins with the narrative act, regardless of whether or not that narrative is set within the confines of a supposed autobiography. However, Roth's text cannot be dismissed as absolute fabrication. In this novel, fiction and fact should not be seen as dichotomous, but as complements on a continuum.

In an essay about his novel, Roth writes about the political inspiration behind his text, and, in referring to the early 1940s, speaks of "the American anti-

Semitism that was being stoked, one way or another, by eminent figures like Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh … and our nation's anti-Semitic propaganda minister, the radio priest Father Charles Coughlin" ("Story" 10). In Roth's novel the anti-Semitism reaches epic proportions, and is exposed by another radio broadcaster and columnist, Walter Winchell, who almost singlehandedly manages to bring "the Lindbergh grotesquery to the surface" (*Plot* 262), and gets "these organized anti-Semites and their thousands of unforeseen sympathizers to reveal themselves for what they were – and [reveals] the president for what *he* was" (*Plot* 267).

While Winchell manages to expose Lindbergh for what he was, Winchell's true, or at least complete, historical persona is, quite knowingly on Roth's part, concealed to some degree within the narrative. Winchell is portrayed as doggedly left wing in *The Plot Against America*, and as a consequence of that, is even assassinated before America's involvement in World War II (Roth *Plot* 272). Yet in real history, after the war, he "turn[ed] to [the] far right [and became a] fierce foe of [the] Soviet Union and anti-Communist supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy" (Roth *Plot* 375). Roth details this in a Postscript (*Plot* 363-91) to the text, which includes brief (and true) biographies of some of the novel's real-life characters, and some reproductions of historical documents, including Lindbergh's 1941 anti-Semitic speech, "Who Are the War Agitators". Roth presents this history, in some ways, to set the record straight, to allow the reader to realise the history against which he was writing. But he also seems to do so, as in the case with Walter Winchell, who vacillates from extreme left to far right, to demonstrate history's susceptibility to sway and selection in the hands of the author. History, like other texts, is finally subject to the author's creative impulses. And in this case, Roth's impulse has been to articulate, through lies, the truth of the anti-Semitism of 1940s America which sometimes goes unnoticed when looking back at the past from a biased and often morally superior present.

The anti-Semitic rioting described in the novel, the fictitious history portrayed, reveals the anti-Semitism that was being "stoked" in real history, not nearly reaching the proportions of the nation-wide violence of the novel, but was nevertheless present to some harmful degree. This may suggest Roth's belief in the inevitability of Jewish suffering in America at this time. That is, no matter the historical trajectory, real or imaged, the text seems to suggest that Jews were doomed to suffer. But this would be to misread Roth's alternative. What Roth seems to be showing in this text is not that Jewish suffering is inevitable, but that fictitious representations may sometimes unearth truths suppressed by more conventional narrative

forms. The truth, the novel suggests, can be explained in another guise. Historical alternatives can inform historical truth, and Roth's alternative is not as damaging, or as untrustworthy, as one may assume.

Roth places both alternative and actual histories, on scales both personal and national, side-by-side, where the reader is constantly comparing her own history to Roth's imagined version. In this way, *The Plot Against America* alerts the reader to the different avenues by which one may encounter historical truth in narrative. And in the ironic positioning of the memoir set within an alternative history, the text warns against placing our faith in the simple narrative postures of this mode of representation. In autobiographical writing, the "signature" in the contract of authenticity to which Lejeune alludes may be breached just as easily as it may be honoured based exclusively on the whim of the author. The form of the text exists independently of truth. Yet this is not to say that Roth is doubtful of narrative to ever establish truth. It is only that the text demonstrates that it is not necessarily through memoir that one reaches this truth.

## TARANTINO: OLD AESTHETICS FOR A NEW GENERATION

There are hundreds of films that depict World War II or the Holocaust either directly or indirectly. Quentin Tarantino adds one more item to an already extensive list of films which may be considered a film franchise unto itself. In depicting what did not happen in the war, specifically through comedy and hyperbole, Tarantino's portrayal of World War II is one which presents alternatives to both the content and style of such a familiar and well-documented event. Tarantino uses this alternative version of World War II to prompt a reworking not only of the war itself, but also of conventional depictions of this history, especially those conventions made popular by recent cinema.

Tarantino's film adopts a hyper-realistic aesthetic. His images are bright, the performances cartoonish, and the action overblown. *Inglourious Basterds* is a mix of comedy and fantasy, and, despite the ironic realism of the clothing, language, and sets, nothing in the film speaks either to a reality with which we are familiar, or to recognisable filmic depictions of the war. This version of the war is split into chapters, where the title of the first chapter recalls the language of fantasy fiction: "Once Upon a Time … in Nazi-Occupied France" (Tarantino *Basterds*). To under-

stand the storybook aesthetic to which Tarantino's film ascribes, it may be helpful to understand what it functions to work against.

In a review of *Inglourious Basterds*, critic Ben Walters traces the tonal shift in World War II narratives over several filmic generations, demonstrating that the seriousness and gravitas with which the event is portrayed is found mainly in filmic texts from the 1990s and after, the tonal and aesthetic opposite, it seems, which characterises Tarantino's contribution:

> Today, few subjects are as culturally hallowed as World War II, enshrined in popular culture as the locus of the greatest sacrifice, the greatest heroism, the greatest evil, and the greatest tragedy. At the time [of the war], things were different … [and] Hitler was considered fair game for satire.… [M]oments of irreverence include the *Captain America* comicbook cover in which the hero biffs Hitler, Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, and the genitally fixated lyrics set to the 'Colonel Bogey March.' After the war, with the danger passed and the extent of Nazi atrocities evident, lampoon was less useful, and by 1968, *The Producers* could prompt arguments about bad taste. But genre escapades and Nazis stock villains continued to appear afterwards: from 1970s thrillers, *Marathon Man* and *The Boys from Brazil*, to the Gestapo farce of the 1980s BBC sitcom, *'Allo 'Allo!*. Only since the 1990s, when the generation who experienced the war ceded political and cultural dominance to their children, have piety and sentimentality become the dominant cultural registers. (21)

Walters' taxonomy of World War II cinema demonstrates that Tarantino's irreverence of the past comes from a long tradition of farcical portrayals of the event. And it is the director's depiction of Hitler which is particularly demonstrative of this. Like his vision of World War II more generally, Hitler in *Inglourious Basterds* may also be read as Tarantino's response to other more common portrayals of the subject. One of the more popular examples of Hitler portrayals in recent filmic memory may be found in Oliver Hirschbiegel's Academy Award-nominated *Downfall*. Hirschbiegel's Hitler as stern and maniacal has become a common image of the dictator over past years, but these stereotypical representations are often complemented by unexpected moments of tenderness and vulnerability in the film.

When we are first introduced to Hitler in *Downfall* the audience assumes the vantage point of Traudl Junge, Hitler's last secretary, as she is preparing herself for a night-time interview to become Hitler's assistant (Hirschbiegel). Without the

audience seeing him, Hitler is called out from his office to meet Junge and the other candidates. This adds to the air of mystery and magic about the figure.

When Hitler conducts the interview with Junge he tests her typing speed as he dictates to her. However, she cannot keep up with his dictation. Junge, and the audience by extension, tenses as she anticipates Hitler's reprimand. Hirschbiegel plays with our expectations, though, when the tension is released as Hitler forgives Junge for her mistakes, suggests sympathetically to her that "we try it again", and subsequently hires her (Hirschbiegel).

In another scene Goebbels' wife and six children come to join Hitler in his bunker (Hirschbiegel). As a treat, Goebbels has his children prepare a song for their Führer. The children sing their song, dressed in their best, and take care in following their father's stage direction while Goebbels' youngest daughter sits on Hitler's lap. Hirschbiegel shows Hitler's avuncular and patient turn is certainly not out of character, and is merely representative of a complex and altogether human personality. There are other moments throughout the film in which tenderness and care come to typify Hitler's relationship with his wife and also his secretary, Junge. The film even sometimes focuses on Hitler's tremulous left hand, which he often holds behind his back, Hirschbiegel perhaps utilising this as a symbol of the seemingly omnipotent dictator's vulnerability.



Figure 3: Hirschbiegel's depiction of Hitler in his *Downfall*

In one scene, Hitler is even shown to possess some restraint under circumstances which would warrant anger. Upon recognising his army's imminent defeat in a discussion with Albert Speer, Speer informs Hitler that he, Speer, did not carry out, and even went counter to, Hitler's orders during the last few months. As Speer confesses this, Hitler clutches a pencil and snaps it, and when he finally speaks to Speer, he never raises his voice, quietly dismisses him, and begins crying silently. These instances of softness certainly do not dominate the film, and only serve to act as complements to the rage and madness which characterise other parts in which Hitler appears. In one such scene, a still of which may be seen in Figure 3, we witness this undercurrent of psychotic violence. About a third into the

narrative, as Berlin is falling and German assaults are proving unsuccessful, Hitler, enraged, realises the war has been lost. His voice, as he spits and shouts, begins to assume his singular high-pitched screech (Hirschbiegel). Hirschbiegel's Hitler seems both caring father of both the nation and those around him, and unrestrained psychopath in equal measure.

In depicting Hitler without any evidence of subversion or monotony, Hirschbiegel is intent on offering his audience a portrayal that ascribes to what an audience may consider *real*. Similarly, some prominent non-fiction writing has treated Hitler in the same believable fashion. Despite declaring that "prejudices [may] creep through the pages of this book from time to time" (xii), William L. Shirer, in his *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, offers an initial description of Hitler that is plausibly human:

> The man who founded the Third Reich … was a person of undoubted, if evil, genius. … But without Adolf Hitler, who was possessed of a demonic personality, a granite will, uncanny instincts, a cold ruthlessness, a remarkable intellect, a soaring imagination and – until toward the end, when, drunk with power and success, he overreached himself – an amazing capacity to size up people and situations, there almost certainly would never have been a Third Reich. (5-6)

Likewise, Hirschbiegel's Hitler is characterised by this kind of realistic portrayal, and is made all the more realistic by the director's choice to bookend the film with documentary footage of the real Junge speaking about her involvement as Hitler's secretary. Hirschbiegel seems to be suggesting that all that is between the documentary snippets, meaning the film proper, is representative of the same kind of truth we expect of documentaries. To have portrayed Hitler singly would have been to designate the character to a place of farce and charicature. We believe that Hirschbiegel's Hitler could have been of this world because the character possesses elements of both tenderness and tyranny. In *Inglourious Basterds*, however, Tarantino's approach is a deliberate avoidance of such balance.

We first witness Tarantino's Hitler following a scene in which we are introduced to the Basterds. Hitler, upon hearing about the Basterds' objective to kill Nazi soldiers, becomes heated. The first words we hear him utter as he slams his fists on the table with each monosyllabic cry are "Nein, nein, nein, nein, nein, nein!" (Tarantino *Basterds*). As Hitler screams, an enormous likeness of the figure is being painted in the background. The painting is large, overwhelming, and imposing, and depicts Hitler commandingly casting his gaze in the distance, a stark counter to



Figure 4: Tarantino's Hitler in his *Inglourious Basterds*

the animated image we observe in the foreground in which Hitler is played as a petulant child who cannot have his way, as seen in Figure 4. Tarantino seems to have borrowed this filmic image of the Führer, recreating his likeness from Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. As Chaplin demonstrates to the audience the busy life of a dictator, a sequence of shots reveals the dictator walking from room to room preparing battle strategies, arguing, and occasionally posing for a painting and a sculpture. These pieces are created by artists who must quickly take advantage of the dictator's fleeting appearance in the room before he rushes off to the next task, as Figure 5 illustrates. As in Tarantino's film, the painting of Chaplin's dictator is one of fortitude and might. Also as in Tarantino's painting of Hitler, the valour depicted in the painting of Chaplin's portrayal is betrayed by his hysterical darting around from room to room. For both directors, the cool control we see in the painting is nothing like the folly observed outside of it.



Figure 5: Chaplin's dictator poses for his portrait in *The Great Dictator*

Chaplin's dictator is Adenoid Hynkel, who, while he does not share the infamous tyrant's name (but does his initials), is effectively a Hitler stand-in with his iconic salute and narrow moustache. Released in 1940, *The Great Dictator*'s farcical tone cannot be taken as a response to other narrative interpretations of the same figure, and therefore functions under a different set of political premises, namely, ridiculing a morally sordid and seemingly omnipotent figure of the time (Chaplin). Chaplin's portrayal cannot be read as a critique of a lineage of past representations of Hitler, but of Hitler himself. And in drawing our attention to the

discrepancy between painting and person, Chaplin seems to suggest that the might Hitler believes he projects to his public is one betrayed by the stupidity of his dangerous ideology, further demonstrating the ease with which fascism falls into farce. Tarantino's Hitler, however, may certainly be read as a response to previous depictions of the man.

Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* seems to be warning its audience that portrayals of such grand historical icons must be treated with scepticism and an awareness of artistic licence. As we are presented with two versions of the same person, we come to realise that representation is not necessarily tantamount to truth, and the medium and genre in which that depiction is made determines the conclusions we draw of such historic figures. Tarantino's comic Hitler may be read as a response to more serious portrayals that assume an air of realism, portrayals to which a film audience, especially a young one, has become inured. In this, *Inglourious Basterds* prompts us to contemplate the value in differing perspectives in historical figures and history itself, showing that we may discover something new if we are to narrate the familiar within the frame of a different genre, rather than within realism which also falsely assumes a sense of verisimilitude.

Another comic depiction of Hitler has found its way into novels quite recently, and in an alternative history of sorts, no less. In 2012, Germany saw the publication of Timur Verme's *Look Who's Back*. The novel is set in present-day Berlin and opens with Adolf Hitler, who also serves as the novel's narrator, waking up while lying in dirt, and reappearing in the world picking up from where he left off after his assumed death in 1945 to become a television celebrity (Vermes). While the novel does not alter history to the extent seen in *Inglourious Basterds*, it does change contemporary history: Hitler has not come back to life, and he has not become a television celebrity. For this reason, the novel may be more accurately said to portray an alternative *present* rather than an alternative *history* if we are to go by more conservative definitions of the term.

In the novel Hitler's 'likeness' to the 'original' is taken to be indicative of the character's dedicated talent, or, as one early admirer points out: " 'I've seen *Downfall*. Twice. Bruno Ganz was superb, but he's not a patch on you. Your whole demeanour … I mean, one would almost think you were the man himself' " (Vermes 17). The public view Hitler as an uncanny impersonator of the infamous dictator, so close to the original that they cannot help but admire the accuracy of his uniform, and even suspect him of having undergone plastic surgery. Soon after he wakes from his decades-long slumber, Hitler is contracted to appear as Hitler

on television in his new occupation as a comedian. The fledgling comedian's speciality becomes, of course, political satire.

The novel's comedy emerges from the audience's awareness of the dramatic irony afoot: all those around Hitler assume the man to be a method actor who never deviates from his dedication to his character under any circumstances (Vermes 155). When trying to write a contract for their new talent, Hitler's producers struggle to find any documentation establishing his 'real' identity. They ask if he owns a passport, or has been outside the country, to America perhaps, to which Hitler responds, " 'I did, very seriously, plan to go.… But unfortunately I was stopped in my tracks' " (Vermes 94). Also, before he is put in front of the camera, one of his producers, Bellini, attempts to establish some boundaries for his jokes. When she suggests that "the Jews are no laughing matter", in earnest Hitler declares, " 'You are absolutely right,' I concurred, almost relieved. At last here was someone who knew what she was talking about" (Vermes 84). The author's dialogue consistently straddles this fine line in which meaning is ambiguous so as to satisfy both Hitler and the person with whom he speaks. It is from this that the reader is able to laugh. But the reader's laughter is not strictly directed *at* Hitler as may be the case in Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, or Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. The humour is rather pointed to this double meaning in communication between Hitler and his audience, who are unable to distinguish satire from sincerity.

*Look Who's Back* was enormously popular, selling well over a million copies in Germany alone (Olterman n. pag.), and has also been adapted into a film (Wnendt). Vermes's novel seems to function within the same generational and cultural milieu as Tarantino's film. And the success of both suggest a younger German generation ready to accept and entertain other interpretations of their vicious past created by a vicious leader whose political extremism, to a large extent, and physical idiosyncrasy, to a lesser extent, lend themselves to ridicule. Unlike Vermes's novel, Tarantino accomplishes this effect by making reference to, and adopting the style of, texts much older than the generation to whom he seems to target his film.

Within *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino, staying true to form, references dozens of World War II films: *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich), *The Inglorious Bastards* (Castellari), *The Great Escape* (Sturges), *To Hell and Back* (Hibbs), and *The Devil's Brigade* (McLaglen), to name a few, which Tarantino cites both as a form of praise and inspiration as counter-tone to World War II films from the 1980s onwards. In 1967's *The Dirty Dozen*, a film from which Tarantino borrows some major plot

points, director Robert Aldrich presents the viewer with a motley American crew of convicted murderers who are selected to carry out a special mission to assassinate high-ranking German officers. It is obvious that Tarantino borrows this plot point from *The Dirty Dozen*, but, significantly, Tarantino's eight Basterds, unlike Aldrich's dozen, are Jewish, and many sometimes lack the confidence and muscle for which such a role in such a film would normally require. Many of the Basterds are slight and even boyish, lacking the machismo of Jim Brown or Charles Bronson's characters in Aldrich's film. A special unit of Allied criminals sent on a mission is also the basis for Castellari's *The Inglorious Bastards*. In this scenario, these bastards are sent to acquire Nazi intelligence regarding a bomb being transported on a train, and Aldrich's dozen, like Tarantino's band of heroes, are sent to kill a theatre full of Nazi officials. Tarantino borrows plot points and aesthetic from such films, which is an aesthetic distinctly different from such relatively recent films as Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*, Polanski's *The Painist*, and Eastwood's *Flags of our Fathers*.

Released in 1993 to overwhelming critical and commercial success, *Schindler's List* employs anachronistic black and white cinematography (with a few exceptions) for the purpose of immersive verisimilitude (Spielberg *List*). Making use of sepia tones, a comparable effect is achieved in Spielberg's other World War II epic, *Saving Private Ryan*. Similarly, Eastwood's *Flags of our Fathers* presents his war through subtle blue filters and washed-out colours. Eastwood's film in an interesting case study regarding the images we associate with World War II when compared to the reality therein. The film dramatises the moment, after an American victory, in which a photograph was taken of the raising of the American flag on top of a hill at the Battle of Iwo Jima (Eastwood). Eastwood details the staging of the scene and, importantly, how America's propagandist treatment of the photograph displayed the nation's insensitivity to the real horrors endured before capturing the moment on film. As if rectifying this, Eastwood's images are shot in a realist vain – his war is dirty and adopts the bloody realism made famous by *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg *Ryan*), the violence in that film unreservedly shocking. There is a marked difference between tropes employed by the realist aesthetics of these films when compared to those of Tarantino's. Films such as *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Flags of our Fathers* trick the viewer into believing that its scenes are real, and therefore the events depicted by these images are real, and, importantly, could not possibly have occurred in any other way.

Tarantino's portrayal, as well as Spielberg's and Eastwood's, each work within widely different genres, and are reconstructions of a past of a certain kind. However, as if taking his cue from the alternative history within which he operates, the difference is that Tarantino's film makes overt the unlikely and fabricated nature of his version of the same historical events. Tarantino's colours are vivid and brash. His edits sometimes manipulate the speed of the action. His plotlines are farfetched. What Tarantino offers here is a radical revision of history not only in terms of its content but also its look. To rethink and re-evaluate the historical narratives to which we have become familiar, reading *Inglourious Basterds* suggest that it is not enough merely to alter the narrative itself, but also the manner in which that narrative is told, accomplished by placing that narrative in a different genre, a different set of narrative clauses. The effect is that our assumptions and understandings of the past are altered as new metaphors are utilised for an old story that has become all too familiar.

## READING OUTSIDE OF TIME IN *TIME'S ARROW*

Compared to the other primary texts in this study, Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* may be the most faithful to history. Like the other texts, it is a fiction, but, in chronicling the life, from death to birth, of the imagined Odilo Unverdorben, the narrative is set against a true historical backdrop. It is through the narrator that we learn, in this order, about the end of the Cold War, Kennedy's assassination, and World War II in which Odilo becomes entwined. The facts of the history presented remain unchanged, and are received third-hand: we read the narrator's interpretation of what Odilo chooses to see. Yet Amis constructs an altogether new narrative of history; new largely through Amis's tricky presentation of the past.

Amis's novel may be read partly as an interrogation into the formal mechanics of time and the ineluctable link between time and narrative. Mark Lawson, in his analysis of the text, argues that priority should be placed first on the text's form before its content, and accuses other critics of panning the novel's anti-Semitism when they really mean to call out Amis's "technical perkiness" (43). However, as Sue Vice argues, "the form and content of *Time's Arrow* are inseparable" showing that one informs the other (12). The basic premises and assumptions upon which Vice's argument relies, the symbiosis of time and narrative in Amis's novel, may be

generalised to all fiction, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, time may be thought of as one of the most basic constituents of narrative and interpretation: reading must take place *in* time. And so it is that the narrative reversal in Amis's text influences our reading of the politics and morality within. Time, then, influences both writing and interpretation.

In observing the link between time and narrative as inseparable, Amis's temporal manipulation unsettles our unconscious dependence on reading in time, and it is our dependence on a specific conventionally forward-moving time at that. For example, as a doctor working in America in the novel's opening chapters, the narrator assumes Odilo's task is to harm and kill:

> You want to know what I do? All right. Some guy comes in with a bandage around his head. We don't mess about. We'll soon have that off. He's got a hole in his head. So what do we do? We stick a nail in it. Get the nail – a good rusty one – from the trash or whatever. And lead him out to the Waiting Room where he's allowed to linger and holler for a while before we ferry him back to the night. (*Arrow* 76)

Despite the "technical perkiness" (Lawson 43) of the text, and of this passage as an example of this, it is important to acknowledge that *Time's Arrow* adheres to some conventional aspects of narrative form. It remains the case that, like the narrator, the reader is still moving through the world (or through the narrative in the case of the reader) from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. The reader remains always unaware of the specific detail of what is to happen to Odilo from one moment to the next, unable to anticipate what the narrator is to make of some new information that comes to light. It may even be called realist in some regard, especially if we adhere to the definition of realism as provided by Lukács. Lukács's definition of realism sees it as that which "transcend[s] the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality" ("Realism" 37). For Lukács, realism seems to be that narrative mode which narrates personal experience through the lens of much larger social truths. Richard Menke believes that, by Lukács's definition, *Time's Arrow* is surely a realist text as it "[devises] a fictional version of life that subtly but determinedly reveals the total forces of history at work on a social reality that its characters, like its readers, experience only subjectively" (977). But I would argue that, for all the novel's realism, Amis's time reversal offers a radical disruption to the form of conventional storytelling, especially in aspects of time, as time is relied upon in the production of

meaning. This is most dramatically revealed upon Odilo's 'arrival' in Auschwitz in the novel's last third.

If the narrator interprets Odilo's work as a doctor in America as destructive and harmful, then in Auschwitz and Treblinka Odilo, as a Nazi doctor, is seen as a healer, a generator of life. In Auschwitz, the narrator evaluates Odilo's task as one of "Creation", where the objective is "To dream a race. To make a people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire" (*Arrow* 120). The meaning of the Holocaust has changed, and it is a meaning fundamentally determined by Amis's temporal refiguration, which takes the form of more than just mere reversal. The narrator intriguingly describes Auschwitz, as well as Treblinka, as, in a sense, timeless. Upon arriving in Treblinka by train, the narrator notices that the hands of the painted clock are static, which leads the narrator to assert that "time had no arrow, not here", concluding that it is a "place without time" (*Arrow* 143). Of Auschwitz, he makes a similar comment, stating that "Here there is no when" (*Arrow* 120).

Understanding the implications of these temporal manipulations first depends on our assumption that time is necessary to narrative, and that narrative must take place *in* time. In *Time's Arrow*, the narrator's description of Auschwitz and Treblinka as lacking time, that these places are in some way timeless, may suggest that Auschwitz and Treblinka cannot be narrated. If it cannot be narrated, then it resists any attempt at generating meaning. In addition to the timelessness of Auschwitz, the narrator also claims that "*Hier ist kein warum*. Here there is no why" (*Arrow* 120). This reference to Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, in which a camp guard informs Levi of the same thing about the place (*Auschwitz* 29), speaks of the impossibility to comprehend such history. It may therefore be concluded that Auschwitz cannot be narrated because the necessary narrative frame, time, is lost. For similar reasons, this leads Menke to a negative hermeneutic of the relationship between history and narrative in the text:

> … *Time's Arrow* sets up the relationship between literature and history as divorce rather than dialectic, leaving no place for their synthesis as historiography. Its carefully constructed narrative, almost impeccably mimetic, even carefully 'realistic,' within its *donnée* of temporal reversal and narratorial powerlessness, treats history as the atrocity-producing situation that narrative, passenger or parasite, can only view as an image on the windshield: outside, overhead, upside-down. (974)

Menke's understanding of Amis's text, in which Menke reads *Time's Arrow* as an indictment of history's imperviousness to narrative, does not prevent Amis from attempting to narrate these atrocious histories in *some* way. After all, these histories *are* represented in the text. Through irony and the reversal of time, Amis manages to provide at least something resembling meaning in his description of this seemingly unspeakable past. This indirect and ironic meaning, though, hinges on the novel's use of temporal inversion, or, put another way, the novel's reversal of beginnings and endings.

In playing with the most fundamental tenets of narrative form, Amis demonstrates the consequences this may have on our reception of historical events, especially if we are to understand the concept as the narrative ordering of cause and effect, of beginnings and endings. As Kermode shows, in a review of *Time's Arrow*, "We find out what [the novel] is all about as we approach the end, which, under the licence of imagination, is represented as a beginning. This changed relation of end and beginning may modify our assumptions of causality" ("In Reverse" 11). To begin grasping at the significance of Amis's manipulation of beginnings and endings, Edward Said's *Beginnings* offers some foundational analyses on the matter.

Said deconstructs our understanding of beginnings, commenting on the irony with which we have come to handle the term. The inherent irony of the concept may be found in the act of its creation: "To identify a point as a beginning is to classify it after the fact" (29), which is done "to indicate, clarify, or define a *later* time, place, or action" (5). The irony of the term is also indicative of its artificiality. Beginnings are not self-evident; they are retroactively applied, as Said propounds. Of course, this does not negate its power, which we have come to use as "*the first step in the intentional production of meaning*" (5). As it is in the business of meaning-making, beginnings, and by extension endings, come to be understood as narrative framing devices; beginnings are our means of narrative control. They determine the value of the narrative within. As Said argues, if what has come after the beginning is deemed worthy, then the narrative's beginning gains value as it is assumed that the beginning intended all that has come after (32). The literary value of beginnings does not end there. Said also demonstrates how beginnings inform our perceptions of the relationship between author and text.

We assign meaning through language. Language, as Said shows, marks the beginning of interpretation: "Words, therefore, stand at the beginning, *are* the beginning, of a series of substitutions. Words signify a movement away from and

around the fragment of reality" (77). Yet in developing his thesis, Said looks further, looks beyond, and briefly entertains the possibility of the author, especially in narrative fiction, as the symbol of a narrative's beginning (83), though Said finally concedes that the assumption of author as first mover "is a sham" (84). Drawing on examples from nineteenth-century fiction, he shows that the author does not begin a narrative; the author, in having read and referenced past texts, is merely a point in a long line of narratives that have come before (152). Author, reader, and critic all participate in this fabrication of author and narrator as the beginning of a text (Said 84). But in realising this not to be so, in realising that author is not inceptor of narrative, Said shows that one commits an act of what he refers to as literary molestation (30). In undermining the beginning, Amis's text also commits this molestation, and therefore undermines the authorial voice.

In narrating the story backwards, the reader is obliged to read the novel twice. As we read we come to appreciate the narrator's (mis)interpretation of events, but also learn to reorder time into its forward trajectory to create new meaning. In doing so, we restructure the narrator's meaning, and readers of the text begin to write the text. The novel itself may be taken not as a representation of the past, but as Amis's invitation to the reader to impose her own meaning onto the past. This act of interpretation extends to Amis's portrayal of Auschwitz and Treblinka, sites of unconscionable historical narrative. When the narrator, through implication, comes to suggest the impossibility of narrating a certain kind of catastrophic history, we are led to view Amis's own textual depiction of Auschwitz and Treblinka as merely gesturing towards narrating this past, rather than reading such descriptions as true and faithful. This means that it is left to the reader's active reversal of the narrative to glean meaning from these events. It is at this point at which I depart with Menke's reading of the text.

Menke opines that the novel "sets up the relationship between literature and history as divorce" (974), where "narrative can itself only reimagine history by conceding its powerlessness before it" (960). Yet in this reading Menke seems not to account for the role of the reader, and Amis's call for the reader's participation in narrating an unspeakable past, each reader contributing to the narrative process. For Menke, the novel disables any attempt at narrating history, where other evidence suggests there are multiple narratives, or even multiple beginnings. Auschwitz and Treblinka take on a plurality of meaning in Amis's abdication as author-god. The author undermines his position as meaning-maker, as the originator, or beginner, of meaning.

But through this invitation of multiple meanings, instigated by Amis's formal manipulation of time, we must also realise that this may imply that all definitions of the past seem equally valid. This creates a possible point of contention, the deep significance of which is especially vivid given the incredibly sensitive nature of the actions illustrated in the text. These accusations are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, particularly in relation to Holocaust denial, with which alternative history fiction shares some formal qualities.

# Chapter 3
# Holocaust Denial: A Test for Relativism

> No, she said, with great certainty, because now they had facts, and facts changed everything. Without them, you had nothing, a void. But produce facts … and suddenly that void had geometry, was susceptible to measurement, had become a solid thing. Of course, this solid thing could be denied, or challenged, or simply ignored. But each of these reactions was, by definition, a *re*action, a response to some thing which existed. (R. Harris 334-35)

## DENIALISM AND RELATIVISM

Drawing on points from the previous chapter, alternative history allows the reader, at least in part, to question the dissemination and reception of the facts of history. In doing so, some critics of World War II alternative history fiction have perceived this as a potential danger. In reading the mode as one that encourages the artistic necessity of recounting historical events, in believing that alternative history demonstrates that historical narratives have more formal overlap with art than with science, some critics have observed alternative history's tonal commonality with denialism. Such accusations draw alternative history into a much broader spectrum of debates on relativism. The argument goes that if World War II alternative histories reimagine what the war and the Holocaust may have or have not been, if they employ, through poetic means, a refashioning of this genocide, then these narratives may also suggest that our understanding of these events (and by extension all of history) is relative.

There is the danger that each author's unique inflection of the Holocaust and related events may validate other more radical and morally questionable portrayals. If we interpret and remodel the Holocaust in one way, then why not in any other? More tempered negative criticism of the employment of such narrative liberties often argues that these texts treat the Holocaust irresponsibly. Harsher

criticism tends to suggest that such narratives may flirt too closely with the kind of language employed by Holocaust denialism.

Holocaust denial, in part, grew out of deconstruction of the late 1960s through the 1990s (Shermer and Grobman 26). Deconstructionists, none of whom may be accused of denying the Holocaust, argued for an emphasis in the reader's role in textual analysis where the generation of meaning must be thought of as more fluid and, in the most extreme cases of deconstruction, impossible to pinpoint and define. Deniers used this as a starting point for their own racist political ends in arguing that their 'findings' merely presented another equally valid perspective on World War II and the Holocaust: "… [Deconstruction] created an atmosphere of permissiveness toward questioning the meaning of historical events and made it hard for its proponents to assert that there was anything 'off limits' for this skeptical approach" (D. Lipstadt 18). Using this "atmosphere of permissiveness" as leverage, Holocaust deniers undermined the work of historians: "It has questioned our belief in a fixed and determinable past, compromised the possibility of historical representation, and undermined our ability to locate ourselves in time" (Harlan 581).

Alternative history seems to share some ideological commonality with this perspective. As a consequence of distorting and manipulating the past, alternative history offers a revision of our understanding of history, and allows for new perspectives on old narratives. The central metaphor in alternative history fiction, the past as it did not occur, may stand as real history's narrative other. That World War II alternative histories are sometimes accused of Holocaust denial speaks of the necessity to demarcate the instance at which alternative history ends and Holocaust denial begins, to clarify the " 'boundary problem' ", to borrow a phrase from Sherman and Grobman who write extensively on the subject (238). The consequence of such a task is important both semantically and politically.

Holocaust denial has been well-documented and thoroughly explained by many authors. Historian Richard J. Evans collates several definitions of the term, compacting them "to a lowest common denominator" (*Hitler* 110), and demonstrates that Holocaust deniers must necessarily hold the following four beliefs:

> (a) The number of Jews killed by the Nazis was far less than 6 million; it amounted to only a few hundred thousand, and was thus similar to, or less than, the number of German civilians killed in Allied bombing raids.

(b) Gas chambers were not used to kill large numbers of Jews at any time.
(c) Neither Hitler nor the Nazi leadership in general had a program of exterminating Europe's Jews; all they wished to do was to deport them to Eastern Europe.
(d) 'The Holocaust' was a myth invented by Allied propaganda during the war and sustained since then by Jews who wished to use it to gain political and financial support for the state of Israel or for themselves. The supposed evidence for the Nazis' wartime mass murder of millions of Jews by gassing and other means was fabricated after the war. (*Hitler* 110)

In speaking of the political motivations behind Holocaust denial, Lipstadt shows that denialism is largely the action of those who reach far to the conservative right, and whose politics and ideologies are coloured by anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism, all performed under the guise of 'correcting' history:

> What has … shocked me is the success deniers have in convincing good-hearted people that Holocaust denial is an 'other side' of history – ugly, reprehensible, and extremist – but an other side nonetheless. As time passes and fewer people can personally challenge these assertions, their campaign will only grow in intensity. (3)

Lipstadt also makes the claim that it is through the distortion of truth, misinformation, and lies that Holocaust deniers are able to advance their ideology: "This is precisely the deniers' goal: They aim to confuse the matter by making it appear as if they are engaged in a genuine scholarly effort when, of course, they are not" (2).

Upon attempting to gain legitimacy and voice, denialists often style themselves as participants in historical revisionism, an established and academically sound historical practice that began shortly after World War I, in which historians argued for Germany's unfair treatment after the war (Evans *Hitler* 145; D. Lipstadt 20). Yet it would be incorrect to recognise denialists as revisionists. Denialism "falls into [the] category of pseudohistory, whose purpose is *the denial of the past for present political or ideological reasons* (Shermer and Grobman 238). For denialists, "evidence plays no role" (D. Lipstadt 21), and they seek to exchange undeniable historical claims for false ones. The work of revisionists, by contrast, "is built on a certain body of irrefutable evidence" (D. Lipstadt 21), where revisionists strive for "*the modification of history based on new facts or new interpretations of old facts*" (Shermer and Grobman 238). We may read alternative history as being written in

the same spirit. And as in our considerations of historical revisionism, there is a distinct difference between the work of alternative history and Holocaust denial. Both denialists and alternative history authors present their readers with other histories. But where alternative history authors attempt to offer new perspectives on existing historical facts, denialists attempt to correct history for racist ideologies. Where denialists are by definition right leaning, alternative history authors are not obliged to convince their readers either way.

There is also a more fundamental ideological difference which separates alternative history from denialism. Alternative history authors cannot be accused of being denialists since their adjustment of the facts of history cannot be interpreted as sincere. Unlike Holocaust denialism, or historical revisionism, the writing of alternative history is not an attempt to present evidence that would change the facts of history, but is rather an attempt to take those facts as apparent and observe how distorting them (in a way to which the reader and writer are both privy) can alter not history, but our perceptions and interpretations of what, in fact, has happened. Holocaust denialism and alternative history are both works of fiction, and alternative history authors would claim that their work is all fiction. Holocaust deniers would claim that their work is anything but.

Entertaining the claims of Holocaust deniers is much like considering assertions of nonsense with equal seriousness and legitimacy as one would more sensible arguments. This is certainly not how alternative history fiction has been treated, but this does not stop critics of the mode, especially those that use World War II and the Holocaust as its subject matter, to use Holocaust denial as a metaphor for the unease they feel with certain manifestations of alternative history. It is implicitly implied that all alternative history fictions call for different ways of thinking about the facts of history. Because of this, accusations of Holocaust denial in the discourse surrounding the mode is more a critique of alternative history's assumed position that all interpretations of history are somehow valid, that all versions of a historical event must be considered with seriousness, or that history is somehow relative.

In his cataloguing of World War II alternative histories, Gavriel D. Rosenfeld considers those examples of the mode in which the Holocaust itself is rewritten, and also the critical responses to such artistic pursuits. By suggesting that the Holocaust did not happen, may not have happened, or happened otherwise, many alternative histories have been subjected to fairly harsh attack, particularly by critics who express a discomfort in these texts' proposed alteration of one of western

history's most degrading and inhumane marks. Helpfully, Rosenfeld considers not only those alternative histories written in English, but also those in German, of which there are a few that reconstruct the Holocaust.

Prominent and acclaimed German-language texts examined by Rosenfeld include the following: Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara*, and Thomas Ziegler's two works, the novel *Stimmen der Nacht*, and the novella "Eine Kleinigkeit für uns Reinkarnauten". Each of these texts undo or reimagine the Holocaust in radically different ways from how it was enacted, but not all these texts are praised for this historical undoing. *Morbus Kitahara* imagines a post-war Germany is which the Holocaust is gradually depleted from memory, thereby effectively writing it out of history (Ransmayr). *Stimmen der Nacht* also complicates memory of the event, and presents an ending in which the protagonist imagines Hitler's assassination (Ziegler *Nacht*). And in "Eine Kleinigkeit für uns Reinkarnauten" we are asked to consider a world in which Hitler never lived, thereby granting the world the possibility of never having to experience the Holocaust (Ziegler "Reincarnauts"). Rosenfeld shows that all three texts enjoyed great praise from critics and reviewers at the time of their publication. But they have also come under fierce attack. Rosenfeld shows that in the case of Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara* some critics expressed concern about the author's "critique of memory as justifying the Germans' postwar evasion of the Nazi past", and some claimed that the novel's aesthetics were ill-suited to its subject matter (369). Such criticism is certainly not unique to German-language World War II alternative histories.

In English, one key example of such negative criticism may be seen in Michael Chabon's 2007 novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. The novel takes place in a contemporary Alaska, but it is a place with a history that differs is startling ways to the reader's accepted version of the past (Chabon). In Chabon's world, Israel has been destroyed in a post-war conflict between Israel and Palestine, and two million Jews have died in the Holocaust (instead of six million), because of America's initiative to evacuate Jews from Europe during the war. The novel's main character is Meyer Landsman, whom readers would be quick to recognise is modelled playfully on many of Raymond Chandler's leading men. Chabon takes great care to mimic several familiar detective noir clichés into his plot, and especially in his characterisation of his main character. Meyer Landsman is a detective close to retirement whose love life is in ruin, and must battle alcoholism as he reluctantly takes on one last case to solve the novel's central murder mystery.

Most critics received the novel well, commenting on Chabon's meticulous attention to the genre to which he commits so fervently. Praising Chabon's knack for "mix[ing] fact and fantasy, literature and popular entertainment", David L. Ulin shows that *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* exhibits the author's deft abilities in creating "not just the characters but the very landscape in which they move" (n. pag.). Chabon's novel received few negative criticisms, making Neil Steinberg's review of the novel an outlier amongst other evaluations of the text. Steinberg claims that "You could set a rollicking murder mystery in Auschwitz, too, and maybe somebody has. But at some point the awfulness of the setting would overwhelm and poison whatever particular crime the hero was tracking down. That is what happens here" (n. pag.). To recall the language of Hayden White, it seems that, by Steinberg's estimation, Chabon's choice of trope (in this case irony) is mismatched when considering the real history of the Holocaust that looms in the backdrop of the Alaskan landscape.

Criticisms that read World War II alternative histories as comparable to Holocaust denial speak toward much larger concerns of alternative history's susceptibility to accusations of relativism. The implication is that these works, especially those that depict the Holocaust in some capacity, have been far too open in their artistry in ways that overstep what is considered both historically and morally permissible. In other words, these texts, according to some, seem to exercise a moral relativism that is an unfortunate though inevitable offshoot of their historical relativism. It may help in observing such critiques through the lens of historiography.

Fredric Jameson states that our age is one in which "historical causality has slowly evolved from diachronic to a synchronic perspective", that we have come to appreciate the causal plurality, as opposed to the singularity, of historical events (*Archaeologies* 88). It is in this historical plurality that Hayden White's conceptualisation of tropes participates. We have already discussed White's thesis regarding tropes and the myriad ways in which a historical event may be represented based on the artistic choices made by the author narrating that event. This kind of modal free-for-all has led many of White's critics claiming that he endorses what is usually termed epistemological relativism. For example, there is Peter Gay who prefers, over White, historians such as Leopold von Ranke whom Gay favours based on Ranke's willingness to present history as a set of objective facts: "Ranke's celebrated wish to relate the past as it actually happened is neither a fatuous fantasy nor a concealed ideology. It is a difficult but perfectly realistic expectation"

(199). Additional criticism comes from Lionel Gossman: "I am now concerned that … the new emphasis on the 'poetics' of history … may be promoting a facile and irresponsible relativism which will leave many who espouse it defenceless before the most dangerous myths and ideologies, incapable of justifying any stand" (303). Gossman believes that it is this brand of relativism, supposedly supported by White, which provides fertile ground on which ideologies of the "revolutionary Right" may flourish (303). Yet it is White himself who remains one of his own fiercest critics in these matters.

Regarding his modes of representation, White is sometimes not as open to all kinds of narrative style as certain critics would believe. He values some modes more than others. For example, White seems to regard irony as a particularly good trope with which to express history because of the wit it brings in its dual meanings, but he is not always as concessive to farce as a narrative preference as "the choice of a farcical style for the representation of some kinds of historical events would constitute not only a lapse in taste but also a distortion of the truth" ("Literary Theory" 12). Not only does this indicate White's self-awareness of his own argument, but it also proves White a moderate thinker; he is not completely willing to entertain the extremes of relativism, unlike some would believe of him. Interestingly, according to White it is the Modernist writers, such as Woolf and Joyce, who exemplify the kinds of retelling of history of which he approves. This is because their plurality of voices, uncertain narrators, and tone of doubt and scepticism allow for the kinds of foreshadowing of the uncertainty inherent in the author's understanding of a historic event after the fact ("Modernist Event" 81). It is a narrative style which undermines its own certainty and promotes plurality, the kind of plurality that has become symptomatic of postmodern fiction.

Just as White demonstrates that there is nothing natural about the choice of metaphors that guide the process of historical narration, so too do alternative history texts speak, at least symbolically, towards the subjectivity that drives the ordering and narrativisation of historical facts. Similarly, pseudohistorians' claims of the 'myth' of Jewish genocide are often strongly attacked not only for their astounding anti-Semitism, but also for the relativism that underpins these claims.

There has been some recent academic literature on the commonalities between alternative history and the principles of relativist histories. Derek J. Thiess's *Relativism, Alternative History, and the Forgetful Reader* discusses the points at which alternative histories and historical relativism diverge and most importantly converge. The larger context in which Thiess operates is one which considers how

relativist histories offer a challenge to perceptions of history's pursuits in objectivity. It is not this overall thesis which is of interest here, but rather how Thiess constructs a view of alternative history by reading it alongside the principles of relativism.

Thiess describes the core set of beliefs held by relativist historiography:

> History, as a literary endeavor and therefore based in language and narrative, is inherently relativistic.… [T]his statement is a good summary of the formula of relativist historiography: (1) history (reality) is based in language, like fiction; (2) as a narrative, the reader plays a role in creating meaning; and (3) therefore, history is relative. (11)

Such extreme positions have garnered vociferous criticism from some prominent historians. For example, there is Richard J. Evans who points to an even more profound irony inherent within this doctrine that Evans calls postmodern hyper-relativism. Evans argues that "if all theories are equally valid, should we believe postmodernist theories of history rather than other theories?" (*History* 231). What Evans points out is the contradiction in such an extreme position. If relativist historiography champions all possible readings of a text, then, certainly, we must consider those readings which claim that we should not consider interpretations offered by relativist historiography itself. Thiess considers a similar flaw, stating that there is an "irony inherent in [relativist historiography] that at once claims there are limitless interpretations of a historical event and yet often polarizes around its own consensus" (13). He further explains that such a position opens one up to multiple perspectives and attitudes towards such contentious subjects as, say, Nazi science, an unambiguously moral atrocity (14). That possible racist and right wing perspectives may be validated under relativist historiography suggests, as Thiess shows, the limits of a paradigm which argues for such limitlessness. Significantly, he implies that even relativist historiographers are implicitly aware of the possible moral relativism to which their paradigm is susceptible, and as such they are possibly more amenable to "a fairly limited set of conventions" or types of historical reading (4). Of course, this self-imposed restriction undermines the supposed infinite readings that relativist historiographers endorse. With its championing of multiple histories, it is perhaps easy to observe the commonality between realist historiography and alternative history fiction. But there is more that separates the two than joins them.

Drawing on the work of alternative history theorist Karen Hellekson, Thiess demonstrates that a key function of alternative history (which he refers to as a genre of science fiction (16)) is that "the individual reader constructs history via his or her own narrative reading" (2). As a consequence, Thiess infers that alternative history "offers, even demands, potentially endless permutations of a given historical moment" (4). While the merits of Thiess's argument may be sound, such an understanding of alternative history may relegate the mode to the same philosophical quagmire as relativist historiography. By presenting what did not happen, alternative history implies that anything else could have happened, too. The mode permeates the boundaries of the history readers have come to believe is true. Through this, alternative history authors allow readers to perceive history as a text to which they may respond, writing back to history and thereby creating their own historical narratives and understandings of the subject in the process.

However, it is important to consider the danger in reading Thiess's understanding of the relativism in alternative history as in some ways innate to the mode. Specifically, there is a danger is Thiess's use of the word "demand" in his estimation of the assumed infinite readings of any historical event. As I will argue, it is not a necessary prerequisite of the mode that we offer any and all readings of history simply because we are able to. While some World War II alternative histories are less sensitive to the relativism to which they seem to ascribe, there is evidence to suggest that this is certainly not the case for all instantiations of the mode, despite the plurality upon which these texts depend for their creation. This is especially evident when considering portrayals of the Holocaust and Jewish suffering more generally in such works.

## Roth's Critique of Alternative History

Among other valid readings, the spurious history in *The Plot Against America* serves to disclose the real history of America's latent fascism that lay dormant before and during the outbreak of World War II. Indeed, statistics point to evidence of quite glaring anti-Semitism in America during the early stages of the nation's involvement in the war: "Surveys taken from 1940 through 1946 [in America] show that Jews were almost consistently seen as a greater menace to the welfare of the United States than were any other national, religious, or racial group" (D. E.

Lipstadt 127). During this period many Americans expressed hostility towards "pro-German groups' espousal of fascism and Nazism but were not immune to their antisemitic preachings" (D. E. Lipstadt 127). It is through what did not happen that Roth exposes the reality of anti-Semitism during the years before America's involvement in the war.

Upon its publication, such thoughtfully playful interpretations of history led many critics to praise the novel's ingenuity. For example, Jonathan Yardley, writing for *The Washington Post*, argued that Roth's novel "may well be his best" and is successful in its attempts to demonstrate the weight of "living amid the turmoil and unpredictability of history" (n. pag.). In *The New York Times*, Paul Berman called Roth's work a "terrific political novel", and, despite the alternative version of events, claimed "the history reader in [him] was delighted" (n. pag.). But despite some high praise, Roth's novel was not without its detractors.

Among the most prominent critics of the text was Walter Benn Michaels. In an essay on the novel, Benn Michaels claims that *The Plot Against America* offers "another kind of Holocaust denial" (290). At first, Benn Michaels provides cautious praise for Roth's work and is happy to accept the truth of American anti-Semitism in the text's ironic history: "What undoes the paradox, what makes the book believable, is that we think of anti-Semitism as a significant factor in American history" (290). Yet part of what compels Benn Michaels' perception of the novel's implausibility is the portrayal of exaggerated violence, especially when set against its counter, real history, for which violent discrimination was a reality for millions of black Americans, but which Roth, for Jewish Americans, inappropriately portrays as likely (288-89). It is this for that Benn Michaels accuses *The Plot Against America* of endorsing "another kind of Holocaust denial" (290). And his argument may be encapsulated in the following question: "Why should we be outraged by what didn't happen rather than outraged by what did?" (289). He presents this argument as part of a much larger thesis on the nature of the politics behind identities in culture, poverty, and race in America, and specifically how discrimination against some groups is appreciated more readily than discrimination against others.

Benn Michaels is fully aware, though, of the lack of consistency in his critique of Roth's text. Towards the end of his essay, the author concedes that the novel's alternative history paradoxically points to *some* kind of truth, one in which Roth disrupts the narrow definition of Americanness to which the nation ascribes:

> The point of a novel like *The Plot Against America* – the point of calling it the plot against America – is that it's not just Jews but the very idea of America that's the target of anti-Semites, that anti-Semitism is a kind of anti-Americanism. What this means is the complete identification of America with neoliberalism, an identification that can obviously be disputed since the US is no doubt nowhere near as free of discrimination as it ought to be. (Benn Michaels 298)

This validation of Roth's use of alternative history as a means of establishing a clearer image of American realities is certainly what most critics have appreciated about his novel. Though ultimately dismissive of his own accusations of reading "another kind of Holocaust denial" (290) into Roth's work, Benn Michaels' essay provokes an interesting discussion into identifying the qualitative proximity between Holocaust denialism and the novel's alternative history. His initial reservations about *The Plot Against America*, that it forces us to consider with more seriousness what did not happen over what did (289), is similar to the task of Holocaust deniers who attempt to persuade the public to favour one kind of past over another. Yet there is evidence in Roth's own text which demonstrates the novel's care in evaluating the merits and limits of multiple histories; that is, Roth considers the dangers of relativism into which his alternative history text may fall.

The novel's self-reflection on its own construction is most pertinently expressed in a scene towards the end in which Philip, reluctantly entering the family basement to investigate a noise he heard, discovers his Aunt Evelyn. At this point, America's militant anti-Semites have taken to attacking and even killing Jews in the country's "first large-scale pogrom" (*Plot* 266). Aunt Evelyn, frightened, and believing that the attackers outside are looking for her specifically, has taken to hiding in her sister's basement, unbeknownst to the Roth family (*Plot* 350).

When Philip finds his aunt, she surfaces from her hiding place, declaring the following: " 'I know the truth,' she said, and there, emerging like an oracular priestess out of the Delphi of our storage bin, came my aunt. 'They're after me, Philip,' Aunt Evelyn said. 'I know the truth, and they're going to kill me!' " (*Plot* 350). The larger context of the quote is one in which the course of history seems to have deviated from all sanity. At this stage in the text, we understand that some citizens speculate that Lindbergh's disappearance was due to a larger conspiracy in which it is said that Lindbergh was really " 'working from the White House as a Nazi agent' ", as suggested by Mayor La Guardia (*Plot* 313), and believed and narrativised in the most fantastic ways by Aunt Evelyn and her husband, Rabbi

Bengelsdorf (*Plot* 321-26). It is a narrative just as false as the one presented by Roth.

The moment in which Roth inserts an alternative history into his own may describe the point at which the text becomes most aware of its own construction as an alternative history. It becomes aware of the potentialities of its own form, and, in the broadest sense, marks a moment of self-reflection. Certainly, there are various ways in which an alternative history may consider its own purpose and consequence, and there are various reasons why such a text may do so. Before returning to Roth, we might draw our attention to Philip K. Dick's 1963 alternative history *The Man in the High Castle* as one such text that reflects on the value or danger of telling history as it was not, and seems to do so to epistemological ends. The novel is set in America, around the time of its publication, and America and its people must learn to navigate a dystopic present produced from a history in which the Axis powers have won. Among its many characters is Wyndam-Matson, owner of a large metalworking factory, and producer of fake memorabilia of the American Civil War. In one scene, Wyndam-Matson speaks to his mistress, Rita, about the fickle nature of assigning historical significance to objects. He talks about the authenticity of a lighter found in the pocket of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he was assassinated in 1933. Wyndam-Matson owns both this and a phony duplicate, and asks Rita if she is able to discern the difference between the two, if in the real one she can " 'feel' " (66) its authenticity, if she is aware of its " ' "mystical plasmic presence" ' " (66), or its " 'historicity' " (65). But Wyndam-Matson argues that " 'This whole damn historicity business is nonsense' " (65), that historical authenticity is determined by knowledge and is, as he makes of it, " 'In the mind, not the [object]' " (66). In presenting Rita with a certificate of authenticity, a document which vouches for the lighter's historical truth, he shows that " 'The paper proves its worth,' " as he claims, " 'not the object itself' " (66).

Authenticity, or historical truth, becomes deferred as history is not valued in and of itself, but is valued indirectly through something other which bears no real relationship to that history. Other materials must vouch for history's authenticity. For Wyndam-Matson, it is this authenticity which determines history's worth. While Wyndam-Matson's dogmatic assumption of history's singularity presents one kind of relationship to the past, other characters are more sceptical about the possibility of establishing history's truth.

Halfway through the novel, Robert Childan, owner of an antique shop, begins to question the history upon which he has come to rely, in some instances likening

history to myth. Childan thinks the following: "Maybe I don't actually recall F.D.R. …. Synthetic image distilled from hearing assorted talk. Myth implanted subtly in tissue of brain. Like, he thought,… Abraham Lincoln ate here. Used this old silver knife, fork, spoon. You can't see it, but the fact remains" (141). Childan begins his meditation by describing history's immateriality. He does not remember FDR, and this lack of memory becomes cause for doubt of FDR's reality. Like Wyndam-Matson's assertion before, history becomes produced by the mind. The figure, or at least the figure's historical reality, is compared to a "Synthetic image distilled from hearing assorted talk". Roosevelt becomes a reality only insofar as the number of people who can confirm that he had been. Childan also reduces history to "Myth", and refers to Lincoln having used *this* specific spoon and *this* particular knife, facts of history which can neither be confirmed nor denied, and must merely be believed as would be the plot of a myth. In this way historical truth and assumed materiality is undermined. History is made into an abstraction as Childan leaves us with only the idea of history. Yet he also concludes that historical "fact remains", demonstrating that doubt about historical truth must be divorced from historical facts, whether they are believed or not.

When comparing it to Dick's novel, while there may be some similarity in their use, Roth's *The Plot Against America* assigns a different function to considerations of the harm or value of inauthentic history. Roth's employment of the conceit seems more political when measured against Dick's more philosophical employment. Towards the end of Roth's novel, the reader is exposed to the fantastic stories that are used to explain Lindbergh's mysterious disappearance. We are given Roth's alternative within his alternative. The absurdity of believing such an alternative with any degree of sincerity is most clearly expressed in Aunt Evelyn. We are immediately suspicious of her grand claims to " 'know the truth' " (*Plot* 350) when Philip finds her in the family basement. Her phrase, repeated a few times towards the end of the text (*Plot* 339; 351), is suspicious in its authoritative singularity, and may be indicative of her madness.

The description of Aunt Evelyn "emerging like an oracular priestess out of the Delphi of our storage bin" (*Plot* 350) is symptomatic of what seems to be an abuse of alternative history. Her belief in a version of history based absolutely on falsehood is a product of a mind lacking in all sanity. It is an alternative version of history that is stretched beyond any plausibility and, despite Aunt Evelyn's emphatic belief to the contrary, is decidedly lacking in any kind of truth. Considering such lies holds no value in and of itself, and is even void of any potential in offer-

ing any elucidation on real history. This may suggest that alternative history exists on a continuum, where the novel proposes some authorial responsibility in altering the past. Not all historical narratives are relative, the text seems to claim; not all histories are the same.

## TARANTINO'S HISTORICAL RELATIVISM

More so than the previous text, Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* has been the target of accusations of Holocaust denial, in various forms, from a significant number of critics who did not receive the film favourably. Most critics expressed dissatisfaction with what they believed to be Tarantino's mockery of Jewish suffering. Such mockery was felt to be misrepresentative and even insulting of true history. Framed another way, these dissenters took issue with what they felt was Tarantino's historical relativism, where the film's brash narrative style was used to channel a story for which Jewish suffering (both true and imagined) formed the backdrop of the narrative. One version of history, one way of expressing sensitive historical material, seemed just as valid as another.

One of the more vocal opponents of Tarantino's disruption of history comes from American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum. In his short online review of the film, the author claims that "[*Inglourious Basterds*] gave [him] the sort of malaise that made [him] wonder periodically what it was (and is) about the film that seems morally akin to Holocaust denial, even though it proudly claims to be the opposite of that" ("Recommended Reading" n. pag.). It is not exactly clear what Rosenbaum means when he suggests that Tarantino's work is "akin to Holocaust denial", as he does not provide much detail to support, or elaborate, on his argument. But Rosenbaum, in the same piece, by way of endorsement, sites another essay as an echo of his point. This second essay, written by Daniel Mendelsohn, is an online review. The aspect of the review which Rosenbaum most appreciates is Mendelsohn's questioning of the reversal of Jews and Nazis in Tarantino's alternative history: "Do you really want audiences cheering for a revenge that turns Jews into carboncopies of Nazis, that makes Jews into 'sickening' perpetrators? I'm not so sure" (Mendelsohn n. pag.). Mendelsohn's antidote to Tarantino's film would be precisely to reinforce real history over Tarantino's historical bastardisation:

> An alternative, and morally superior, form of 'revenge' for Jews would be to do precisely what Jews have been doing since World War II ended: that is, to preserve and perpetuate the memory of the destruction that was visited upon them, precisely in order to help prevent the recurrence of such mass horrors in the future. (n. pag.)

Mendelsohn concludes his article stating, "To indulge [fantasies] at the expense of the truth of history would be the most inglorious bastardization of all" (n. pag.). Both Mendelsohn and Rosenbaum argue that Tarantino's work may be seen, at the very least, as a denial of the Holocaust in a manner which makes light of true history in favour of entertaining a fiction. Anything goes, the film seems to suggest, even narratives that show would-be victims as perpetrators of violence.

Michael D. Richardson, in his article "Vengeful Violence: *Inglourious Basterds*, Allohistory, and the Inversion of Victims and Perpetrators", suggests that the "dubious righteousness of the protagonists (coded as former victims) also allows [the Basterds] to circumvent moral restrictions, undermining precisely those moral and ethical standards that are seen as distinguishing Nazi from victim" (95). Richardson's argument is that the film does not merely portray Jews as killers, but does so in a way that shows this killing as unambiguously good. This argument is much more nuanced than Rosenbaum's and Mendelsohn's, and may even be corroborated upon observing some key aspects of the film's portrayal of Jewish-inflicted violence, especially when reading such portrayals alongside other texts that show Jews killing Nazis, of which there are a few.

Within the world of alternative history is Harry Turtledove's 2011 novel *The Big Switch*, which forms the third part of a six-part series of alternative history novels that imagine what would have happened had the war begun in 1938 (instead of 1939). In this installation of the series, the author provides an unexpected twist on the Jew-to-Nazi turn. In the second book of the series, *West and East*, Poland is under threat from Stalin and requests assistance from Germany, though Nazi soldiers are, understandably, initially reluctant to offer help (*West* 85).

In the next book of the series, *The Big Switch*, Poles, many of them Jews, take up arms and fight alongside the Nazi army against Stalin. The ideological conflict at the heart of this irony is largely examined from the perspective of a Nazi solider, Hans-Ulrich, who first speaks of it as if it were a "sexual perversion", as the narrator informs us (*Switch* 83). As an extension of this theme, Hans-Ulrich later falls in love with a "half-Jewish" (*Switch* 283) Polish barmaid, Sofia. About half-way through the text, still in love, Hans-Ulrich and Sofia part ways, but he remains torn

over her Judaism (*Switch* 347). The conflict of (Polish) Jews fighting for Nazis, in which Jews in a sense become Nazis, is not given as much exploration on the battlefield as it is through the relationship between the two lovers. We must look elsewhere to find instances of narrative representations in which the dangerous moral conflation of Jewish and Nazi fighter is addressed more directly.

Released in 2008, one year before Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, Edward Zwick's *Defiance*, by no means an alternative history, is a film that dramatises real events in which a band of partisan Belarusian Jews fought back in the Second World War. The group is led by three brothers, two of whom, Tuvia and Zus Bielski, hold opposing stances on violence and its value. Tuvia sometimes wields his weapons reluctantly, Zus much more eagerly, especially after the killing of their families and neighbours. Zus, who lives by the adage "Blood for blood" (Zwick), joins a group of Soviet partisans whose prime focus is killing Nazis; his brother seems more intent on keeping alive the hundreds of civilians who have sought refuge with him after escaping near death. Tuvia asserts that "We cannot afford revenge.… Our revenge is to live" (Zwick).

In one particularly unsubtle moment, when Tuvia and his large group of rescuees are stuck between a watery marsh and an impending group of Nazi soldiers (much like Moses and his freed slaves), the film finally seems to resolve its philosophical conflict by erring on the side of violent resistance. At first Tuvia, persuaded by his younger brother, Asael, decides to cross the waters. Once on the other side, they are attacked by even more Nazis, and when Tuvia is asked if they go back across the river, he firmly declares, "No, we stay and fight" (Zwick). Straddling the line between violence and non-violence, *Defiance* ends by demonstrating the necessity of killing under threat of being killed. While more pointed in its considerations of Jewish violence when compared to Turtledove's work, Zwick's efforts seem undercut by his artistic simplification of the issue.

Like Zwick's film, Primo Levi's novel *If Not Now, When?* is inspired by fact and describes bands of Polish and Russian Jews who combat the German army. The story's protagonist, Mendel, fights for one such group, though his views on violence are much more complex than Tarantino's Jewish soldiers'. When relaying the story of the Nazis' obliteration of his village and his wife, Mendel turns his attention on himself, examining his attitudes to his acts of violence, stating that,

> after that I think that killing is bad, but killing the German is something we can't avoid. From a distance or close by; your way or ours. Because killing is the only language they understand, the only argument that

> convinces them. If I shoot a German, he is forced to admit that I, a Jew, am worth more than he is: that's his logic, you understand, not mine. They only understand force.… So that's why it's important for there to be Jewish partisans, and Jews in the Red Army. It's important, but it's also horrible; only by killing a German can I manage to persuade the other Germans that I'm a man. And yet we have a law that says 'Thou shalt not kill.' (*When?* 78)

Mendel's message is that killing is a necessary though undesirable evil. Yet it cannot go unnoticed that he justifies what he perceives as necessary through projectivist logic. Mendel "can't avoid" killing others intent on killing him, and absolves himself of any moral responsibility by claiming that the rules by which he acts operate beyond his sphere of agency: "that's [the German's] logic, you understand, not mine" (Levi *When?* 78). Yet Mendel is at least aware of this irony. He calls it "horrible", and recognises the Jewish law which dictates that " 'Thou shalt not kill' " (Levi *When?* 78). His reservations in killing certainly lack the joy observed in Tarantino's Jewish Basterds. Contrasting acutely with Levi's Mendel, Raine describes the Basterds' task for the first time, using phrases that bear a coincidental similarity to Mendel's words (but without Mendel's considered moral nuance):

> Nazi ain't got no humanity. They're the foot soldiers of a Jew-hating mass-murdering maniac, and they need to be destroyed.… We will be cruel to the Germans. And through our cruelty, they will know who we are.… And when the German closes their eyes at night, and they're tortured by their subconcious for the evil they have done, it will be with thoughts of us that they are tortured with. (Tarantino *Basterds*)

That it is through their "cruelty [that the Germans] will know who [the Basterds] are" demonstrates that Nazi cruelty is somewhat interchangeable with that of the Basterds'. It is also this cruelty that Raine expects the Basterds to adopt unquestioningly and without hesitation. Tarantino's Jews are cruel because the Nazis are cruel. This is the same logic Levi's Mendel acts upon, but Mendel demonstrates considerably more self-awareness and thought in this reasoning. It is also an occurrence which Levi shows is grounded in historical truth. Basing his narrative on his reading of texts such as Reuben Ainsztein's *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, Levi points out the following in an "Author's Note" after the end of the novel: "It is true that Jewish partisans fought the Germans.… It is true that groups of Jews, amounting to a total of ten or fifteen thousand people, survived

for a long time, some of them until the end of the war" (*When?* 279). The Jewish killing of Nazis is a fact of history that goes unrecognised by Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn, but it is a fact which does not necessarily invalidate their arguments concerning Tarantino's relativism. Other parts of *Inglourious Basterds* may do better in supporting this reading.

Just before the Basterds excitedly massacre Nazis in the theatre, we witness the Nazis excitedly revelling in their propaganda film, *Nation's Pride* (Tarantino *Basterds*). Hundreds of Allied soldiers are killed in the film as Nazis are visibly enjoying the spectacle; and hundreds of Nazis are killed in the theatre as we, the other film audience, are meant to express the same kind of rejoicing in seeing Hitler's bloody death. Not only is it suggested that Jews are swapped for Nazis, but film audiences are as well. Tarantino provides no thoughtful distinction between the two. Both audiences are encouraged to delight in scenes of a very similar nature; each history is opposite yet equal. It is this moral relativism that seems informed by Tarantino's historical relativism, which is a point of contention also raised by Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn in their respective essays.

Rosenbaum suggests that Tarantino's insensitivity to history is indelibly marked by the "blindness to history that leaks out of every pore in this production (even when it's being most attentive to period details) …" ("Recommended Reading" n. pag.). It is true that the film *looks* historically accurate, but this is (quite knowingly) belied by subtle choices made by the director that go almost unnoticed. Upon closer inspection, Tarantino's detailed historical aesthetic is not as accurate as Mendelsohn may assume. This is particularly relevant given its consequences on our reading of the text as an alternative history. In writing of the film's (assumed) historical accuracy, Von Dassanowsky shows that

> Tarantino's film … vacillates wildly between its fine historical detailing and its intentionally flawed, even laughably wrong information. German character names like Fredrick and Bridget are so unlikely that the German-speaking actors have difficulty pronouncing them. Tarantino's Hitler offers a very convincing vocal impersonation, but has intentionally striking brown eyes instead of blue. Accurate uniforms have inaccurate decorations …. Tarantino's film is about language accuracy, but it is the high level of authentic (mis-)communication that covers these factual errors as if to say we never really watch a film closely enough, we are not critical enough, we desire to look at what we want but do not see. (xiv-xv)

These deliberate inaccuracies, in one way, may reveal that the film is simply a film; Tarantino is not presenting his work as a faithful embodiment of the past in any way, let alone narratively. Though, as Von Dassanowsky shows, these almost unnoticed deviations from history may also be read in another way; that is, it may be seen as Tarantino's send-up of the historic solecisms in many a historical war film in general. So, when Rosenbaum declares that Tarantino's film represents a "blindness to history that leaks out of every pore in this production (even when it's being most attentive to period details) …" ("Recommended Reading" n. pag.), he seems to miss (or dismiss) the period details as themselves being blind to history. Some of the inaccuracies in the film are far too conveniently and ironically placed to be considered thoughtless, or a manifestation of the director's ignorance. Tarantino is aware of, and anticipates, accusations which state that adhering to a history far too other may be more destructive than it is constructive. He plays with this idea by suggesting that all films misrepresent history in some capacity and to some degree.

Some critics have been much more welcoming of this play on history than others. Stepping away from Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn's critiques of Tarantino's work, *Inglourious Basterds* has also garnered numerous awards from distinguished and popular film institutions such as in Cannes at the Cannes Film Festival, and in America at the Academy Awards. Also, in a review of the film, critic Roger Ebert admired the work greatly, and likened it to *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino's other major critical and commercial success. Ebert wrote that "[Tarantino] provides World War II with a much-needed alternative ending. For once the basterds get what's coming to them" (n. pag.). This comment speaks of the author's recognition of the logic and purpose in some of the motivations behind alternative history: the point of the mode is not merely to alter the facts of history, but to reorder, rewrite, and play with existing stories so as to create new meaning. History in Tarantino's film becomes as much of a text to be referenced and reworked as the other films to which it alludes, as Ebert's review suggests. It seems Tarantino offers his audience more than a mere denial of history; he provides us with a tale that has been retold exhaustively to the point that we are able to identify any deviation from an all-too-familiar narrative. Ebert's comments are also interesting in that they demonstrate how critics are willing to read the film's depiction of the relationship between morality and the aesthetics of history. Rosenbaum, Mendelsohn, and Ebert all read the film within a similar frame, but come to different conclusions. All critics demonstrate how Tarantino's attitudes to the telling of history inform his positions on

violence. Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn, for example, argue that what they perceive to be the director's historical relativism is reflected in his moral relativism. Yet I find some caution must be exercised in arguing that Tarantino's supposed attitudes to history are reflected in the director's use of violence, or that the two are somehow causally correlated. While it may be argued that Tarantino's violence is amoral and relativist, there is evidence to suggest that we may not draw the same conclusions of his historical depictions.

About a third into the film, after threatening to kill Nazi soldier Pvt. Butz, the Basterds manage to extract information from Butz regarding the whereabouts of other Nazi soldiers in the area. Before they let Butz go, the Basterds reason that it would be in Butz's best interest to lie about why he was freed, instructing Butz to tell his superiors that the Basterds intended to keep him alive so that he may spread the word about their intention to kill as many Nazis as possible. When Hitler hears Butz's fabricated story, he informs him not to speak of the incident at all, and change the story yet again: "Your outfit was ambushed, and you got away!" (Tarantino *Basterds*). In this rather vertiginous oscillation of information and misinformation, Tarantino presents an alternative history within an alternative history within an alternative history, where, in the audience's confusion, no story is valued more than the other. This acts as one of the film's first indications of its awareness of the mode of alternative history in which it operates. Tarantino's considerations of other very closely related matters, such as truth, are given the same treatment early on in the film.

In the film's first scene, Col. Hans Landa interrogates Perrier LaPadite, a French farmer, on his land (Tarantino *Basterds*). During the conversation, Landa, pompous, animated, loquacious, begins deliberating about truths and lies regarding rumours of Jews hiding in the area. When Landa poses this as a possibility to LaPadite, who is hiding the Jewish Dreyfus family beneath the floorboards on which Landa's chair rests, LaPadite claims that his only knowledge of this is the rumours that circulate regarding this story. Landa responds: "I love rumours! Facts could be so misleading where rumours, true or false, are often revealing". This seems to encapsulate Tarantino's thoughts on the nature of the value of stories that are imperfect portraits of history, or alternative history fiction more generally. Tarantino, through Landa's statement, seems to suggest that rumours, which we may take as alternative historical narratives, often point to a concealed truth. Rumours may be "revealing" in that they gesture towards a truth that is veiled in misinfor-

mation, exaggeration, distortion, and lies. A rumour, Landa teaches us, is not the antithesis of truth but its supplement.

Landa also claims in the quote above that "Facts could be so misleading". What is implied is that facts are prone to misreading and misquotation. There is nothing in a fact, in and of itself, that suggests that it will be understood or interpreted appropriately. The film introduces a discourse on the associations of that which has been labelled 'true'. One of the effects of purporting a text to be true is that it implicitly assumes the unchallengable authority of that text. Yet in presenting a text that lacks authoritative truth, in presenting a text which only points to the truth without committing to it, the reader is asked to decide for herself the merits of the text at hand. In only gesturing towards the truth, Tarantino's film demonstrates its slipperiness; the director demonstrates the possibility of truth's evasive nature, which, to be clear, is not the same as arguing that truth can never be established. In rumours being valued over facts, Landa seems to, first, destabilise our assumptions about truth's stability, and, second, show that lies and distortions of truth are not without their worth. As *Inglourious Basterds* nears its end, matters of truth, specifically as they operate within an alternative history context, reaches its bloody conclusion.

In the film's final act, Landa and Raine begin negotiating the terms of Landa's escape. Landa blackmails Raine by promising not to reveal to Hitler the Basterds' assassination plans on condition that Raine promises, along with his superiors, to agree to Landa's fabricated version of events, that Landa helped the Basterds realise their original plan to kill Hitler. Raine and his superiors would also agree to provide Landa with American citizenship and residence on Nantucket. What Landa seems to be doing differently to Raine is completely bury real history. Landa seeks to destroy factual history and replace it with lies. He gets his way and the Allies agree that history will read that Landa's version of the past, a false and alternative version, will be recorded. However, circumstances change and not all goes according to his will.

In the final minutes, Raine and Utivich, the Basterds who remain, plot to correct history and thwart Landa's plan. They do so by overpowering and forcing Landa to the ground, where Raine proceeds to carefully carve a swastika into Landa's forehead. While Landa screams and Raine and Utivich look upon their doing, the swastika, made all the more bold and bloody through a close-up, serves as a symbol of history as it occurred; it is real history (as the universe of the film has defined it). Landa's version of events, had they been followed through, would have



Figure 6: Landa's bloody swastika in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

portrayed him as a hero. But the mark that will be left on his forehead, which Figure 6 so graphi-graphically illustrates, is an unambiguous representation of his complicity with Nazis. The mark on his forehead represents the indelible fact of history, a version of the real past which cannot be altered.

We may also rely on this final scene to further understand the film's stance on alternative history itself, the mode in which the text operates. Landa's alternative history, though agreed upon by the Allies, is replaced by the film's version of real history under Raine's objections. The film weighs the merits of one alternative history over another, demonstrating discretion over these choices. It presents an anti-relativist stance, showing consideration for the consequences of the mode it utilises, showing that one version of history is not necessarily as worthy of interest as the next.

*Inglourious Basterds* is not without its weaknesses, but they are weaknesses which are sometimes unfairly read into the film's strengths. Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn argue for the film's moral relativism, but do so by suggesting that this somehow influences and as influenced by the film's historical relativism, or its Holocaust denial. In other words, Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn assert that Tarantino's film is an insensitive and unsympathetic portrayal in its misuse of history, making such offensive portrayals as valid as any other depiction of the same subject. But such a reading simplifies what are altogether much deeper arguments the film portrays about the relationship between truth and historical narratives. The film is not as thoughtless on these matters as Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn make it out to be. It is not as relativist as they assume.

## *Time's Arrow* and The Impossible Logic of the Holocaust

To read any evidence of Holocaust denial in Amis's *Time's Arrow*, we must recall that the text may be thought of as a denial of the Holocaust largely based on the

narrator's misinterpretation of historical facts, which leads to a historical rewriting of sorts. The facts of history remain the same. There is, though, a denial of a different kind at the core of the text, which is tied to Odilo's attitudes towards his involvement in the Final Solution.

Upon its release in 1991 many reviewers and critics praised Amis's work, citing the ingenuity of his form as a suitable complement to his portrayal of the Holocaust. In *The Washington Post*, Leslie Epstein, despite some initial "trepidation" about Amis's choice to "[distort] the plain reality of … Auschwitz," concludes that, "Perverse and brilliant, insightful and exasperating, [*Time's Arrow*] is a true contribution to the literature of the Holocaust, and so to the understanding of the times we have gone through and those yet to come" (xi). Similarly, David Chute, commenting on the novel's ability to resist complacency in its consideration of other portrayals of the Holocaust, states that "the book's playfulness … amplifies the emotional impact. It 'makes strange' historical events that have been recited often, bringing us right up against them suddenly from new and unexpected angles, and shocking us at the very sight and thought of them, all over again" (3).

Amis's novel was certainly not without its share of negative criticism, though, with some finding the author's formal play and challenging subject matter an uneasy mix. In her review, titled "Holocaust Chic", Rhoda Koenig writes that Amis's "drama, the dazzle, are also what is disturbing, in the wrong way, about this fiction. One's general uneasiness with the propriety of using the Holocaust for raw material is increased by the flashiness of Amis's method" (117). Koenig certainly recognises the value we may glean from the text, claiming, "Amis – I assume – wants to make Auschwitz new, to reawaken our emotions" (117), but Koenig's unease stems from Amis's methods of reimagining this catastrophe, and particularly what this reversal suggests. She writes that, "Instead of sadly thinking, 'Yes, this is how it was,' we are distressed to think, 'No, this is how it was not' " (117).

Similarly, Claire Tham shows Amis's novel to be a "brilliant … but hollow book", concluding that "Even as one marvels at Amis's bag of tricks, there is a lingering reservation about any literary response which manages to suggest, even ironically, that the Nazis were 'helping' the Jews" (17). Consequently, Tham asserts that Amis's text seems to be written in the spirit of Holocaust denialism. Recognising but dismissing the irony of the text, Tham implies that considering history otherwise would be an offense to the history we have come to appreciate as true, a point echoed by Koenig. While reading the text as one that may suggest denialism,

Amis himself entertains matters of denial of a different kind, particularly as it applies to his backwards narration.

When observing other people moving through the world backwards, the narrator comments on the ability of others to wilfully forget. In a scene in which the protagonist is having an affair with Nurse Davis at the hospital at which he works, Odilo, then John, is caught in the act by Nurse Davis's husband, Dennis (*Arrow* 79). In keeping with the novel's narrative reversal, Odilo enters Nurse Davis's room with his trousers around his ankles, and Dennis begins hitting his wife, stares at John, turns off the lights, and leaves the room (*Arrow* 79). After this incident, the narrator asserts the following:

> What is it with them, the human beings? I suppose they remember what they want to remember. And I suppose, in our case, John and I should exchange high fives in squalid thanks to this human talent for forgetting: forgetting, not as a process of erosion and waste, but as an activity. John forgets. Nurse Davis forgets. The husband, Dennis, shuddering in the cold on his way to work, on his way to watch the night, forgets. (*Arrow* 80)

The effects of the narrative's backwards temporality must be acknowledged when reading this extract. When the narrator speaks of human beings forgetting, it is only because the narrator is misreading as a reaction what is really the subject not having experienced that which can be forgotten only after the fact. Experiences, be they traumatic, pleasurable, confusing, exciting, stressful, or banal, are not forgotten so much as they are not yet experienced. They have not yet crossed the threshold into the past, and are not yet historical. There is no forgetting of history because there is no history to forget. In this way, Amis presents a novel in which there is no history, no real past, and this act of forgetting is not an act of forgetting at all. To indulge the narrator's misinterpretation, though, to read this scene, indeed, as an act of forgetting, makes for some interesting discussion on notions on the subject of memory, especially as they may hold resonance for historical denial.

It is important to acknowledge the narrator's description of this kind of forgetting as an "activity", as it makes forgetting seem like a wilful denial of history. It is like denial in that the subject is aware of the historical narrative she is determined to forget; the subject is aware of what narrative of the past is being denied. As far as the narrator interprets what is happening, people who forget seem to hold both realities simultaneously in the mind, but one history is favoured over another,

much like alternative history narratives. This is more in line with the kind of denial of which Koenig and Tham speak. It is the kind of denial that is reflected also in Odilo himself.

Odilo, working as a doctor in America, is popular and well-liked. During an office Christmas party, under the guise of John Young, he receives a Christmas card from a hospital reverend, and is complimented by other staff members, despite his reluctance to accept this praise: " 'You do good work, Doctor,' everyone here tells me. I deny this. I immolate myself in denial" (*Arrow* 88). This violent language is telling. If we are to accept the narrator's comments as echoing Odilo's feelings, where "I" may refer to both identities, then Odilo's denial of himself as being a good doctor is, superficially, an indication of the guilt he has incurred through war crimes as a Nazi doctor. This is also confirmed by his self-imposed "[immolation]", which recalls the ovens in the death camps at Auschwitz and Treblinka. Odilo is a doctor but denies being one, and "immolate[s]" himself as he did Jews, thereby immolating his and their history in the process. Yet Odilo's thoughts of denial ironically only confirm their opposite. He is both doctor and not; he is both perpetrator and victim; he is both with and without a past. Occupying both spheres becomes a way of acknowledging *and* denying his history. It is this which seems to be the crux of alternative history fiction, too. Alternative histories, through the irony of their construction, refer to real history and its alternative within the same text.

The above does not counter Koenig and Tham's criticism of the text, since, despite both critics' recognition of the irony afoot, they both argue that it is precisely because of this irony, not despite it, that the novel demonstrates insensitivity to history. It is this insensitivity to history, one which allows the reader to consider with equal sincerity real history alongside its opposite, that opens up Amis's text to severely consequential accusations of relativism. And in considering questions of historical relativism, to which the discourse of Holocaust denial and alternative history allude, I will attempt to show, in the discussion below, that Amis's text is perhaps not as relativist as some may think, that *Time's Arrow* offers some necessary parameters on possible readings of the Holocaust.

In the previous chapter, I alluded to Amis's description of the histories of Auschwitz and Treblinka as that which cannot be narrated because they are places without time. This argument was predicated on the premise that time may be seen as one of the primary proponents of all narrative. But earnest as the text may be in arguing that these sites of massive human catastrophe cannot be narrated, we

must also concede that the text, that both Auschwitz and Treblinka in particular, are narrated in some way, even if it is done so indirectly in its reversal. This reverse narration also means that the text will inevitably be put into forward-moving time by its multiple readers, who, in this act, offer a rewriting of the text. This allows for several interpretations of the text, which suggests that Amis welcomes as many interpretations of the Holocaust as there are readers, but this leaves the text open to possible accusations of relativism. From this, *Time's Arrow* seems to suggest that all possible readings of the Holocaust are correct, that none are without their merit, but this would be to overlook certain instances in the narrator's description that point to some limitations of the types of narrative readers may propose as a way of describing Auschwitz and Treblinka.

When in Auschwitz, the narrator claims that everything "makes sense" (*Arrow* 129). This would imply that if the narrator were to observe Auschwitz and Treblinka in the confines of the conventional flow of time, then we can expect the opposite: nothing would make sense. Narrated forward, these places could not be narrated in ways that adhere to rationality. Other descriptors of which the narrator makes use suggest even greater complexity. When the narrator speaks of Auschwitz and Treblinka as being without place and time, he also describes Odilo's role in bringing Jews to life as his "preternatural purpose" (*Arrow* 120) and likens the act to a "conjur[ing]" (*Arrow* 130).

Describing these places in such fantastic terms suggests that their history lies beyond any conceivable reality. This means that even with the richness of ironic meaning offered by the reverse narration, this kind of history cannot be narrated in any coherent way. That is, since the narrator, experiencing this history backwards, claims that Auschwitz and Treblinka only "makes sense" through "preternatural" logic, he implies that this catastrophe cannot make sense turned right way round, and is equally beyond logic when viewed backwards. Both forwards and backwards, then, the death camps cannot be made sense of; they exist, and can only be narrated, without reason.

It is in this way that Amis's history seems to sidestep possible accusations of relativism. Through his backwards narration, Amis invites each reader to reorder the narrative and thereby construct her own meaning. But Amis, particularly in his description of the death camps, limits the kinds of meaning readers may produce. The death camps may only be understood through the irrational; and so the narrator's description presents qualitative, not quantitative, constraints on interpretation.

While this understanding of the novel does not necessarily present a counter to Koenig and Tham's reservations about the text's irony, it at least demonstrates the necessity of acknowledging the narrator's failure in reading the possible in the impossible. With the narrator's description of Auschwitz and Treblinka as existing outside of reality, Amis seems to imply that some kinds of history may only be understood in a certain kind of way. And this particular kind of history may not be understood at all.

The restrictions on interpretation Amis puts forth are similar to both Tarantino's and Roth's. All three texts demonstrate the uses and abuses of alternative history, demonstrate that some versions of history must be considered more readily than others while always deferring to real history as a means by which to assess the merits of one's alterations. They present texts that limit the kinds of alternative pasts which can and should be narrated. What is offered by these narratives is an argument for considering some clear-minded perspectives on World War II and the Holocaust while dismissing other alternative narratives in the process. History is not relative, they seem to announce. The Holocaust, while it may be reconsidered, cannot be denied. Yet it must also be made clear that utilising Holocaust denial as a frame by which we may read alternative histories warrants some careful qualification.

When alternative history texts are shown to be akin to Holocaust denial, the accusation is really one which suggests insensitivity to history and perceptions of the past. It is a reading which sees alternative history as endorsing epistemological and moral relativism. Accusations of Holocaust denial may only be read into alternative history texts with some accordance of liberty and metaphor. To use the term literally would suggest a lack of appreciation of the irony within the text, which would be an unfair dismissal. To appreciate the story, both author and reader must be knowingly complicit in the lie. This further suggests that in its alterity, the mode may serve to confirm real history rather than exist purely as its counter; it exists as an ironic confirmation of the past.

At the very least, appreciating the potentialities of alternative history would be in the same spirit as appreciating the premises of historical revisionism, which is the work of historians more generally, anyway. This is especially true if we are to understand historians as "not just chroniclers – they do not simply retell the tale. Each one tries to glean some new insight or understanding from the story already known …" (D. Lipstadt 21). If we are to appreciate this comparison as valid, then alternative history texts, like historical accounts based on irrefutable fact, may be

valued for the plausibility of the insights it affords real history, particularly if that alternative history is executed with some degree of responsibility and thoughtfullness to real history.

# PART 2: PRESENTS

# Chapter 4
# Recreating the Past for the Present

> To forget and – I will venture to say – to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical studies is often a danger to nationality. (Renan 145)

## ALTERNATIVE PRESENTS

There are at least two kinds of present evident in alternative history fiction: one is the present of the text itself, the present the characters of the text occupy, and the other is the present in which the reader resides (which is often the same present as the period in which the text is published). The former is considered in Chapter 5, the latter here.

Many alternative history texts, in part, aim to illuminate the present through historical alteration: in depicting a different past, some alternative histories suggest how our time may be different now (if things would be different at all). This case can certainly be made for the primary texts herein. These texts show that history, particularly in its alteration, may act as commentary on the real present; that is, our perceptions of history may come to inform our views of contemporary culture and politics. The opposite may also be true: contemporary culture and politics sometimes informs alternative history authors' perceptions of the past. Past and present form a mutually informative dynamic within many works of alternative history, and history writing more generally. Several critics, including Hayden White, demonstrate the importance of understanding the present in acknowledging the motivations behind much historical writing.

White asserts that we are influenced constantly by what is happening now when interpreting what has happened then. Concurring, E. H. Carr writes that the process of understanding history is "to analyse the past in the light of the present" (*New Society* 17). Historians such as Michael Oakeshott disagree. Oakeshott criti-

cises such academic historians, particularly Carr, for not placing enough emphasis on the past as a period of investigation and study that is important in and of itself (332). Not only is it desirable for Oakeshott, but it is entirely possible for a historian to divorce her subject from the context in which she currently lives. That is, it is not inconceivable that history be written without the intrusion of the present besmirching history in its pristine state. Most prominent critics, however, another being Lukács, align themselves with Oakeshott's detractors.

Lukács, in *The Historical Novel*, maintains that it is the task of the historical novel, as a symbol for human progress, "to recall [the driving forces of human history] to life on behalf of the present" (*Historical Novel* 317). For Lukács it is not merely because we are creatures prejudiced in favour of the present that determines that we read the past through a presentist lens. As Lukács argues, "[T]he severance of the present from history creates an historical novel which drops to the level of light entertainment. Its themes are indiscriminate and unrelated and it is full of an adventurous or emptily antiquarian, an exciting or mythical exoticism" (*Historical Novel* 183). The point of writing history, in other words, is to illuminate the present. Lukács further points out that writing and reading history in terms of the present determines the quality of the historical work. History for history's sake, according to Lukács, while not impossible, seems trivial and insubstantial.

There is the tendency of some alternative history texts to either reflect or comment upon present politics, or to present an alternative past to promote a political agenda during the time of its publication. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld expands on this point, showing that directly after World War II, alternative history texts aimed at narratives that justified the Allies' victory over Hitler, where such texts would demonstrate that "the world would have been better without the evil Nazi dictator" (23). C. M. Kornbluth's 1958 short story, "Two Dooms", is one such text which justifies an Allied win.

As the story begins, we find Dr. Edward Royland, a nuclear physicist working for the American government to conduct research on the development of a nuclear bomb, which Royland and his team successfully accomplish with the completion of Phase 56c (Kornbluth 4). Shortly after this success, Royland meets with a Native American residing in the dessert in which his laboratory is located. During the meeting, Royland consumes hallucinogenic mushrooms, and is transported more than one hundred and fifty years into the future to the same location in which he ate the mushroom. There, he finds his country violently dominated by the Japanese and Germans. Royland learns that America came to be this way during what

the Germans call “the War of Triumph (1940-1955)” (Kornbluth 20). In this phase of the war, Germany is nearly defeated, America, foolhardily, expends too many human and military resources on defeating Japan, and Germany, through America’s weakness, dominates and wins the war along with their fellow Axis partners (Kornbluth 20-24).

In this version of history, Adolf Hitler is seen as a dissenting agitator to the leader of the War of Triumph (Kornbluth 19). Royland learns that, because of this, Hitler was executed and is now dismissed as a rumour (Kornbluth 19). And in this new present, those not German or Japanese are branded and held in concentration camps. Also, German science, for which phrenology and astrology are its signal theoretical bases, is largely preoccupied with the stratification of races (Kornbluth 50). There appears to be no evidence of nuclear science; no atomic bombs seemed to have been dropped.

Towards the end of a most harrowing experience in this would-be future, Royland manages to find and consume the same kind of mushroom that brought him here. He is transported back from whence he came, and his convictions of the use of the atomic bombs he helped create are steadfast: “We have a symbol to offer the Japanese now, something to which they can surrender, and will surrender” (Kornbluth 58). This suggests a distinct lack of ambiguity in the text’s moral position on the real result of World War II, where it is shown that it was right that Germany and Japan were stopped in expanding their influence any further than they had. It is good and right that the world had not gone another way. Rosenfeld’s understanding of Kornbluth’s “Two Dooms”, in which he also reminds readers of the author’s personal war experiences, is much the same, arguing that the text “aimed to remind readers about the real, historical crimes of the Nazis. As a World War II veteran who had fought the Germans as an infantryman in the Battle of the Bulge, Kornbluth, after 1945, was a fierce opponent of fascism who was personally committed to preserving the memory of Nazi crimes” (G. D. Rosenfeld 102). In conserving and remembering history as it happened, Kornbluth’s use of alternative history is one which takes advantage of the irony at the centre of the mode. The author uses what did not happen only to remind his readers of what did, further citing real history as the best of all possible outcomes.

Imagining historical alternatives that validate Hitler’s fall is not to say that there are other scenarios in which history could have been even better than what real history has given us. Some historians have corroborated these claims. For example, British historian and journalist Daniel Johnson argues unequivocally that had one

of several assassination attempts on Hitler been successful, then "Not only would the Final Solution have been halted; there would have been no 'death marches' into the interior, on which hundreds of thousands died. The Iron Curtain would have fallen farther to the East" (20). Similarly, German historian Joachim C. Fest claims that "To be sure, the numerous emergencies of [1920s Germany] would have led to crises, but without Hitler they would never have come to those intensifications and explosions that we [have] witness[ed]" (7-8).

Of course, politics shifted drastically with the advent of the Cold War and so did the then-presentist concerns of alternative history fiction. From the early 1960s to the early 1990s, at the end of the Cold War, America faced the Civil Rights movement and the horrors of the Vietnam War, Britain rapidly lost its Empire and encountered economic hardships during the 1970s (Dow 395-96), and Germany suffered economically in the 1960s (Lipschitz and McDonald 70). All three nations began producing alternative histories with a conservative or right-wing bend. These texts would show that the atrocities of World War II were comparable to then-present hardships, thereby creating an alternative which sometimes led to a much more prosperous present, or told of another history leading up to a present that was ideologically similar (as far as the author believed) to the one in which the reader lived (Winthrop-Young 113).

A typical example of this alternative history narrative is *Moon of Ice*, first published in 1982 as a novella, and written by conservative Brad Linaweaver. This epistolic text is composed of "ENTRIES FROM THE DIARY OF DR. JOSEPH GOEBBELS" that are "Translated into English by HILDA GOEBBELS", his daughter (Linaweaver 357). In this world, the Nazis have won the war, but are left the worse off for having done so due to continued dogmatic dedication to their socialist beliefs. America, defeated, is thriving. The reasons for this are mainly socio-economic, as Goebbels, in an April, 1965, entry into his diary admits: "In a few years [Americans] had moved the country back to the foreign policy it held before the Spanish-American War.… [T]he new isolationists didn't believe in economic isolation by any means; they freed American corporations to protect their own interests" (Linaweaver 364). The new America is governed by libertarian ideals, and is prosperous because of it. But outside the text, in the reader's present, the threat of Soviet communism lurks as an imminent danger, comparable to the destructive ideologies which have left Germany in such ruin in Linaweaver's story, despite the nation's victory.

Not all alternative histories may have the same presentist concerns as others in this era, if, indeed, they have any political concerns at all. For example, there is the

Cold War-era novel *Budspy* by David Dvorkin, which imagined Nazi rule in America, but did not conform to the right-leaning politics of alternative histories of its time. In *Budspy*, the novel's alternative shows that bad governance led to America's social unrest, thus criticising then-current America's hypocrisy in opposing anti-communist ideologies when its own civil unrest caused problems internally (Dvorkin).

The conservatism which characterised alternative history texts of this period was somewhat, but by no means completely, diluted following 1989. The time after the Cold War observed the production of both liberally and conservatively inclined texts of the mode: with Germany unified, some alternative history authors were optimistic about the changes whose line could be traced to the Allies having won the war, while some authors remained sceptical (G. D. Rosenfeld 24).

With such diversity of political position, reading the present in alternative histories must be approached cautiously. It would be impossible to determine with any degree of certainty the intention of a text in terms of its political 'message'. It would therefore be more appropriate to read *alongside* the period in which the text was produced, rather than imposing the present *onto* it.

## Roth's Criticisms of Post-9/11 America

A few of Philip Roth's texts have been read against the present in which that work was published. For example, Bill Clinton's all-too-public sex life serves as an introduction to Roth's 2000 novel, *The Human Stain*, a text in which an academic's life is made available for public observation when he is (wrongly) accused of hate speech. And Roth's 1971 *Our Gang*, with a protagonist named Trick E. Dixon, is perhaps the author's most overt attempt at commentary on present politics. With *The Plot Against America*, many critics took the novel as yet another Roth text to be read alongside the present. Birte Otten felt such a reading not only appropriate, but also applied this to many alternative histories published after 9/11, arguing that

> alternate history fiction might have gained popularity among non-science fiction writers because its content and structure provide a suitable frame for stories engaging with the themes of historical rupture

> and change, themes which have dominated public discourse since 9/11 and can indeed be found in recent non-science fiction alternate histories. (n. pag.).

Yet in an essay on his novel for *The New York Times Book Review*, Philip Roth wrote that his work was not intended as commentary on the present:

> I set out to … reconstruct the years 1940-42 as they might have been if Lindbergh, instead of Roosevelt, had been elected president in the 1940 election. I am not pretending to be interested in those two years – I *am* interested in those two years.… My every imaginative effort was directed toward making the effect of that reality as strong as I could, and not so as to illuminate the present through the past but to illuminate the past through the past. ("Story" 11)

Of course, this does not mean that presentist readings of *The Plot Against America* are invalid. Roth's public pronouncements on the intentions behind the writing of his novel are by no means sufficient ground to deter us from such a reading. Even so, despite Roth's claims, elsewhere in his article he seems to undermine this position, suggesting that reading the then-present into this past must not altogether be discouraged. In the same article, he turns to George W. Bush, characterising him as "a man unfit to run a hardware store let alone a nation like this one, and who has merely reaffirmed for me the maxim that informed the writing of all these books" ("Story" 12). While this makes Roth's political affiliations quite clear, it also demonstrates that, as one critic put it, Roth is "trying to have it both ways. He insisted that he had not intended the novel to be political allegory, while knowing full well that it would be taken as such" (Rich n. pag.). And as Halio shows, "We have learned over the years how to take Roth's disclaimers" (204).

Among the many interpretations that reading 9/11 into the text may yield, many readers now argue that the novel's fictionalised 1940s America reflects post-9/11 attitudes of yearning for a reversion to a time that was, as Dan Shiffman demonstrates. In referring to the turmoil that Philip begins to internalise well into the novel, Shiffman's reading of the text concludes by citing Philip's nostalgic lament, described in the novel as "that not uncommon childhood ailment called why-can't-it-be-the-way-it-was" (Roth *Plot* 172). Shiffman reads this as indicative of Roth's perception of the childishness and futility of such appeals to imaginary histories in times of catastrophe, stating that the America for which Philip pines "was long gone before 9/11" (72). Svetlana Boym's writings on nostalgia provide an in-

teresting framework by which we may comprehend the subtleties of Philip's presentist yearnings.

In her much-referenced *The Future of Nostalgia*, which presents the historical and current attitudes of nostalgia particularly in an Eastern European context, Svetlana Boym believes that nostalgia may be thought of as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (xiii). In "longing for a home", nostalgia is initiated by the desire for psychological comfort. That this longed-for home "no longer exists or has never existed" suggests the invention and creativity in which nostalgia plays. Since the home was, but is no more, the home is replicated in the mind of the one who is "long[ing]", and, likewise, if it "never existed", one must invent one's home from the ground up. Nostalgia is an act of narrative reinvention whereby one recreates a desired past from the present. Elaborating on the temporal significance of nostalgia is Jameson, who shows that

> Historicity [or depictions of history] is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future (although its various forms *use* such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective. (*Postmodernism* 284)

When Jameson shows that, through representation, the past may be thought of as a "perception of the present as history", the implication is that stories of the past are, in effect, stories of the present. The real and unstoried past becomes perpetually deferred; it becomes the present's temporal other. And it is precisely this othering of the past which drives nostalgic thought. Yet in the mind of the nostalgic, it is the past which seems authentic, ideal, and therefore desirable, implying an othering of the present (Stewart 23). To the nostalgic, the othering of the present is a false but necessary othering (Stewart 23): it is false as the present is in reality always within reach, and it is necessary so as to make the past appear real.

Nostalgia, then, "does not simply repeat or duplicate memory" (Hutcheon n. pag.). Nostalgia is far messier in its handling of time than a simple linear temporal model is able to explain: "Nostalgia … is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space" (Boym xiv). The past in which nostalgia exists, in being directed sideways, is one which exists outside of linear time; it exists in a time of the mind, which is able not

only to invent time, but reverse, compress, and recall select moments of time. Jameson summarises nostalgia's complication of time, demonstrating that nostalgia produces "the estrangement and renewal as history of our own reading present … by way of the apprehension of that present as the past of a specific future" (*Postmodernism* 285). It is this sense of the restriction of conventional notions of time, and reconstructing the past, which suggests some interesting links between nostalgia and alternative history, as alternative history, like nostalgia, recalls history as it was not.

Some of the more contextual commonalities between nostalgic thought and alternative history are noted when determining the political milieu in which nostalgia is typically cultivated. Writing on the proliferation of nostalgic South African texts shortly after the deinstitutionalisation of apartheid, Medalie claims that "In historical periods which feel strongly their own transitional status … there is an inclination to look at the present with dismay, the future with trepidation and the past with nostalgia" (36). In a similar way, alternative history gained huge popularity in countries such as America and the UK directly after World War II (G. D. Rosenfeld 15), suggesting, like nostalgia, a similar kind of sideways remembrance of time and history in the aftermath of historical catastrophe.

Yet it must also be appreciated that, in reinventing the past, there are subtle differences between the processes employed by nostalgia and those of alternative history. Boym states that nostalgia, in inventing the past, tends to mythologise history, that nostalgia turns history "into private or collective mythology" (xv). Turning history into myth is not the primary intention of alternative history. One of the consequences of alternative history is certainly to demonstrate that history functions as a text that may be manipulated, but this is done on the assumption that history itself, real history, sits firmly as a fact of human culture, as suggested in the previous chapter. This necessitates the acknowledgement of the subtle distinction of irony and sincerity that separates nostalgia from alternative history, respectively. Where alternative history is well aware of history as it happened, and ironically reinvents the past as a response to the fact of history, nostalgia is intent in creating a sincere mythologised forgery of the past, one which it believes is true but may not necessarily be so. A similar kind of mythical discourse was employed in the catastrophic moments following 9/11.

Shiffman cites Bush's tendency to "[envision] the nation's response to the terrorist attacks as a crusade of good against evil" (62). Also, on the evening of 9/11, Bush, distorting history's significance, wrote in his diary that " 'The Pearl Harbor

of the 21st century took place today' " (Balz and Woodward n. pag.). Laden with nostalgia, what this points to is an irresponsible reading of history for the purposes of currying favour for presentist preoccupations in the wake of sudden disaster. It is also indicative of what 9/11 came to symbolise in the American imagination.

On the morning of 11 September, 2001, two hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Centre, another into the Pentagon, and yet another in a field in Pennsylvania. According to America's National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, it was assumed that this fourth plane was meant for the White House or the Capitol (n. pag.). While addressing the nation and a joint session of the congress on 20 September, 2001, President George W. Bush made it clear that evidence pointed to Al Qaeda as the perpetrators of the crime (n. pag.). The significance of Al Qaeda's targets was not lost on Bush, who showed that "Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity" (n. pag.). From this, 9/11 came to mean an attack on those values of freedom and democracy which Bush's rhetoric, at various points throughout his speech, defined as quintessentially American. In response to the attacks, Bush made it clear that "Whether [the Americans] bring [their] enemies to justice, or bring justice to [their] enemies, justice will be done" (n. pag.). Of course, such language relied on clear distinctions between us and them, which Bush famously established when he stated that "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (n. pag.).

Just as he wrote privately in his diary, Bush's speech likened 9/11 to the attack on Pearl Harbour: "On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941" (n. pag.). Bush further cemented the comparison, drawing clear symbolic links between Al Qaeda and the Nazis, stating that Al Qaeda "follow[ed] in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism" (n. pag.). This speech packaged 9/11 into easily digestible portions for the American public, likening the enormous moment and its perpetrators to historical events on which lines of morality had already been clearly entrenched. In other words, in comparing the attacks to Nazism, Bush tapped into America's nostalgic appreciation of World War II, thereby also implicitly justifying his retaliatory violence.

*The Plot Against America* presents a weariness of this kind of nostalgia, or it is at least sceptical of certain kinds of depictions of history in light of present poli-

tics. When inserting moments of nostalgia or sentimentality into his novel, Roth seems always to undercut it, which he does often through references to post-9/11 American politics. This is especially evident when comparing the beginning of the text to the end.

Before the slurs of anti-Semitism, before America's Jews are uprooted from their homes, and before the onset of the calamity of history, Scanlan notes that Roth's text could even be mistaken as one "suffused with nostalgia or adolescent humiliation": "Roth has only to allude to Herman's job with Metropolitan Life, or to seven-year-old Philip's cherished stamp collection or his pleasure in rolling clean socks into balls as his mother stands beside him in the kitchen, ironing shirts, to establish a secure, predictable domestic universe" (510). But history sets in to disrupt Philip's domestic sanctuary, a history comparable with the anxieties and fears that have come to typify post-9/11 politics.

As some readers have noticed, there are a few poignant similarities between Roth's Lindbergh and a post-9/11 Bush. Roth seems to legitimate these comparisons from the very appearance of the two figures, as Scanlan explains: "In *The Plot Against America*, Lindbergh is given to making public appearances wearing a flight jacket and leather helmet, an image instantly evoking Bush's dramatic 'Mission Accomplished' arrival on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* on May 1, 2003" (511). Further, it is hard not to recognise similarities in Lindbergh's government programmes as echoing those of the Bush administration. For example, "Just Folks", which provides young Jewish boys the opportunity to experience the lives of WASP America, and "Homeland 42", in its efforts to disband Jewish communities by means of forced removal, may forgivably be misread as the Patriot Act or Homeland Security. Even some of the novel's deviations from then-current America may be appreciated ironically. For example, Lindbergh's policies are isolationist; Bush's was interventionist. This may accurately reflect Lindbergh's real-life political attitudes, but towards the novel's end, as the country spirals in its internal rupture, America is forced to enter the war, suggesting that the nation cannot help but perform on the global stage.

Despite the disturbing similarities between fact and fiction, Margaret Scanlan reads *The Plot Against America* as a novel which "retains some faith in the majority" (516), suggested, Scanlan argues, by the final pages in which America seems to restore its sanity. Scanlan takes this as an indication of Roth's attitudes to then-current America, which implies Roth's optimism in America's ordinary citizens upholding the country's ideals. Although, to be sure, she is finally critical of Roth's

conclusion, particularly in the novel's final moments in which the narrative's history aligns itself with the reader's own. Scanlan shows that this alignment demonstrates Roth's lack of faith in real history:

> This formally happy ending, however, is undercut by our knowledge of the real history into which the fiction folds; ahead lie the massacre of Europe's Jews, the bombings of Dresden, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima, and further massacres, bombings, and famines from China and Cambodia to Ethiopia, Rwanda, and the Sudan. Even 9/11 will arrive on schedule. (517)

Scanlan uses this evidence to argue that Roth warns against overestimating the power of history. The moment of the text to which Scanlan refers is certainly an interesting one. But it is a moment which I find she misreads, thereby tempering the validity of her argument. To begin with, Scanlan presents an overreliance of this plot point which Roth presents ultimately as rather incidental. This moment may mean very little, or nothing at all.

Speaking parenthetically on Roth's parenthetical insertion of real history towards the end of *The Plot Against America*, J. M. Coetzee, in a review of the novel, shows that

> There is hardly any forward perspective beyond 1945. (If there had been – if a poignant gap had been allowed to open up between a boy who thinks that being relocated to Kentucky is the worst that can happen and a man looking over his shoulder who knows all the time that the plot against world Jewry extends to gassing them and incinerating their remains – then Roth would have had a different book on his hands.) ("Philip" 6)

What Coetzee implies is that Philip's historical naiveté upon which the narrative depends would have been undermined had Roth elaborated on the real history to which he alludes. Indeed, when the novel meets with real history (though almost a year after schedule, unlike Scanlan incorrectly implies) it is contained in only a single (albeit lengthy) sentence:

> The next month – following the devastating surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and, four days later, the declaration of war on the United States by Germany and Italy – America enters the global conflict that had begun in Europe some three years earlier with the German

> invasion of Poland and had since expanded to encompass two-thirds of the world's population. (Roth *Plot* 320).

The facts of history, or true history, are not what interests Roth. Part of Roth's project seems to be the creation of a misremembered past whose distortion results from the trauma of history, a point on which I expand in the next chapter. Roth's other preoccupations, it seems, lie in depicting a dystopian past from which the reader may project a potentially dystopian present or near-future, a reading supported by the allusions to post-9/11 America which are evident throughout Roth's work. Interestingly, this also seems to undermine the temporal trajectory to which readers have become accustomed within dystopian literature, as J. M. Coetzee shows:

> A historical novel is, by definition, set in a real historical past. The past in which *The Plot Against America* is set is not real. *The Plot* is thus, generically speaking, not a historical but a dystopian novel, though an unusual one, since the dystopian novel is usually set in the future toward which the present seems to be tending.…
>
> In the typical dystopian novel there is a … gap between present and future …. ("Philip" 6)

In presenting a dystopian past, Roth manages to simultaneously confuse genre conventions and temporality. Typically, in dystopian futures, such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (which Coetzee sites as a classic example of the genre ("Philip" 6)), the reader must retroactively apply the novelist's future onto the present. However, in Roth's dystopia, in its depiction of an imagined past, the reader must work forward in time to the reader's present, which may suggest that catastrophe *is* happening, as opposed to typical narratives of dystopian futures in which the reader portends that this *could* happen. Not only is this a disruption of the dystopian narrative, but also of the nostalgia readers are poised to observe in texts depicting childhood.

Susan Stewart, in her book *On Longing*, states that the nostalgic longing to return to one's home is always necessarily utopian (23). Yet Roth manages to subvert his readers' expectations of the nostalgic childhood (pseudo)memoir by creating an unlikable past. Roth's defamiliarisation of both nostalgia and dystopia results in the respective defamiliarisation of both present and future. And since these temporal subversions serve to inform us of Roth's criticisms of the (reader's) present, one may read Roth's novel as a warning against drawing too much comfort in

generic temporality. Such actions, the novel seems to suggest, are often driven by oversimplification and a desire to distort the present.

## TARANTINO'S DISINTEREST IN POST-9/11 POLITICS

Tarantino's films are never without violence. The excessive bloodiness of the director's oeuvre has provided ample fodder for his fiercest critics, and *Inglourious Basterds* proved unexceptional in this regard. Some negative readings of the film found that its violence, specifically as it falls in the genre of a revenge thriller, reflected post-9/11 attitudes of American jingoism and bloodlust. However, while many of these negative readings of *Inglourious Basterds* are not without their validity, it seems that in some cases there is an over-application of post-9/11 sentiment read into Tarantino's text. In *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino seems less concerned with the real present than he does with both past and present film.

In one particularly withering review of Tarantino's film, Hiram Lee draws an interesting correlation between the film and the alarming news reports circulating at the time of its premier: "*Inglourious Basterds* was released the same week that an internal CIA report was made public detailing the horrific torture of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan …. Masses of people have been killed in the bloody colonial-style wars pursued by the US since 2001" (n. pag.). Lee believes this to be indicative of Tarantino's carelessness and immorality: "To produce a film in this context in which American soldiers torture and execute their enemies on the battlefield … is utterly reprehensible.… This is surely among the least healthy works to have emerged in the years since the attacks of September 11" (n. pag.).

Recognising the potential links between the film and post-9/11 sentiment with greater scepticism, Richardson asks if it is fair to assume that the film allows enough distance between its violence and its meta-cinematic depiction of that violence in which an audience may "critically engage" (107). Upon much consideration, Richardson seems to think the answer to this question is no (107), and opines that "The film's message of justified torture and its Manichean worldview is not very far afield from other post-9/11 glorifications" (108). From Richardson's reading, it seems that *Inglourious Basterds* utilises the past to reflect present American sentiments, and shows an insensitivity to history in its lack of objection to America's present ills.

Jonathan Rosenbaum draws similar conclusions. Commenting on Tarantino's lack of appreciation for historical catastrophe both then and at the time of the film's release, Rosenbaum shows that *Inglourious Basterds* demonstrates that there is "no subject … so sacrosanct that it can't be met with an adolescent snicker – including, say, the Holocaust or, closer to the present, 9/11" ("Afterthoughts"). Expanding on this thesis in its considerations of a post-9/11 milieu, Rosenbaum believes that Tarantino's work is only one of a number of filmic responses which exemplify the attitudes of many popular directors at the time. In an article for *Film Quarterly*, Rosenbaum explains that films such as 2010's *Kick-Ass* (Vaughn) and Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* "have inspired and/or rationalized American bellicosity" (Rosenbaum "South"). Yet unlike many critics who have considered this to be a problem, Rosenbaum offers a solution, citing another then-contemporary film by way of counterargument. He compares *Inglourious Basterds* to Jean-Pierre Jeunet's 2009 *Micmacs*, claiming that Jeunet's film defies injustice in, as he sees it, more humane ways:

> … [T]he heroes of *Micmacs* – eccentric societal rejects … banded together as underground Parisian junk dealers,… are ultimately more interested in justice than in retribution. The difference was salutary and, for me, revealing, making me realize that unthinking revenge and revenge as an art form may be interchangeable for Tarantino; but for … Jeunet they are worlds and ideologies apart. ("South" n.p.)

Indeed, in *Micmacs*, we witness the central character, Bazil, with the help of his motley crew, seek justice from arms manufacturers by setting up two heads of arms companies against one another (Jeunet). At the film's climax, the two parties, in trying to outdo each other, are exposed on YouTube for their atrocities (Jeunet). The justice sought by Bazil and his friends is one that is passive and non-violent, unlike, as Rosenbaum suggests, *Kick-Ass* and, more significantly, *Inglourious Basterds*. According to Rosenbaum, this sets Tarantino's film as a firm example of a post-9/11 text that argues for bloody vengeance as a reasonable offering of justice ("Recommended Reading").

On 9/11, Tarantino has said little, but his few comments on the matter are nevertheless worth consideration. In a 2003 online *Rolling Stone* article, Tarantino made some interesting assertions about the attack on the Twin Towers. In the interview, the director confirms that when the attacks occurred he was "scared, like everybody else" (Tarantino "Kung-Fu Grip"). Though, when asked if the incident affected his work, he responded with the following:

> 9/11 didn't affect me, because there's, like, a Hong Kong movie that came out called *Purple Storm* and it's fantastic, a great action movie. And they work in a whole big thing in the plot that they blow up a giant skyscraper. It was done before 9/11, but the shot almost is a semi-duplicate shot of 9/11. I actually enjoyed inviting people over to watch the movie and not telling them about it. I shocked the shit out of them. But, again, I was almost thrilled by that naughty aspect of it. It made it all the more exciting. ("Kung-Fu Grip" n. pag.)

While Rosenbaum also makes use of this interview to substantiate his reading of Tarantino's irresponsible violence in a post-9/11 climate ("Afterthoughts" n. pag.), an assertion, as shown throughout this section, many critics identify in his work, the same document may be used to claim the opposite. In declaring that the incident "didn't affect me", it seems that reading 9/11 into Tarantino's films is largely the undertaking of the readers of his text rather than that of the director himself. This is not to say that arguments made against the director's irresponsible use of violence in his films are not worthy of consideration. It is only to say that perhaps comparing post-9/11 violence to Tarantino's specific brand of violence is to overstate the matter. Even in coming to understand the effects of 9/11, Tarantino defers to film as a frame of reference. It seems that it is the violence of other films, and not the violence of reality, which interests Tarantino; it is a unique brand of meta-filmic violence evident in every film of the director's oeuvre. Indeed, the violence in *Inglourious Basterds* seems rather unexceptional when measured against his other films, and the criticisms put against the use of such violence is also rather uniform. These are usually criticisms which argue that the portrayal of such violence is deemed unfair, relativist, and excessive beyond justification or artistic merit.

Looking back to 1994's *Pulp Fiction*, Groth argues that "[Tarantino's] films are a succession of torture scenes, murders, and tough-guy talk until the only possible response is one of disaffection … [and one instance of violence] means no more or less than the other" (35). Tellingly, in a 1995 essay on *Pulp Fiction*, Giroux, like Rosenbaum, reads Tarantino's violence as "a marker of the age.… The hyper-real violence [demonstrates] an endless stream of characters who thrive in a moral limbo and define themselves by embracing senseless acts of violence as a defining principle of life, legitimated by a hard dose of cruelty and cynicism" (304). Giroux is compelled to conclude that this particular hyper-real aesthetic does not provide any "normative grounds on which to challenge violence or to resist power that is

oppressive and brutal;… the aesthetic of realism serves pedagogically to justify abstracting the representation of violence from the ethical responsibility of both film makers and the audience to challenge it as an established social practice" (309). According to Giroux, Tarantino indulges in violence for violence's sake.

Later in his career, some critics have observed the same kind of absent centre in his portrayal of violence in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*. In a review of the film, David Denby, speaking of the film's unsuccessful intent on dissociating its violence from reality, argues that "Coming out of this dazzling, whirling movie, I felt nothing – not anger, not dismay, not amusement. Nothing" (Denby "Dead Reckoning" 113). By way of evidence, Denby refers to a scene in the film in which The Bride kills another woman "in front of the woman's little girl, who stares but utters not a sound. Again, we know the scene is meant as play.… But where's the joke in this particular unreality?… Tarantino wants the shock of a mother killed in front of her daughter without the audience undergoing any discomfort at all" (Denby "Dead Reckoning" 113). Denby's argument suggests that Tarantino unsuccessfully separates movie violence from the real violence which it unavoidably recalls. This is violence as mere spectacle without consideration of consequence. A similar aesthetic may be evident in *Inglourious Basterds*.

About a quarter into the film we find Raine and the rest of the Basterds attempting to extract information from the German Sgt. Rachtman. Raine even threatens Rachtman's life to persuade him, telling him that the Bear Jew, one of the Basterds, will "take that big bat of his, and he's going to beat your ass to death with it" (Tarantino *Basterds*). Despite Raine's best efforts, Rachtman refuses to divulge information regarding the whereabouts of other German soldiers hiding in the area. When he refuses, thereby welcoming the threat of the Bear Jew, the Basterds begin laughing, and Raine explains to Rachtman why: "Quite frankly, watching Donny ['the Bear Jew' Donowitz] beat Nazis to death is the closest we ever get to going to the movies" (Tarantino *Basterds*).

When called, Donny slowly emerges from a dark tunnel nearby. The Basterds applaud. Once Donny bashes Rachtman's head in, he gleefully exclaims, "Teddy fucking Williams knocks it out of the park! Fenway Park is on its feet for Teddy Fucking Ballgame!" (Tarantino *Basterds*). Through Raine and his Basterds, we observe that there is no distinction between violence on screen and violence in the real world. Violence, as Donny suggests, is a sport, put on for mass spectacle.

Critics may be correct to point out the amorality of Tarantino's violence, but it seems less a symptom of then-present American attitudes (as Rosenbaum and

Giroux point out) than it is a reflection on a postmodern aesthetic: violence, not only in *Inglourious Basterds* but in Tarantino's films more generally, is mimicked rather than critiqued. The literary significance of this may be understood more clearly by recalling Jameson's conceptualisation of pastiche and parody.

In his book, *Postmodernism*, Jameson defines pastiche as "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" but specifies this to be "a neutral practice" (*Postmodernism* 17). Put another way, pastiche is mimicry without a political agenda. This is unlike parody, which Jameson shows to be pastiche but with political ends (*Postmodernism* 17). Parody is pastiche with the intent to critique. Using Jameson's framing, it is more that, in his illustrations of it, Tarantino's violence, in its lack of critical engagement, may more likely be classified as pastiche than parody. However, as has been argued in Chapter 2, while Tarantino may not be critical of filmic violence, or the political then-present, he is certainly critical of World War II film aesthetics. If his film is at all parodic, Tarantino's parody lies in his critique of recent filmic depictions of World War II, witnessed especially in the film's admiring references to World War II exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s. His parody is one borne out of dissatisfaction with what have become war film clichés, and not necessarily the violence used to portray such matters.

## Amis's Monsters: The Present as a Moment of Crisis

If World War II may be considered one of *Time's Arrow*'s greatest global threats, then the Cold War may not be that far behind. Before World War Two 'begins', it is the Cold War which seems to define the novel's threatening undercurrent, especially, on occasion, with the mention of nuclear weapons. Indeed, *Time's Arrow* (first published in 1991) begins around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event which signalled the end of the Cold War. With the backwards narration, the Cold War and its nuclear threat act as precursors to World War II. But in reading the novel the right way round, World War II, or the past, may illuminate our understanding of then-present German unification and the dangers which led up to that moment.

Four years before *Time's Arrow* Martin Amis published *Einstein's Monsters*, an anthology comprised of one essay and five short stories. *Einstein's Monsters* may

be seen as a tonal and thematic precursor to *Time's Arrow*. This is especially evident given the subject matter of the works contained within the anthology: explorations of then-current Cold War politics; the overwhelming ironies which have come to define the twentieth century; and the ways in which time is unsettled by the proliferation of nuclear arms. *Time's Arrow* and *Einstein's Monsters* may therefore be seen as contemporary pieces, one informing the other, and both providing great insight into Amis's global and philosophical consciousness at the time.

In the introductory essay to *Einstein's Monsters*, "Thinkability", it is clear that the threat and fear of atomic warfare is the nucleus around which Amis's concerns revolve. The essay sets the tone for the short stories that follow. Amis defines nuclear weaponry as "clearly the worst thing that has ever happened to the planet" ("Thinkability" 8), and they seem to take full occupancy in the author's mind, claiming that on the subject he has "read too much [and] thought too long" ("Thinkability" 8). It is through writing and language that the author attempts to gain some perspective on the form of this large topic, which we may take as indicative of a Cold War sensibility to which Amis seems to allude. It is a language suffused with irony that aids in Amis's understanding of the always imminent threat of atomic warfare, which the author believes has come to define the politics of the time.

For Amis, the discourse of nuclear weapons, especially as they come to stand as symbols of the Cold War, is both "the highest subject [and] the lowest subject" ("Thinkability" 9); it is a subject which signals the wielding of great power, but in its great threat renders us powerless; and it is one which provokes thought about all existence on the planet only because, in the wake of nuclear war, there will be nothing. "Everywhere you look there is great irony" ("Thinkability" 9), Amis writes. Irony, of course, is the locus of *Time's Arrow*. It is the novel's driving force. Odilo's 'other', the narrator, inverts Odilo's actions, and the Jews of Auschwitz and Treblinka are not killed, but created. These ironies are impacted on by the novel's formal irony: time runs backwards, not forwards.

In one of Amis's short stories, "Bujak and the Strong Force", the titular Bujak, a former circus strongman, believes the twentieth century to be characterised by "squalor, profanity and panic", all a consequence of, as he terms it, "einsteinian knowledge, knowledge of the strong force" ("Bujak" 40). It is this which makes Bujak a self-proclaimed "Oscillationist, claiming that the Big Bang will forever alternate with the Big Crunch, that the universe would expand only until unani-

mous gravity called it back to start again" ("Bujak" 49). In this, "time would also be reversed" ("Bujak" 49).

Time, and its overwhelming influence on our lives is similarly bastardised in "The Time Disease". This story describes a post-apocalyptic world that has ingrained in the population a pathological preoccupation with time, causing what the protagonist calls "*time*-anxiety" (Amis "Disease" 71), the hyphen of which suggests that one may not be thought of without the other, much like the role of the hyphen in 'space-time'. As far as Amis is concerned, this has turned time into an unrecognisable mutation. Time becomes compellingly different: "[T]he past and the future, equally threatened, equally cheapened, now huddle in the present. The present feels narrower, the present feels straitened,… the modern situation is one of *suspense*" ("Thinkability" 22). It is this which we may assume colourises Amis's thoughts on the Cold War.

The Cold War may be understood as an event in which the world observed the production of the greatest weaponry, but where the greatness of these weapons were never realised. It was the threat of the weapons that continually loomed, the planet's people aware that danger was always near. As Amis suggests, the coldness of the Cold War is one in which the world, and with it time, was held in suspense. By this he means that with the threat of collapse, there can be neither past nor future because of an obsessive dedication to the present. Not only does this explain Amis's Cold War sensibilities, but Odilo's own placement in time as well.

In *Time's Arrow*, Odilo is stuck in the present: moving backwards in time, he cannot construct a past; and all that *will* happen may be predicted with certainty, which then suggests there can be no future, especially if we understand the future as defined by uncertainty. Odilo, it may be argued, is one of Einstein's monsters born out of the Second World War. Or, as another critic, Dermot McCarthy, puts it, "[I]n as much as Odilo is one of the 'doctors' who justified their barbarism under the rubric of 'Nazi science,' he derives from the same narrative archetype as does the figure Amis deploys in his book about the bomb. Einstein's monsters are the bombs but also the bomb-makers" (310-11). Odilo embodies the threat of an external present, and this Einsteinian threat is realised again in the narrator's perception of 1960s nuclear warfare.

Shortly before the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the threat of nuclear catastrophe, as a consequence of his backwards perception of time, is dismissed by the narrator as a possibility:

> Now despite years of steady disarmament they're all talking about nuclear war again, and more intensely than ever before. I wish I could put their minds at rest. It isn't going to happen. Come on: imagine the preparations that would be needed. No one's even started. No one's ready.
>
> Remember the punks? They were ready. The experiments in mortification they performed on their own faces – the piercings, the pallor. The punks had made a start. They were ready. But they vanished decades ago. (*Arrow* 81)

The backwards narration is informative. The narrator's claim that "It is not going to happen" is based on his experience of having lived through the 1980s, in which there 'was' a threat of equal intensity which effectively produced nothing as a result. Now, in the 1960s, in which cries of nuclear war abound, the narrator believes, based on his 'past' experiences, that this threat is largely empty. The "punks", however, "were ready". The "punks", as they are likened to the dead in their "mortification" and their "pallor", embody the threat of a nuclear Holocaust. (The 1980's punk seems to have occupied the cultural space now taken over by zombies in contemporary pop culture. Both, it seems, at least in Amis's view of the cultural significance of 1980's punks, have come to symbolise the threat of apocalypse, nuclear or otherwise.) Amis's punks appeared before in "Bujak and the Strong Force", adorned in "NO FUTURE T-shirts" ("Bujak" 36), again suggesting their realisation of the infinite present of their time. To the narrator of *Time's Arrow*, the punks, as they have "vanished decades ago", were the last indicators of the promise of a real nuclear end-time, a promise which has gone unfulfilled.

But as we enter the 1940s, where Odilo is now Hamilton de Souza, the narrator experiences a shock when he discovers that the nuclear bomb has become a reality: "The end of the world. *A bomba atómica* … I was astonished. So! They did it. They had to go ahead and do it. Just when world abolition looked like a certainty. They couldn't resist: limited nuclear war" (Amis *Arrow* 106). The narrator's surprise in this passage speaks of the unreliability of history to predict the future. That an event never happened before does not preclude the possibility of it ever happening. Similarly, nothing precludes the recurrence of an event if it indeed did happen before. Lightning may very well strike in the same place twice. We are left in uncertainty, realising that anything could happen. The debilitating fact of nuclear weaponry, ever since the confirmation of its destructive presence since World War II, is one which is constantly suspended above us.

In our futural uncertainty, like Odilo we are stuck in the present. In so doing, Amis offers a different definition to conventional understandings of the end of time. For Amis, an end-time does not signify that our existence desists, but rather that there can be no newness or oldness, similar to how Odilo is forced to live through the same narrative. We may further understand the complexities of Odilo's purgatorial present by reading it through Kermode's formulation of the "middest". Kermode borrows the term from Edmund Spenser, who uses it in his "The Faerie Queene" as a temporal distinction to mark the difference between the work of the poet from that of the "Historiographer" (7), or what we, today, would call a historian: "For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the things forepaste, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all" (7-8). Plainly, for Spenser the historiographer's task is merely a faithful recollection of the past, where the poet's task is much greater and nobler. The poet must wield her wit to recreate the past and imagine what could be, all performed from the limited present, the middest.

Inspired by this definition, Kermode's "middest" refers to a time, the present, situated between beginning and end, between past and future. Like Amis, Kermode believes that to live in the middest is "to live in crisis; in a world which may or may not have a temporal end, people see themselves much as St. Paul saw the early Christians, men 'upon whom the ends of the ages are come'; and these ends bear down upon every important moment experienced by men in the middest" (Kermode *Ending* 26). To resolve the crisis of the present, Kermode argues that we create fictions of the beginning and, most importantly, the end (*Ending* 58), not dissimilar to the function performed by Odilo's alter-ego, the narrator.

Moving from the novel's beginning to its end, the narrator lives through a past and sits gazing towards a future about which he is perfectly ignorant. Past and future remain reliable temporal points by which to frame his and Odilo's present. Through these means, and especially through the backwards narration, the narrator constructs a narrative out of Odilo's life, making out of it something which it is not, making out of it a fiction. Using Kermode's middest, we see that Odilo unconsciously creates a new narrative from the present in which he finds himself stuck.

We may further read Odilo's suspension in the present as symptomatic of a much larger history, one tense in its uncertainty. Linking the significance of one massive global event to another, Amis suggests that the nightmare of the Cold War

may be a mere continuation of the nightmares incepted by the Second World War. With the deployment of atomic bombs, World War II brought with it a corruption of time in which, like Odilo, we seem to be stuck in an immovable present. As a result, the Cold War, and the continued threat of nuclear war, not only determines the politics of the time, but also the politics of time itself.

# Chapter 5
# Alternative Identities

> As long as the patient is in the treatment he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering. (Freud "Remembering" 150)

> The question arises whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past? (van der Kolk and van der Hart 179)

## TIME IN TRAUMA AND DOUBLING: AN OVERVIEW

Despite narrating World War II in the alternative, the primary texts concerned (though it is done ironically in *Time's Arrow*) are still intent on portraying the event's devastation, the effects of which are both sweeping and localised on the individual. Doubling comes to be a common trope through which the effects of war are manifested within the primary texts. It seems a natural trope towards which alternative history authors gravitate since the mode of alternative history preoccupies itself with portraying history's other to begin with. In the academic discourse of trauma, doubling, generally understood as a response to trauma, is characterised by specific alterations to one's identity. This will be used as a basis for understanding the texts' portrayals of characters that operate under constraining histories, but not all the texts may be read through this lens all of the time. Each text demonstrates other complex ways in which characters may alter within the context of their alternative histories. Doubling, as a lens through which the texts may be read, may provide only so much insight into understanding how identities become altered within the texts concerned. From here, an exploration of

the term remains necessary, especially in its relation to time and identity under the effects of trauma.

The range and applicability of trauma theories are deep and far-reaching, so much so that it cannot all be contained here. Upon first being formally introduced into psychological study, trauma "seemed to engulf everything around it" (Caruth 3). Therefore, these introductory comments aim to address specific aspects of trauma and doubling which concern matters of history and time. In coming to use ideas of trauma to assist in reading the texts concerned, it is necessary, first, to explore the condition of the traumatised; that is, it is necessary to define post-traumatic stress disorder before coming to understand the specificity of factors of time and history in their shaping of the condition.

We may define post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the condition in which

> there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth 4)

In addition to this definition, it is important also to take note of the subjectivity which characterises PTSD: the event itself, and the severity thereof, may not be identified as traumatic by all who experience it (Caruth 4). In other words, "Trauma … does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully experienced as it occurred" (Caruth 151). The traumatised recognises the event as traumatic only after the fact.

Taking note of the temporal aspects of Caruth's assertion, it is not strictly the past that is prioritised for the traumatised subject, but the "experience" of that past. "The pathology consists," as Caruth continues, "solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (4).

The above speaks to the necessity of invention by which PTSD seems to be defined. In experiencing the event only at a later time, the traumatised are forced, or "possessed" (5) to reinvent, to re-narrate, the event in the mind. From this definition, it is clear how one may recognise the similarities between PTSD and alternative history, especially those texts, as the ones discussed here, that portray the effects of a traumatic and tumultuous history. Sufferers of PTSD are unwillingly subjected to replay their traumatic history in their dreams, memories, and

thoughts. Similarly, alternative history texts allow us to replay and re-narrate history in an attempt to reinterpret history, or to elucidate what is otherwise a seemingly incomprehensible past.

To turn to the temporal significance of PTSD, Caruth defines the traumatic experience as one where the subject "confront[s] an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge … and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time" (153). Such an experience forms part of what John Krystal calls one of "a number of temporal paradoxes that occur in patients with PTSD" (6). PTSD may be perceived as a rupturing of memory, or a rupturing of the past. As the past cannot properly be recalled, it is broken. This is similar to the manner in which history is created within alternative history texts, where the past is imperfectly repeated.

'Post-traumatic stress disorder' is itself a term which speaks to the centrality of time within our understanding of the condition, but it is a term which perhaps does not accurately describe the subjective experience of the sufferer. The 'post', read literally, carries with it the perspective of the diagnoser, and certainly not that of the diagnosed, especially if we are to understand the sufferer's condition as one marked by a perpetual reliving of the past. In the traumatised having to relive the traumatic event in, for what is for the traumatised, a stark and realistic déjà vu, it is as if the 'post' is meaningless. To the traumatised, it is precisely that there is no 'post', no after to the event as it is periodically relived. And since there is no after, and the past seems stretched out into the present, there can only ever be the midst, or now. Time, to recall Amis's term, remains in suspension. And it is time that is part of what separates the traumatised from others who are not. PTSD may be thought of, in part, as a pathology of time.

Temporality becomes corrupted in the mind of the traumatised. To be sure, PTSD, especially when considering factors of time, is varied in both degree and kind. Specific context must always be thought of. And if we are to use the tenets of studies of trauma to understand not only aspects of alternative history but the kinds of characters who assume different identities in different temporalities in the primary texts considered here, then it is necessary, also, to consider the uniqueness of these texts. It is necessary, in other words, not to apply these ideas prescriptively, and to regard with interest not only the ways in which these texts submit to, but also deviate from, the discourse of trauma theory. Generally, what the texts in question seem to discuss are the ways in which individuals respond to the sweep of history, thus altering their present identities in the face of an over-

whelming past. It is therefore time specifically in relation to identity that will aid in our understanding of the alternations of identity experienced by the characters of these texts. And it is trauma theory which is particularly helpful in understanding the several manifestations of identity in the very particular history that concerns these narratives, specifically in ideas of doubling as formulated by theories of trauma.

Before observing the specificities of the primary texts herein, Robert Kraft, in his book *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, provides an expansive study of the traumatic experiences of Holocaust survivors. Kraft attempts to gain a sense of the role of testimony in subjects who have suffered greatly during the Holocaust. Through analysing his vast collection of testimonies, Kraft has discovered that doubling, or believing that one's past is experiencially distinct from the life one currently leads, is a common trope among Holocaust survivors. Some examples illustrate this point:

> Irene W. says, 'There is a … division, sort of schizophrenic division, or a compartmentalization of what happened. And it's kept tightly separated and yet it isn't.' Isabella L. states flatly, 'I am not like you. You have one vision of life, and I have two.… We have double lives that we can't cancel out.… I talk to you and I am not only here, but I see Mengele, and I see the crematorium, and I see all of that.' (2)

The final sentence of Isabella L.'s statement is of particular interest. In this portion of her testimony, she declares that she inhabits two discrete temporalities, being both " 'here' " and " 'see[ing] the crematorium' ". Kraft recognises this theme of doubling as almost universal among his testimonies, showing that

> Almost all witnesses state that they live a double existence.… Holocaust memories and normal memories are assigned to two, sometimes hostile, territories.… Holocaust memories are not integrated into the survivor's definition of self. They stand apart as defining another self at another time in another place. (2)

Significantly, it is not that a singular self experiences this temporal duality, but, as Kraft suggests, one's past identity is "not integrated" into the present. This state of doubling describes two separate states of self, each associated with different places and times. One inhabits the present as fully as one's other inhabits the past. There is no continuity between past and present selves.

While all the primary texts concerned exhibit a form of doubling as we may understand the term within trauma studies, the texts also come to demonstrate other forms of doubling, or alterations to identity such as masking, particularly in relation to time. In some ways, the texts demonstrate the ways in which the past infiltrates the present, or the present self, necessitating an adaptability of personhood as a consequence of the grandness of history and the portrayal and understanding thereof. Further, as the past cannot be reproduced, the texts also demonstrate that, through the identities certain characters assume, the present becomes a tool for engaging and understanding the past. Theories of trauma and doubling may do well in illuminating the reader's understanding of how time and identity alter under catastrophe, but it is also necessary to recognise the ways in which these texts may offer different perspectives on these matters.

## Roth's Selves: Alternative History as Healing

The doubling trope in *The Plot Against America* manifests itself in at least two ways. It does so once through its duplication of history (in its alternative history plot). And it does so again through Philip's character, observable most clearly in Philip's impersonation of Seldon Wishnow, and again in Philip's stand-in for Philip Roth the author. These doublings of character usually come as a response to trauma, which, for the most part, is manifested in the novel as the trauma of history. In some ways, as I will argue, Roth presents these doublings not entirely as a sign of pathology, but also as a necessary fiction: history's double serves to enlighten our understanding of real history, and is not always exclusively its pathological other.

In the wake of Lindbergh's election, and the resultant anti-Semitism, Philip's prejudices of the safety and protection with which he associated history becomes threatened. If we are to take Roth's novel as a Bildungsroman, then we may understand Philip's growth from ignorance to knowledge as explained in his coming to appreciate history and the many forms it assumes. It is not simply history's sweep that traumatises Philip, but the surprise with which it appears. The surprise of history, as we come to learn in the text, emerges from the style with which that history is both narrated and received. It is the ineffectuality and harm of history as

grand narrative which is key in understanding Philip's traumatic reception of the past.

In a trip to Washington, the nation's capital, the Roth family explore iconic America with the guidance of a retired high school history teacher, Mr Taylor. While exploring the city, they come upon the US Capitol, which the narrator describes as

> the biggest white thing I had ever seen …[, with] broad stairs sweeping upward to the colonnade and capped by the elaborate three-tiered dome. Inadvertently, we had driven right to the very heart of American history, and whether we knew it in so many words, it was American history, delineated in its most inspirational form, that we were counting on to protect us against Lindbergh. (*Plot* 57-58)

History is monumentalised. It is static, visible, and reliable. It is grand and stark, and its form and meaning apparent. It is also history which Philip comes to assume offers a form of protection against a national threat, which in this case is the president himself. Yet this form of history is also singular and unchanging. There is no variation in this symbol of history as it stands large and inert, its symmetry and its whiteness suggesting history in its perfect form. This is history as grand metanarrative. Philip's belief in the protection this form of history may afford proves ineffectual, though, and the beginnings of his doubt is alluded to in the extract's last sentence as it is this history which the Roths "[count] on" as their defence against a seemingly unlikely national anti-Semitism.

Later in the text, this grand and imposing version of history takes on a much more threatening guise, showing that the security that it was assumed to inspire was largely based on an overestimation of history as Philip has described it. Philip comes to understand that history, at least as grand narrative, really poses a threat, and has made the boy vulnerable to the damage of trauma, as exemplified in the following extract:

> … the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as 'History,' harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic. (Roth *Plot* 113-14)

Just as the US Capitol is described as sturdy, unchanging, and singular, so is history described in the passage above, particularly in its "inevitab[ility]". These are the same qualities, though, that turn history into a threat as it deceptively conceals, as Philip puts it, "the relentless unforeseen". Philip's understanding of history conforms to the "epic", which is perhaps a warning on Roth's part against the inappropriate generic labelling of history under conditions which require more nuance and subtly. What the epic represents is a stark and predictable monolithic narrative form, which, because of its imposing stature, and its inability to explain the unforeseen, becomes threatening. The other narrative form to which Philip likens this threatening kind of history is science, as he states that "The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides" (*Plot* 113-14). He reasons that likening history to a science, if we are to understand science as the pursuit of discovering pattern and predictability in previously uncategorised phenomena, dangerously makes of history that which it is not. It is this form of history which makes Philip vulnerable to the trauma of Lindbergh's anti-Semitic government, against which Philip uses doubling as a form of protection. And it is Seldon, Philip's neighbour and schoolmate, who comes to be implicated in Philip's attempts at doubling.

Seldon is bookish, intelligent, and has a terminally ill father who eventually dies. At school, and in the neighbourhood in which he and Philip live, Seldon is unpopular and burdened by a rather pathetic life, as Philip explains: "Of us all, Seldon was the least robust, least confident, and, most painfully for him, least lucky, and yet it was to Seldon that I had managed to contract myself for the remainder of boyhood and probably beyond" (*Plot* 222). The latter part of the quote describes Philip's commitment to Seldon, which is a position the former part of the quote suggests Philip assumes with reluctance. Seldon seems to take from this relationship more than he gives. He vampirically "latche[s] himself onto [Philip] as his other self" (*Plot* 222), which Philip terms as "shadow[ing]" (*Plot* 221). This act of shadowing in the text is interestingly reversed when Philip decides to not only imitate but become Seldon, thereby assuming the role of Seldon's double. In transforming himself into Seldon, Philip steals and adorns himself in Seldon's clothes, but there is a slight degree of discomfort that comes with the transformation at first as Philip begins to "feel like a freak" (*Plot* 222). As the threat of history proves unrelenting, though, assuming Seldon's identity becomes a necessary means of escape for Philip.

On one evening, Philip again dresses as Seldon, packs his stamp collection, and sets out into the night with a plan never to return home. He does not venture far before he is knocked unconscious by a kick to head by a horse. Seldon is the one who discovers Philip and contacts an adult who gets Philip to a hospital. Once saved, Philip's neighbours speculate that this strange behaviour may be attributed to "daydreaming", " 'sleepwalking' ", and " 'delusions of grandeur' " (Roth *Plot* 232), descriptors similar to that of the nightmares and flashbacks which haunt the traumatised (Krystal 6). Philip, however, makes it clear that his motivation for exhibiting such abnormal behaviour is to escape history, as he declares: "I wanted nothing to do with history. I wanted to be a boy on the smallest scale possible. I wanted to be an orphan" (*Plot* 233). His desire to embody Seldon's persona seems motivated by his perception of Seldon's lack of history, which, in turn, is likened to being an orphan. Indeed, with his father dead (*Plot* 169), Seldon's history begins to disappear, as Philip may interpret it. (Of course, by the end of the novel, as his mother is murdered, Seldon comes to lose family history in its entirety (*Plot* 337)). Philip's desire to be Seldon is further demonstrated in Seldon's family name: Wishnow, a name (if we are to abide by the Anglicised (mis)pronunciation) that implies desire to be in the present moment. Philip's understanding of the present is that it is a time which is devoid of history. He does not desire having another history, an alternative or double history, but no history at all.

Philip is not the only character who expresses a desire to alter his identity in the face of overwhelming history. Sandy, Philip's older brother, presents a particularly interesting variation on the matter. Sandy is a character who, through Aunt Evelyn's employment in the Office of American Absorption (OAA), is quite easily encouraged to become a member of Just Folks, which the Lindbergh government describes as " 'a volunteer work programme introducing city youth to the traditional ways of heartland life' " (*Plot* 84). After signing up to the programme with Aunt Evelyn's help, Sandy is sent to spend part of his summer working on the Mawhinneys' tabocco farm in rural Kentucky, and emerges transformed. Philip marks this difference by Sandy's newly acquired patois, demonstrating that Sandy "said 'cain't' for 'can't' and 'rimember' for 'remember' and 'fahr' for 'fire' and 'agin' for 'again' and 'awalkin' and 'atalkin' for 'walking' and 'talking,' and whatever you wanted to call that concoction of English, it wasn't what we natives of New Jersey spoke" (*Plot* 92-93). Philip makes a point of exposing the clear divide that is evident between the people with whom he identifies, and the people with whom Sandy has chosen to affiliate himself.

In another telling scene, Philip and Sandy's cousin Alvin, who opposes Lindbergh's anti-Semitic isolationist ideals with violence, discovers Sandy's collection of Lindbergh drawings. Philip unsuccessfully and naively attempts to defend Sandy's drawings by lying to Alvin, claiming that Sandy produced the images not in honour of Lindbergh, but as a ruse for Lindbergh supporters who may pose a threat to detractors (*Plot* 183-84). Alvin, of course, is unconvinced, but Philip continues to hope that Sandy would, in fact, be living "a double existence! If only he *was* making the best of a terrible situation and masquerading as a Lindbergh loyalist to protect us!" (*Plot* 183-84). Philip and Sandy both resort to doubling as a response to their trauma. Both brothers create alternative versions of themselves. But these manifestations of doubling differ quite tellingly.

Where Philip responds to this historical upheaval through committing himself to a perpetual present, or through dissociating himself from history altogether, Sandy's response seems characterised by an internalised anti-Semitism. During numerous fights with his more knowing and more righteous father, Herman, Sandy often resorts to anti-Semitic name-calling, sometimes referring to his father as one crippled by a " 'persecution complex' ", and labels his parents " 'ghetto Jews' " (*Plot* 193). Sandy's doubling is one in which he aligns himself with the persecutor so as to escape persecution. He comes to identify with a different set of historical parameters in the construction of his alternative self. Eventually, though, adolescence strikes and Sandy loses interest in Just Folks and his farm work for the Mawhinneys: "Lindbergh's Jewish tobacco farmer discovers breasts, and suddenly he turns up as just another teenager" (*Plot* 253). Unlike his brother, Philip does not simply snap out of the effects of the trauma he experiences that are fuelled by America's anti-Semitism, and only made worse by Philip's misplaced faith in grand historical narratives. Philip's trauma, and the doubling which emerges from this, seems much deeper, and is made more complex when considering the adult Philip Roth (the text's narrator), who seems to act not only as a counter to the trauma experienced by his younger self, but is also the younger Philip's other double. Reading Roth's other work may shed some interesting light on this assertion.

In an interview with Aharon Appelfeld, Roth opens a discussion regarding Appelfeld's *Tzili*, and questions the author on why he "decided to imagine a girl as the survivor of this ordeal. And did it occur to you ever *not* to fictionalize this material but to present your experiences as you remember them, to write a [direct] survivor's tale?" (*Shop Talk* 27). Appelfeld's response, below, is also quoted in full in *Operation Shylock* (*Shylock* 85-86). That it was quoted in another of Roth's nov-

els, especially one about a fictionalised Philip Roth whose identity is stolen by an Israeli man who, uncannily, is Roth's spitting image, suggests the resonance with which Appelfeld's words were received in Roth's own creativity regarding questions of false selves on the backdrop of traumatic histories. Appelfeld's response is lengthy, but it is worth reproducing much of it:

> I have never written about things as they happened. All my works are indeed chapters from my most personal experience, but nevertheless they are not 'the story of my life.' The things that happened to me in my life have already happened, they are already formed, and time has kneaded them and given them shape. To write things as they happened means to enslave oneself to memory, which is only a minor element in the creative process. To my mind, to create means to order, sort out, and choose the words and the pace that fit the work. The materials are indeed materials from one's life, but ultimately the creation is an independent creature.
>
> … The things that are most true are easily falsified.
>
> Reality, as you know, is always stronger than the human imagination. Not only that, reality can permit itself to be unbelievable, inexplicable, out of all proportion. The created work, to my regret, cannot permit itself all that.
>
> The reality of the Holocaust surpassed any imagination. If I remained true to the fact, no one would believe me. But the moment I chose a girl, a little older than I was at that time, I removed 'the story of my life' from the mighty grip of memory and gave it over to the creative laboratory. There memory is not the only proprietor. (*Shop Talk* 27-28)

Appelfeld demonstrates the abilities of fiction to explain the facts of a traumatic past. He explains that historical trauma, exemplified here in the Holocaust, "surpasse[s] any imagination", and the tenets of realism are no longer suitable for translating that trauma into narrative. The tenets of realism are easily labelled as "unbelievable, inexplicable, out of all proportion". It is really fiction that presents liberation. Fiction is the "laboratory [where] memory is not the only proprietor", and is therefore more suited to develop understandings of the traumatic past. These premises seem to have made their way into Roth's near-entire oeuvre, but especially *Operation Shylock*, *Deception* (discussed earlier), and *The Plot Against America*. In these texts, Roth seems to recall Michael Riffaterre's thesis regarding the uncovering of fact through fiction: "… [F]iction emphasizes the fact of the fictionality of a story at the same time it states that the story is true. Furthermore,

verisimilitude is an artefact, since it is a verbal representation of reality rather than reality itself: verisimilitude itself, therefore, entails fictionality" (Riffaterre xv). In *The Plot Against America*, truth is established and trauma exorcised through lies and alternative histories. But it is also the novel's narrator with whom this is achieved.

The author of *The Plot Against America* is Philip Roth. The protagonist is Philip Roth. However, that the text is set in the much larger context of an alternative history implies that the Philip who writes is not the same Philip about whom we read. The doubling in name, though, is far too teasing to suggest no overlap between the two, and it is the narrator, the adult Philip, as we read and understand the text as a Bildungsroman, who comes to exhibit change and maturity in the protagonist's attitudes to history.

Towards the novel's end, after Seldon, whose mother is killed, is saved by Herman and Sandy (Philip's father and brother), the adult Philip narrates the following: "My father was a rescuer and orphans were his speciality.… No one should be motherless and fatherless. Motherless and fatherless you are vulnerable to manipulation, to influences – you are rootless and you are vulnerable to everything" (*Plot* 358). This extract, especially when considering young Philip's earlier desire to be an orphan, to be without history and exist, as he puts it, in an "eternal, unhounded now" (*Plot* 225), suggests Philip's eventual acceptance of the purpose of history. Philip's desire to be an orphan marked his desire to deny history through and through. It demonstrated his desire to believe that it was not the case that history had happened otherwise, but that it did not happen at all. But as the novel demonstrates, the adult Philip Roth (who serves also as the story's narrator) presents to us a historical alternative rather than presenting no history at all. He constructs a fiction of the fact, which is by no means the same as denying it. In creating a fictional double of himself, and, by extension, a double of history, Roth shows that perhaps misremembering or fictionalising history is not necessarily a sign of pathology, but of healing. The author demonstrates that narrating history's alternative may be considered a function of coming to process and understand the trauma of the real past as it lingers in the present.

## ODILO'S TRAUMA: AMIS'S DOUBLING IN NAZI PERPETRATORS

Doubling and alternative selves come to be some of the major motifs of Amis's *Time's Arrow*. Odilo is doubled through the narrator; Odilo constructs several versions of himself after leaving Auschwitz to conceal his original identity; there are two kinds of time as the narrative runs backwards and, through the reader's reordering of the text, also forwards; and, as a consequence of these two times, the moral atrocities of the Holocaust take on dichotomous meaning. Each instance of doubling or duplication serves to inform the other; they cannot be read or made sense of in isolation. And compared to the other primary texts in the study, despite its high poetry, Amis's use of these devices possibly comes closest in overlapping with the ideas and discourses of trauma, especially because of, and not despite, the text's employment of backwards narration.

The narrator in *Time's Arrow* may be seen as Odilo's most significant double, and, as Odilo's double, may function as an unconscious reaction to the trauma experienced during Odilo's time in Auschwitz. The split between narrator and protagonist may be thought of as indicative of a fractured self where Odilo and the narrator, his alter-ego, come to represent two parts of the same damaged whole. But the narrator is only one among many identities with which Odilo comes to be associated in the course of the novel.

In the beginning of the text, we are introduced, through the narrator, to Tod Friendly, who, as we discover in several instances in the text is not the protagonist's true name. Tod T. Friendly becomes John Young (*Arrow* 67), who becomes Hamilton de Souza (*Arrow* 101), who finally assumes the identity of Odilo Unverdorben (*Arrow* 111), the protagonist's original and true identity. Odilo's change in identity suggests his desire to alleviate himself of any accountability of his war crimes; he wishes to conceal his history. Speaking of the names by which we come to identify the protagonist, Joffe explains the etymological significance of Odilo's polynymity: Odilo Unverdorben – "*Odilo* [derives], perhaps, from *Odin*, the god with power over life and death (and much admired by Nazi mythologists) …. [Unverdorben] means 'unspoilt', 'undepraved', and given the exposure of the atrocities he enthusiastically commits, constitutes one of the novel's abundant ironies" (4); Tod T. Friendly – "The first name is a popular late twentieth century American invention, making Odilo, as always, one of the boys, though it remains also a Germanic reminder of the man's close association with *death* ……. [He is] a tad *too* friendly [as he] press[es] gifts onto children in the streets" (4); John Young – "The

temporary nature of this identity in transit [as he arrives in New York for the first time] is suggested by the *John* Doe anonymity of the first name, and, because he is about to be reborn in a new life and identity in adopted USA, *Young* is equally appropriate" (5); Hamilton de Sousa – "*Hamilton* is an aristocratic Scots name, taken from the town in Scotland, and suits his temporary wait in Portugal as he lives in an agreeable country villa with three maids, a gardener and chauffeur, courtesy of the gold stolen from death-camp victims" (5). Odilo's name changes throughout the text. His ability to escape history, to essentially exist entirely in the present as he denies his past, presents its own unique problems.

As the war draws 'near' the narrator begins to tally the incidents of name-change Odilo has gone through, drawing connections between these changes and the impending war. The narrator also begins to notice the public's attitude to the start of the war, which, as readers turning the narrative the right way round, we may take to be the aftershock of having just experienced the event:

> I am assuming that this identity business is a foible of John's, of Tod's, of Hamilton's, and not universal. But look outside, at the street-skinned hills, the wildernesses of the parks behind their railings, and all the people. This crowd must churn with pseudonyms, with noms de guerre. Those that the war will soon reel in. We've been through three names already. We seem to be able to handle it. Some people, though – you can see it in their faces – some people have no names at all. (Amis 101)

Amis shows the effect of names and naming on the masses who must endure catastrophic historical narratives. It is clear that there is a distinction between the general public and Odilo, specifically in the ways in which these two parties name and carry themselves within the present in relation to history. Odilo wears his names, or "noms de guerre" (literally, 'war names'), as one would a mask. The public, however, as the narrator comments, "have no names at all", suggesting that those affected by the catastrophe of the recent war wear their trauma unconcealed. Most individuals do not see the necessity of hiding their history since most individuals, we may safely assume, do not identify as the war's perpetrators as Odilo does.

Yet it is not Odilo's name-changing which is most indicative of his trauma. Odilo's name-changing acts more as a sign of his attempt to conceal his crimes; it is the narrator, as we shall see, who comes to signify the trauma of Odilo's involvement as Nazi doctor during World War II. The text's most poignant form of

alternative identity lies not in Odilo's change of character, but in the psychic exchange between narrator and protagonist.

Through observing the world in backwards time, the narrator, functioning as Odilo's alter-ego, imagines a version of history which in turn presents a version of Odilo as guiltless redeemer. The Jews of Auschwitz and Treblinka do not die, they are not tortured or experimented on, but become acts of "Creation" (*Arrow* 120), thereby negating Odilo's trauma. In another light, the narrator's distortion of history may function as a metaphorical reminder of Odilo's real history. This depends on our belief of the role of metaphor as a device which creates epistemologically imaginative ties between the real and its similar unreality. Metaphor itself acts as a form of doubling: it is repetition with variation; it marks the instance in which a reader is able to hold both literal and figurative meaning simultaneously. Odilo's unconscious literalises the metaphor Odilo creates. This is interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, it allows for Odilo to function in a present with a different set of historical valences. Secondly, this literalisation of metaphor speaks to an abuse of figurative language. Interestingly, the (mis)use of metaphor was of foundational importance in Nazis' self-justification and superior self-definition during World War II, as Joffe points out:

> Over a period of years of continual conditioning, the Jews were designated as vermin. Always alluded to as 'dirty', their presence in any institution was considered a 'contamination'; enlightenment political, philosophical and intellectual ideas, inimical to fascist ideology, were labelled Jewish and banned, trashed and burned, and through the manipulation of linguistic shifts, Germans were habituated to thinking of Jews, not as human beings, but as *üntermenschen*, as lice, as vermin, as diseases such as typhus against which Germans needed to be inoculated. By reducing Jews to the status of vermin, it required no leap of the imagination by Germans to accept their liquidation and extermination. (3)

According to Joffe, "The Nazis literalised metaphors" (3), and through sincere though altered perception of the other, this translation of fiction into fact, a greater distance between reality and fantasy manifested. As Alvin H. Rosenfeld contends, the Nazis "clos[ed] the space that formally mediated between violent words and violent deeds" (135), and this practise "effectively invalidated language and made it forfeit its usefulness as the primary means of social and cultural discourse" (A. H. Rosenfeld 135). By flattening language, by making of it a simple

thing, the Nazis incapacitated any possibility of meaningful exchange, which demonstrates how the Nazi project, in large part motivated by the death of a race, began with the death of language itself.

The fictions by which Nazis lived appear elsewhere in *Time's Arrow*. When Odilo fraternises with his colleagues in a clubroom in Auschwitz, the narrator overhears that "Jews come from monkeys (from *Menschenaffen*), as do Slavs and so on. Germans, on the other hand, have been preserved in ice from the beginning of time in the lost continent of Atlantis" (Amis *Arrow* 130). This myth is based on a grand ideological programme constructed to determine and officiate German superiority. Speaking of the founding of the German race, Alfred Rosenberg, key figure in the Nazi Party's formulation of German racial superiority, and author of *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, notes that "from a northern centre of creation which, without postulating an actual submerged Atlantic continent, we may call Atlantis, swarms of warriors once fanned out in obedience to the ever renewed and incarnate Nordic longing for distance to conquer and space to shape" (19). Rosenberg is also confident that "Whatever the results of future research … nothing can alter the one supreme fact that the march of world history has radiated from the north over the entire planet, determining in vast successive waves the spiritual face of the world – influencing it even in those cases where it was to be halted" (21). As the former part of this quote suggests, conclusions have been drawn before facts have been considered, and nothing could deter Nazi ideology to alter its racist and superior stance. According to Hale, that the German people descended from a Nordic Master Race was an idea especially appealing to some hugely influential Nazi members: this myth held "powerful appeal for Himmler" (182), for example. In the context of racial and national identity, apart from the belief in supernatural origins, another preoccupation for the Nazis, especially for medical 'research' during Auschwitz, was twins.

Twins were of particular interest to one of the most infamous of Nazi doctors: Joseph Mengele, who carried out his studies on his twin subjects with depraved enthusiasm. Mengele was referred to as Uncle Pepi by his child and adolescent human experiments, some of whom spoke of his affection, hence his unofficial title (Lifton 355). Mengele also appears in *Time's Arrow*, where he is only ever referred to as Uncle Pepi. And as he is Odilo's medical superior, Odilo's recurring thoughts of twins may be explained by this relationship, which, early in the text, the narrator begins to notice: "All this stuff about *twins*" (*Arrow* 12).

Through the disembodied narrator, Odilo seems to have formed his own twin, which Odilo may have created due to an inability to confront his true self, as the narrator avers: "No one could accuse Tod Friendly of being in love with his own reflection. On the contrary, he can't stand the sight of it.… God knows what he looks like. There are several mirrors in our house,… but he never confronts or consults them" (*Arrow* 9-10). Through this, the narrator, or Odilo's unconscious, becomes Odilo's means of existing in a present that cannot bear his history. As Odilo's unconscious, the narrator is completely separate from him, observed most evidently in the narrator's use of "we" in the text. Significantly, this use of pronoun turns quite dramatically as Odilo enters Auschwitz in Chapter 5 of the novel where it is clear from the opening line that Odilo and his unconscious, Odilo and his double, merge to create a whole, as the narrator speaks the following: "I, Odilo Unverdorben, arrived in Auschwitz Central somewhat precipitately and by motorbike … shortly after the Bolsheviks had entrained their ignoble withdrawal" (*Arrow* 116).

Despite the singularity of personhood towards the end of the text, the backwards narration retains this duality as it inverts the moral meaning of Auschwitz, changing Odilo from killer into creator. Indeed, orthodox history demonstrates that clinging to a sense of duality was necessary for some Nazi doctors as they performed their medical torture, a phenomenon written about in detail by Robert Jay Lifton in his book *The Nazi Doctors*, a text which Amis, in the Afterward of *Time's Arrow*, speaks of as one of his work's primary influences: "My novel would not and could not have been written without it" (*Arrow* 167). In *The Nazi Doctors*, Lifton describes the role of Nazi doctor duality, stating,

> The key to understanding how Nazi doctors came to do the work of Auschwitz is the psychological principle I call 'doubling': the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self. An Auschwitz doctor could, through doubling, not only kill and contribute to killing but organize silently, on behalf of that evil project, an entire self-structure (or self-process) encompassing virtually all aspects of his behavior. (418)

Two of Lifton's most interesting characteristics of doubling, characteristics that have had fundamental influence on Amis's writing, are those which describe the doubling of the moral principles under which Nazi doctors function:

> … [A] major function of doubling, as in Auschwitz, is likely to be the avoidance of guilt: the second self tends to be the one performing the 'dirty work.' And, finally, doubling involves both an unconscious dimension – taking place … largely outside of awareness – and a significant change in moral consciousness. (419)

Lifton's definition of doubling is similar to how it has come to be used in the discourse of trauma. Trauma theories have described doubling as the instance in which the traumatised subject consciously creates a distinct other version of herself to cope with the aftermath of the traumatic event. Similarly, Lifton's work seems to imply that Nazi doctors have employed a comparable mechanism to guard and distance themselves from the atrocities they commit. That Odilo exhibits signs of PTSD, and has himself constructed a double of himself through the narrator, implies that he has become traumatised precisely because of the trauma he instigated.

Though an uncomfortable truth, perpetrator trauma has been recognised both in other Holocaust fiction as well as academic literature within trauma studies. Jonathan Littell's 2006 novel (released first in French and published in English in 2009) is an example of such a work of fiction. The novel is narrated by Max Aue, a former Nazi officer, decades after the Holocaust, Max's involvement in which the novel makes explicitly clear. In the text's opening pages, Max offers a meticulous and laboured justification of the purposes behind his writing, which is to provide a detailed account of his experiences from his perspective. In this preamble, he recounts that he dreams he is "being smothered beneath a heap of stones. With [his] memories, it's been more or less the same" (Littell 5-6). Max also narrates that he is sometimes prone to vomiting "for no reason, just like that. It's an old problem, I've had it since the war, since the autumn of 1941, to be precise, it started in the Ukraine, in Kiev I think, or maybe Zhitomir" (Littell 8). Despite the darting and feverish tone, suggested by the excessive comma splicing, Max dismisses these symptoms of PTSD as his "numerous little afflictions" (Littell 8).

As traumatised perpetrator, Max resorts to a variety of coping mechanisms. It is clear from other parts of his introduction to his narrative that Max's most preferred method of coping with his trauma is through intellectualisation. For example, when considering the toll of the dead during the war, he calculates that, in the war's entire duration, on average one person died "every 4.6 seconds" (Littell 16). While this startling statistic places this catastrophe in horrifying perspective, Max informs his reader that counting the number of dead in real time is "a good

meditation exercise" (Littell 16). It may only be half true to attribute such thoughts to the workings of the mind of a sociopath. In one sense it illustrates Max's lack of remorse, but his intellectualisation also tells of the necessity he feels to curb the effects of these horrific events of which he was often a willing participant. To claim Max is perpetrator of such traumatic events is as true as stating that he is also a sufferer from the effects of such traumas.

Writing on the consequences of remembering the Holocaust, Dominick LaCapra, in his book *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, argues that, indeed, in some cases, "the perpetrator may be traumatized", and even offers some noteworthy examples of Nazis of significant rank who, it was assumed, were afflicted by this condition: "Himmler … suffered from chronic stomach cramps that his masseur, Felix Kersten, saw as psychosomatic in origin. And Himmler's aggressive associate, Erich van dem Bach-Zelewski, was prey to hallucinations and nocturnal fits of screaming connected with the killing of Jews and related activities in the East" (41). Speaking of the ethics of conceiving that perpetrators experience trauma at all, LaCapra argues that

> perpetrator trauma, while attended by symptoms that may be comparable to those of victims, is ethically and politically different in decisive ways. The denial or repression of that crucial difference is one basis of the projective attempt either to blame the victim or apologetically to conflate the perpetrator or collaborator with the victim. (41)

While it is true that doubling is a symptom that can be exhibited by the perpetrator, there is a danger that reading characters such as Odilo through this lens may, to use LaCapra's term, "conflate" perpetrator and victim. Theories of doubling may certainly be relied upon to illuminate our understanding of Odilo's split consciousness. It may even explain the two temporalities at the heart of Amis's text. But such readings must also be cognisant of the fact that while perpetrator and victim may sometimes share symptoms of trauma, the ethical boundary between the two cannot be blurred in the same way. The split in Odilo's psyche may be an attempt at Odilo's self-redemption, but one is always aware of the disturbing truth which necessitated this act in the first place, an act instigated largely as a means to cope with a traumatising past perpetuated in the present.

## TARANTINO: PERFORMANCE AND THE SILENCING OF TRAUMA

Several of Tarantino's characters alter their identities on the backdrop of a historical landscape in flux. Some characters do so to take advantage of these historical changes, and others are forced to in light of the inescapability of their historical narrative. In other words, some are able to move within a present whose history affords such movement, while others become debilitated by their histories, and are unable to negotiate the present. Almost all major characters in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, willingly or not, must assume the position of actors, they must duplicate themselves to survive on history's shifting stage.

The list of instances of double identities, or alter-egos, in *Inglourious Basterds* is extensive: there is the group of American soldiers intent on killing Nazis who construct an alter-ego for themselves by calling themselves the Basterds; the Basterds' leader, Lt. Aldo Raine, goes by Aldo the Apache; Shosanna Dreyfus, a Jewish woman, changes her name to "Emmanuelle Mimieux" to protect herself while living in occupied France; Lt. Hicox at one point assumes a German identity, along with other Basterds, for Operation Kino; and Frederick Zoller, the sniper who, after successfully killing more than 300 Allied soldiers, is garlanded with the nickname "the German Sergeant York", who, at one point in an act of self-multiplication, plays himself in the Nazi propaganda film *Nation's Pride*. There are many others, and the list is long. The most layered example, though, with one alternative identity atop another, may be found in Bridget von Hammersmark, whose tightrope walk is tested most in La Louisiane, the bar in which the Basterds meet with Von Hammersmark in a room full of Nazis, to discuss the execution of Operation Kino.

Tarantino foregrounds the complexity of Von Hammersmark's performance with a card game in which the bar patrons participate: on a card each person must secretly write down the name of a famous figure, real or imaginary, pass this onto her neighbour who sticks the card on his head without looking at the name, and, through yes-or-no questions, the neighbour must finally guess the identity he has assumed. By playing this game within this potentially dangerous setting, Von Hammersmark assumes several roles: she is, first, a German actress, who is also working as a spy for the Basterds, and is pretending to be a friend of the Nazis, and further takes on unknown identities in a drunken card game. From this, it is little wonder that Tarantino winks at the audience when one of the German barmaids, also joining in the game, exclaims that her opponent's card reads "Mata Hari", the famous Dutch dancer and performer who was later accused by the

French of spying for Germany during World War I. With everyone in the bar participating in the game, almost everyone becomes a spy, and, indeed, almost everyone in the film is, to some or other extent. Everyone constructs another version of her- or himself, or assumes an alternative persona. As the desperate circumstances of the war dominate, most characters must become actors whose survival depends on the deft of her or his performance.

Characters who assume alternative identities is a trope that is common in Tarantino's films. In 1992's *Reservoir Dogs*, Freddy Newandyke, a police informant, must conceal his identity amongst a group of bank robbers by pretending to be one of them. Dubbed Mr Orange by members of the gang, Freddy is eventually found out for the informant he is and tortured as a consequence (Tarantino *Dogs*). In subtler ways, *Pulp Fiction*'s Jules Winnfield and Vincent Vega sometimes only *play* at being hardened mobsters rather than assuming such identities with any sincerity. As they drive in a car in the film's second scene, we are introduced to the pair whose conversation spans the merits of foreign fast foods and foot massages, subjects atypical of any movie mobster with whom audiences may be familiar.

As they arrive at their destination, they stand outside the door of the apartment of the men who owe a debt to Jules and Vincent's boss, Marsellus Wallace. Before they enter, Jules and Vincent conclude their conversation when Jules, speaking to both himself and Vincent, says, "Come on, let's get into character" (Tarantino *Pulp Fiction*). To assume control of the situation that awaits them, the two gangsters must become actors playing roles appropriate to the context in which they find themselves. In these examples, role-playing and masking become a matter of assuming power. As we will discover, in *Inglourious Basterds* this device is employed for much greater political and ethical ends.

Like Bridget von Hammersmark, though not professionally, Col. Hans Landa is the film's other actor. When speaking with Pierre LaPadite in the film's opening scene, Landa's gestures and phrasing are sometimes exaggerated in a most actorly manner, demonstrating the performative quality he interprets as necessary to his occupation. Take, for example, the unnecessarily longwinded explanation he provides in his request to speak English with LaPadite:

> Monsieur LaPadite, I regret to inform you I've exhausted the extent of my French. To continue to speak it so inadequately would only serve to embarrass me. However, I've been led to believe you speak English quite well.… This being your house I ask your permission to switch to English for the remainder of the conversation. (Tarantino *Basterds*)



Figure 7: Landa as actor in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

As illustrated in Figure 7, Landa's gestures are exaggerated and phony, his speech insincere. He uses his talents for embodying characters to establish control. When speaking of his nickname "The Jew Hunter", Landa admits to LaPadite that he "love[s his] unofficial title", but, while negotiating the terms of his escape with Raine and Utivich, speaks dismissively of the nickname: "But Jew Hunter? [*Snorts*] Just a name that stuck" (Tarantino *Basterds*).

This masking, this doubling of self, is hinted at during his conversation with LaPadite when, after LaPadite explains his house has been searched nine months ago, Landa states that "like any enterprise when under new management there's always a slight duplication of efforts" (Tarantino *Basterds*). And when he is done with his interview, after he has determined that LaPadite is hiding the Dreyfus family under the floorboards, Landa admits to have put on a "masquerade" the whole time they have been speaking. Antithetically, Aldo Raine, standing as Landa's nemesis, seems to be quite singular in his characterisation, a quality of his personality which only becomes magnified when face-to-face with Landa.

In Chapter 3 it was established that, in the film's final act, in which Landa and Raine fight over which historical narrative to pursue, Raine's real history wins over Landa's alternative version of events. Raine's desire to make certain that real history is told (at least insofar as we are to define real history within the film), seems not only spurred on by his righteousness, but also emerges as a consequence of his character, illustrated by several scenes within the film.

Raine seems to lack the theatricality on which Landa thrives. Unlike Landa, Raine cannot perform; he cannot pretend, and, relying more on literalisation than metaphor, seems to embody the adage which states that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. This is notably observed after the botched attempt to exchange information in a secret meeting between von Hammersmark and Lt Hicox in a basement bar. When Hicox and other German-speaking members of the Basterds are killed in the bar brawl (because Major Hellstrom, a Nazi soldier, recognises Hicox' slip in ordering three drinks with a hand gesture foreign to Ger-

mans), there remain no more German-speaking Basterds who can effectively and convincingly carry out Operation Kino as it was first planned.

The remaining members of Operation Kino are left to improvise. This means that some of the Basterds, of whom Raine is one, must pose as Italians (as none can fake speaking German) at the premier of *Nation's Pride* in the hope that they do not encounter any members of the Nazi party who can understand and speak Italian, a language in which the remaining Basterds demonstrate very little fluency.

During Operation Kino, when high-ranking members of the Nazi party, and those involved in Operation Kino, are mingling in the foyer of Shosanna's cinema, to the Basterds' surprise they encounter a Nazi who is also fluent in Italian, Col. Hans Landa. In this encounter, the Basterds rely on the little Italian they understand, hoping this will be sufficient to trick Landa. When asked their names, some members of the Basterds put on exaggerated Italian accents and use stereotypical Italian hand gestures in the sincere hope that they will not be found out. When Landa engages in conversation with Raine, however, Raine's performance is even worse than his colleagues' as his Italian character only thinly conceals his true identity. In an accent unequivocally from the American south, Raine greets Landa with an almost incomprehensible night-time "Barnjerno".

Landa is not fooled precisely because Raine does not possess any sense of irony or conceit. He is sincere and demonstrates no ability to express an alternative self. This is perfectly opposite to how Landa operates in the world. Landa recognises the benefit of performance and lies. The two approaches seem to confront each other in violent ways, especially in the final scene, to which we briefly return.

Before Raine etches the swastika into Landa's forehead, despite the terms of the negotiation which state that Landa will be set free, Raine handcuffs Landa, claiming that he would need to be dressed appropriately should they come across an official at the border. Raine further justifies this by saying that he is "a slave to appearances" (Tarantino *Basterds*). Continuing his pursuit to have present identity match real history, Raine shoots dead the telephone operator who accompanies Landa, and expresses once again his aversion to Landa identifying with a history with which Landa has no association:

> … I imagine you are going to take off that handsome-looking SS uniform of yours. Ain't ya? That's what I thought. Now, that I can't abide.… I mean, if I had my way, you'd wear that goddamn uniform for the rest of you pecker-sucking life. But I'm aware that ain't practical. I mean, at

> some point, you're going to have to take it off. So, I'm going to have you a little something you can't take off. (Tarantino *Basterds*)

It is at this point that Raine cuts the swastika into Landa's forehead. The scene marks the moment in which Landa's and Raine's attitudes to historical identities clash at their bloodiest. Raine wins: it is his version of history, a history in which each character reflects that history, that wins over Landa's alternative. Working under a different set of historical circumstances, though, is Shosanna Dreyfus, who, like Landa, also attempts to fabricate an identity. The pathetic difference, however, is that where Landa does so to get ahead, Shosanna *must* do so to stay alive.

Once he deduces where Shosanna and her family, the Dreyfuses, are hiding, Landa makes quick work of exterminating them by having his men shoot through the floorboards beneath which the family lies. Shosanna, managing to avoid being shot, crawls out from under the house and runs away. Landa, quietly noticing all of this, raises his gun as she runs in the distance, but, staying faithful to his actorly persona, playfully pretends to have missed his opportunity.



Figure 8: Shosanna's cinema in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

Working at her cinema, we next meet Shosanna "Four years after the massacre of her family", as a title card informs us. When this title card appears, as shown in Figure 8, we witness Shosanna taking down the red letters from her cinema marquee: she tosses a giant 'N' to the floor, signifying the "unspelling of her own name" (Fujiwara 42), with the 'N' of particular importance seeing as the name is usually only spelt with one (Fujiwara 41). As she does this, Pvt. Zoller introduces himself to Shosanna for the first time, but as she needs to conceal her identity, introduces herself, with forged identification documents, as "Emmanuelle Mimieux" (Tarantino *Basterds*). Due to the history which makes of her a target, Shosanna is forced to conceal her identity. It is not her trauma, per se, which prompts this name-change, this double identity, but her tragic past which instigated it. More tragically still is that it is this same history which prevents Shosanna from beginning to explore the significance of her devastation, observed upon her first chance encounter with Landa after he had killed her family.

Once Zoller has nominated Shosanna's cinema for the premier screening of *Nation's Pride*, Shosanna meets with Goebbels in a restaurant, and, coincidently, Landa comes to join their table. Landa kisses her hand as he enters, but does not recognise her as four years have passed since their last encounter. After kissing her hand, and looking visibly shocked, Shosanna looks up, remembering, and, in a textbook traumatic flashback, we witness Shosanna covered in blood, running from LaPadite's house as she did four years ago. The pain of the recollection of her trauma is exacerbated when Landa sits down and orders a glass of milk for her, the same drink he enjoyed from LaPadite's cows before slaughtering Shosanna's family.

When her meeting is over and Landa leaves the table, Shosanna begins to breathe deeply and tremble. Having to change her name and control her behaviour within pressing situations, Shosanna is rendered silent, with her silence becoming a kind of secondary trauma. After she loses her family in the most horrific way, the circumstances of her past proclaim that she can no longer be fully present. Masquerading as Emmanuelle Mimieux, Nazi history stifles Shosanna's true identity in a Nazi-controlled present.

It is only after she is killed in the film's climax that Shosanna is able to articulate her real name and reclaim her history. Shosanna's death becomes the symbolic death of her double, Emmanuelle Mimieux. Speaking of the articulation and silence of trauma, Elaine Scarry points out that "Either [pain] remains inarticulate or else the moment it first becomes articulate it silences all else" (60). Before the film's climax, on which more is said in the next chapter, Shosanna's trauma remains silent; that is, it remains unpresent. Yet in burning the theatre that contains the people responsible for both her trauma and the silencing thereof, Shosanna manages to finally express her history and therefore silence the Nazis.

# PART 3: FUTURES

# Chapter 6
# Spectres and Alternative Futures

> If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. (Barnes 6)

## UNDERSTANDING SPECTRALITY

In *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida shows that capitalism has ascended in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall: communism has died and is now haunting Europe (52). Drawing on various works, most centrally Marx's *Capital* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Spectres of Marx* argues that, according to Marx, history ends when a communist state is achieved (Derrida 66). This differs from Hegel's formulation of the end of history, whom Derrida refers to at various points in his thesis. For Hegel, history ends when freedom of the human consciousness is achieved, or as Hegel puts it, the end of history is marked by the "*spirit's efforts to attain knowledge of what it is in itself*" (54). Of course, the focus is Marx, not Hegel, but, as Hegel's ideas are sometimes used as a counterpoint to Marx's in *Spectres of Marx*, considering Hegel's ideas, even briefly, assists in clarifying Derrida's arguments. The difference between Marx's and Hegel's understanding of the end of history is helpfully illustrated by Francis Fukuyama in his influential *The End of History and the Last Man*:

> Where Marx differed from Hegel was over just what kind of society emerged at the end of history. Marx believed that the liberal state failed to resolve one fundamental contradiction, that of class conflict, the struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.… Hegel believed that alienation – the division of man against himself and his subsequent loss

> of control over his destiny – had been adequately resolved at the end of history through the philosophical recognition of the freedom possible in the liberal state.… The Marxist end of history would come only with victory of … the proletariat, and the subsequent achievement of a global communist Utopia that would end class struggle once and for all. (Fukuyama 65)

In short, Hegel believed the end of history would be marked by the individual's fully actualised being in a free state, and Marx believed it was marked also by freedom, but freedom specifically of the proletariat within the context of a communist world with no evidence of class struggle.

The Berlin Wall may have toppled, marking the beginning of another Europe, but this does not signal the end of history as Marx would have understood it. For Derrida, as capitalism continues to dominate globally, communism will persist as a spectral irritation to capitalism's predominant ubiquity: "At a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (37). Communism may have died, but it continues to haunt.

The cultural specificity of Derrida's text necessitates that his thesis be applied with caution. While Derrida's conceptions are founded almost exclusively on European history, the primary texts within this dissertation are, in varying degrees, American: Philip Roth, an American author, describes an American childhood; Tarantino's film, while set in France, is told, in some part, from the perspectives of American soldiers by an American screenwriter and director; and, while Amis's protagonist is German, the bulk of *Time's Arrow* is set in America where Odilo tries in earnest to assimilate into American culture. I will therefore only be considering Derrida's text as an abstraction. While Derrida makes specific reference to the fall of European communism, the ideas which are of interest include the author's greater inquiry into the role of history and the spectres and spirits that haunt in the wake of collapse. Equally, Derrida's study is an exploration of the significance of history and its role in constructing a present, and using the past to move forward. These ideas, in showing how history may be used to inform other temporalities, are of particular use in framing my analysis of the texts in question.

In developing his thesis on the nature of history, Derrida begins by distinguishing between spectres and spirits, stating that they are "not the same thing" (6).

Derrida calls the spectre "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit" (6). The suggestion here is that the spectre is more fully realised than the spirit, even though the spectre is also invisible: it seems to realise itself in physical space only insofar as it is not there. Derrida refers to this as a "paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, that *non-senuous sensuous* of which *Capital* speaks" (7). This means that the spectre is not-present in quite a literal sense, but its lack of presence only serves to draw attention to its non-presence. This also implies that it is not-present in terms of our (in)ability to pinpoint certain characteristics onto the spectre. As it is knowingly invisible, we cannot possess perfect knowledge of it, we cannot confidently identify and define it. We cannot understand its consciousness and subjectivity as it exists in perfect (or "Platonic" (7)) opposition to ourselves, as Derrida argues. It bears only superficial resemblance to "the simple *simulacrum* of something in general to which it is nevertheless so close and with which it shares, in other respects, more than one feature" (7). But this only speaks of our rudimentary understanding of the spectre, and our rudimentary attempt at defining it in terms of what we already know, which is not at all the same as defining it in and of itself. The spectre stands uniquely on its own.

This non-present presence is termed by Derrida as the "*visor effect*" (7). He develops this term from his reading of *Hamlet*, in which the King, existing only as a spectre and adorned with his armour towards the beginning of the play, is made apparent only by his armour's visor, by that which implicates him in space, as Horatio makes apparent: "Such was the very armour he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 1.1.60-61). Upon observing the spectre, Barnardo asks, "Is not this something more than fantasy?" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 1.1.54), alluding to the unreality in which the spectre exists, or the space between presence and absence. As the spectre resists definition, and does and does not inhabit real space, Derrida recognises this phenomenological internal contradiction and calls the spectre a nameless "Thing": "neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (6). It is this Thing which, throughout the text, Derrida likens to Marxism. It is within the present that Marxism lives on in Europe in a dead way. Like Boym's thesis on nostalgia which states that the past resonates within the present and thereby exposes different meanings of the present, Derrida shows that history lives on in the present in the same way, and for the same purpose.

The above also comes to explain Derrida's other preoccupation with how history haunts the present and, what is of particular interest in this chapter, determines the nature of our movement into the future. One of the aims of Derrida's essay is that it seeks to show how history, of which the fall of Marxism is but one though significant proponent, is able to linger on after the fact, lingers on beyond the past and present. The nature of how the spectre moves into the future, and the shape it assumes, is largely determined by our relationship and understanding of what has been.

Speaking of the political consequences of our attitudes towards the past, Derrida concedes that the largest threat to change is the inability to imagine other possible pasts. It is here that Derrida's work begins to complement the tenets of alternative history. Indeed, according to Derrida, "Guaranteed translatability, given homogeneity, systematic coherence in their *absolute forms*, this is surely (certainly, *a priori* and not probably) what renders the injunction, the inheritance, and the future – in a word the other – impossible" (35). To clarify, briefly, "Guaranteed translatability" is that which does not call for, does not necessitate, interpretation because of a pretence of obviousness and one-dimensionality. What Derrida implies is that entertaining only a singular reading of history prohibits progress, or any ability to imagine beyond the present. "Guaranteed translatability" is what Hayden White would claim is a reading of history lacking in irony as it disregards other possible readings.

As Derrida shows in his text, it is only in accepting the plurality of history, which at this point he calls "inheritance" (16), which enables potentiality or the consideration of possible futures. "Guaranteed translatability", he argues, stunts growth: "If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, [meaning, if the significance of the past were apparent and required no investigation,] if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it" (16). In other words, the only possibility to move into the future is that "*one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction" (16). This is strikingly similar to the premises upon which alternative history is built, especially when understanding the mode as one that speaks against guaranteed translatability. This similarity is also evident if we are to read alternative history as a mode that offers differing perspectives on a past which has become uninteresting in its familiarity. Put another way, alternative history bears compelling overlap with Derrida's "necessary

*heterogeneity*" (16) of history, or the symbolic multiplicity of history, which, to Derrida, is a fundamental proponent of considering possible futures.

## ROTH'S BODILY AND AUTHORIAL SPECTRES

Spectres, and ghosts of other kind, take on interesting and varied forms in Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*. The author as spectre, given his (non-)presence in the text, is a trope considered in much detail within the novel and in some of Roth's other work. Roth also plays with and contorts this idea of ghostliness by imagining a haunting in his text that is visceral in its manifestation. This may be read most significantly in Philip's cousin Alvin's missing leg, which is severed as a result of combat in the war. But the most obvious example is the haunting Philip imagines occurs in his family's basement. These various ghostly forms most often speak to history as spectre that haunts Philip throughout the text.

Fear is the emotional thread that runs through the entire novel (Roth *Plot* 1), and it is the family basement which sometimes becomes the site at which some of Philip's worst fears are realised, the site at which Philip imagines his family's ghosts live: "… I mainly feared the cellar because of those who were already dead ….… [I]n order to patrol our affairs and scrutinize our conduct [our family's] ghosts resided two stories beneath our flat.… I would descend whispering, 'I'm sorry for whatever I did that was wrong' " (Roth *Plot* 139-40). In the first sentence Philip states that he fears the "already dead", a telling turn of phrase. To read into it its opposite, the phrase suggests that Philip confronts the living as those yet-to-be dead. Though technically accurate, it is an odd turn of phrase, and indicates how Philip's fear seems to be emblematic of an inability to rationally demarcate time. Those who are dead haunt him in the present, and those who are living are marked by their future deaths. His fear is pervasive and temporally indiscriminate in its collapsing of future and present.

There is also a great sense of guilt which accompanies this fear. When in the basement the only thought that occupies Philip's mind is his past transgressions, which is demonstrated in his plea for forgiveness towards the end of the extract. Philip carries the past with him. While there are, as far as Philip is concerned, very real ghosts that haunt the Roth household, there are other more symbolic ghosts which haunt the text, such as Alvin's missing leg, his phantom limb.

Alvin, Philip and Sandy's cousin, in his frustration with Lindbergh's non-interventionist and anti-Semitic persuasions, joins the Canadian army in their fight against Hitler and his men. Alvin subsequently loses a leg in combat. Throughout the text, Alvin's leg is referred to negatively, or as an absence, which becomes indicative of its ironic presence. " 'How the hell did you manage to lose a leg?' ", Philip's Uncle Monty would one evening brashly ask of Alvin (Roth *Plot* 149). And when discussing his post-war aggression, Philip's mother would speak of Alvin's missing limb as if it were still there, saying that it is " 'because of his leg' " that he exhibits such bitterness (Roth *Plot* 170). There are even moments in which Alvin's trauma is re-membered through his tendency to function in the world as if his limb had not been viciously severed from the rest of his body:

> When he turned to start back to the bedroom he forgot (for all possible reasons) that he had just the one leg and, instead of hopping, did what everyone else did in our house – began to walk and of course toppled over. The pain shooting up from the butt end of his stump was worse than the pain in the missing segment of his leg – pain, Alvin explained to me after I first watched him succumb to a siege in the bed beside me, 'that grabs you and won't let you go,' though no limb is left to cause it. 'There's pain where you are,' Alvin said when the time had come to reassure me with some kind of comical remark, 'and there's pain where you ain't. I wonder who thought that up.' (*Plot* 154)

Speaking of the body's temporal placement, Merleau-Ponty offers a unique lens through which we may understand Alvin's predicament, or any person unfortunate enough to suffer from such an affliction. Merleau-Ponty explains that a phantom limb "is not a recollection, it is a quasi-present and the patient feels it now … with no hint of its belonging to the past" (98); it is "like repressed experience, a former present which cannot decide to recede into the past" (99). The body undergoes a temporal glitch, replacing the present with the past. Alvin's living as if his leg were still there, at least in the brief moment referred to in Roth's extract, is a sign of his mistaken belief that he occupies a time that is now past, a time that was once present.

Regarding one with a phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body and its nerves "keep empty an area which the subject's history fills" (99). Considering this, it is Alvin's pre-war memory that fills the absence his body cannot. But his phantom limb also holds special significance of another kind of absence, one that

extends beyond Alvin's body and that marks the novel's broader reference to the history of the reader.

The phantom limb, as Alvin lost it in combat, recalls America's actual involvement in the war. Real history becomes the spectre that haunts the text; through Alvin's absent limb, real history becomes the spectre through which readers are reminded of the world they inhabit, a world in which America's involvement in World War II was all too real. (The missing limb, farfetched as this reading perhaps is, may even be a reference to Roosevelt, America's wheelchair-bound four-term president who, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, implicated his country in the war he would eventually win, but would die before realising his victory.) And just as real history haunts Roth's alternative, so too do considerations of other possible alternatives, in turn, haunt real history. Alvin's assertion, that there is " 'pain where you are [and] pain where you ain't' ", may be read as indicative of histories real and fake, each supplementing the other, each one informing our reading of the other. This haunting, this haunting in the Derridian sense, is one which extends, also, to Roth's position as author.

Roth's dabbling in spectrality in *The Plot Against America* is by no means unique in the author's oeuvre. In a previous text, *The Ghost Writer*, Nathan Zuckerman, another one of Roth's many alter-egos, imagines the possibility that Anne Frank does not die during the war, but lives and moves to America to reside under the tutelage of famous fictional author E. I. Lonoff. In the text, Zuckerman dreams that Frank has changed her name to Amy Bellette to forget her past (*Ghost* 123-25), and so becomes the titular ghost writer. But it is Zuckerman, himself, who also assumes this label in the narrative.

Not only does Zuckerman make apparent the spectrality of history in suggesting that Anne Frank survive the war (instead of its tragic opposite), but, as the title suggests, through privately conjuring a new historical narrative of her life, Zuckerman functions as Anne Frank's ghost writer. To be sure, the validity of this reading is predicated on an understanding of the author as one who appreciates the narrative fluidity of the past. In Zuckerman's version of history, Anne Frank is labelled a " 'fetching' " "Femme Fatale" (*Ghost* 29; 122), and Nathan Zuckerman fanaticises about marrying Frank and taking her home to his parents as a means of vengefully asserting the Jewishness they believed he lacked and derided: "*Anne, says my father* – the *Anne? Oh, how I have misunderstood my son. How mistaken we have been!*" (*Ghost* 159). This completely inverts the associations we have come to make of the real-life figure as innocent and precocious. Frank, as public figure

and author, is turned inside out, and it is another author (through Zuckerman's imagination, to be sure) who composes for her a new history, a history that provides promise and prospect, or to put it plainly, a future. This interesting turn of author as spectre is one which is again suggested, though less overtly, in Roth's later work.

In *The Plot Against America*, the narrator, Philip Roth, serves as the other of the real Philip Roth. Philip the narrator serves to remind readers of who he is not: the narrator shares a name with the author of the novel but not the novelist's real-life story. To recall Derrida, the narrator may be said to function as the visor to the real Philip Roth; that is, the author, the real Philip Roth, like a ghost, comes to be present in the text only insofar as he is *not* present. The author haunts the text, and in some ways comes to haunt himself. Philip Roth, the author, assumes the position of a self-haunting spectre in that he imagines an alternative past for himself, a necessary proponent, as Derrida would show, in considering future possibilities.

## *Time's Arrow*: Odilo's Impossible Future

In employing backwards narration, Martin Amis's use of spectres in *Time's Arrow* takes on startling meaning. The discourse surrounding spectrality in his novel is demonstrated not only in the Jews who, because of the backwards narration, come back to life, but is also witnessed in Odilo's dreams, where the protagonist experiences a recurring nightmare in which he envisions a screaming baby. In using Derrida's conceptualisation of the future, the haunting of the novel illustrates how an inability to imagine other historical interpretations prevents one from assuming a future self.

In *Time's Arrow*, the most obvious likeness to spectres is the Treblinka and Auschwitz Jews who, as far as the narrator understands, come back from the dead after being burned in the ovens. Jews in death camps begin their lives as smoke and smog, "gathering in the heavens – awaiting human form, and union" (*Arrow* 123), are "conjure[d]" (*Arrow* 130) into life, are "process[ed] with gas and fire" (*Arrow* 122). The language used by the narrator, that these victims are "gathering in the heavens", suggests that the narrator himself can only make sense of this unusual phenomenon through the fantastic language of spectrality.

Certainly, Amis's presentation of the living-dead throws into discomfort our understanding of spectrality with which we have begun. In one regard, the Jews are spectres because they are made into some recognisably human form when they are processed, when they are brought back to life. They seem to haunt real spaces. The manner in which the narrator describes them suggests they are truly other, or not quite normally human, much like in the way Derrida describes the spectre of history as that which cannot properly be thought of as real.

In another sense, they are not at all spectres as there is, strictly, even with the backwards narration, no 'return' to life; they are now, simply, alive. If we are to consider their otherness at all within the context of the Holocaust, it would be based primordially on ethnicity and culture. As the Jews exist in real space and time, we cannot consider their otherness as existential, phenomenological, or temporal (as we would a spectral or historical other). This would be to ignore their humanity, which would only serve to perpetuate the reasons upon which their suffering was based. Seeing Jews as spectres in the text would also mean that they exist in a different history to their perpetrators, when, quite literally, even with the narrator's distortion of the events considered, the opposite is true: Jews exist in the here and now, just as the Nazi characters do. It is for these reasons that, despite the narrator's unique temporal perspective, it would be incorrect, both morally and factually, to consider Jews as phenomenologically other, as living-deads, as spectres.

Upon observing them, the narrator struggles to come to terms with understanding the dead of Auschwitz, and articulates this difficulty semantically, or, indeed, through the limits of semantics: "The dead look so dead. Dead bodies have their dead body language. It says nothing. I always felt a gorgeous relief at the moment of the first stirring. Then it was ugly again" (*Arrow* 120). The language of the dead is described ironically here, where the "dead body language … says nothing." The language of the dead is one of silence. It is a language in which nothing is articulated, or, if used, is empty, allowing no instance of dialogue. Something is certainly communicated, but what is communicated is insubstantial and weightless. One speaks to the dead but there can be no return, no sounding-off. They articulate Derrida's silence and the indefinability of history, especially if the dead are thought of as symbols which are quintessentially past. The narrator's desire to ascribe meaning to the language of the dead leaves only emptiness. To recall the opening sentence of the sixth chapter, "Multiply zero by zero and you still get zero" (*Arrow* 137).

History, in its silent haunting, disturbs the narrator, and it is the present, as he implies, that brings a "gorgeous relief" when the dead return (*Arrow* 120). This "gorgeous relief" indicates more broadly a familiarity, and it is a familiarity with the present which offsets the narrator's initial trepidation when encountering the dead. When the dead are once again living, language, even in its nascent and unsophisticated form, returns upon the "first stirring". The dead's "stirring" suggests a carnal, primitive and basic language, a body language, but a language nonetheless. Once there is recognisable language, once the dead are again alive and begin to articulate sound, the past no longer becomes other, but becomes the nameable and visible present.

The Auschwitz Jews are, of course, not the only characters in the text who demonstrate a resurrection. As we see in the very opening lines of the text, Odilo returns from the dead as he wakes from what the narrator interprets as a sleep, "the blackest sleep", after which he begins to inhabit real space and time (*Arrow* 3). When we first encounter Odilo through the narrator it is moments 'before' he dies, and thus enters the world as would a spectre. As with the argument above, this does not necessarily mean that we should read Odilo as a spectre as Derrida would define it. Yet one may be tempted to suggest that Odilo may function as a spectre in other ways. One may suggest that he is a spectre in the sense that he is never fully present within the text. To explain it in Derridian terms, the narrator of the text, functioning as Odilo's soul or unconscious, is the only indication we have of the protagonist's existence. In this sense, recalling *Hamlet*, the narrator functions as the visor to Odilo's spectre-King. Odilo's speech is always reported; Odilo is an indirect presence in the text. We may say that we are assured of his existence only insofar as we are confident in the narrator's reporting of his presence, thereby demonstrating his spectrality.

Yet such a reading is unremarkable in its potential applicability to several texts. While it is true that we can only be sure of Odilo's presence based on the narrator's reporting of his presence, this is as factual as it is uninteresting. All characters that have no say in the narration are products of the narrator. We must look beyond simply observing the implied existence of characters in the text if Derrida's theories of spectrality are to be of any use in our reading of Amis's novel. Despite the limits of reading Odilo or the Jews at Auschwitz and Treblinka as spectres, there are still signs of spectrality which run throughout *Time's Arrow*. There are images which haunt the text in very real ways. One of these may refer to the babies which haunt Odilo's dreams.

In the first few pages of the text, the narrator begins to grapple with his own existence, his functioning as a pseudo-consciousness within another's consciousness, or perhaps even Odilo's unconscious, as suggested earlier. The narrator begins to wonder about his own impotence as he resides within Odilo, only able to observe what he chooses to observe, never able to control his movements or alter his feelings. The narrator functions only, as the narrator himself puts it, as Odilo's "passenger or parasite" (*Arrow* 8). Yet the narrator is not completely unaffected. In taking up this position, the narrator is also privy to Odilo's feelings, thoughts, and dreams, or, in some cases, his nightmares, most of which are taken up by Odilo's experiences at the death camps.

When contemplating the existence of others in the world, the narrator thinks about the minds of other people. He wonders about the similarities and differences between himself and those around him, insofar as we may think of him as a separate consciousness while he occupies a host: "I bet they don't have the dream we have. The figure in the white coat and the black boots. In his wake, a blizzard of wind and sleet, like a storm of human souls" (*Arrow* 8). Odilo may be dreaming of himself. Indeed, upon 'arriving' in Auschwitz, the narrator describes Odilo as wearing the same outfit composed of "black boots" and "the white coat" (*Arrow* 116). The figure in Odilo's dreams is reminiscent of Odilo himself. It is indicative of Odilo as spectre or as image of his past self. His life after Auschwitz comes to haunt his present, and it is the baby in Odilo's nightmares for which this is most overtly the case:

> Rather as I feared they would, babies have started showing up in Tod's dreams.…
>
> You naturally associate babies with defenselessness. But that's not how it is in the dream. In the dream, the baby wields incredible power. It has the power, the ultimate power of life and death over its parents, its older brothers and sisters, its grandparents, and indeed everybody else who is gathered in the room. There are about thirty of them in there, although the room, if it is a room, can't be much bigger than Tod's nook of a kitchen. The room is dark. More than this, the room is black. Despite the power it wields, the baby is weeping.…
>
> … Tod himself weeps like a baby before the dreams happen.… (*Arrow* 45-46)

Read in the normal temporal trajectory, the reader realises, upon Odilo's arrival in Auschwitz, that the baby that haunts Odilo's dreams is the same baby whose cry-

ing gave away the hiding place of those hiding from Nazis (*Arrow* 141-42). Upon observing the real baby, upon encountering the dream's real-life referent when the time comes, the narrator comments that the baby "had no power at all" (*Arrow* 142), which, compared to the baby in Odilo's dreams, haunts Odilo precisely because of the "power it wields" (*Arrow* 45). The suggestion here is that the baby Odilo finds is one that exists in the present, but, once dead, moves into the past and takes on much greater spectral significance. The baby of Odilo's nightmares is even further likened to "a bomb" (*Arrow* 46), which serves to indicate the violent hold history possesses over him.

Unlike the narrator, Odilo can only remember history in one way. Throughout this study, it has been suggested that the reader, because of the narrator, is able to envision the many forms history may assume. The narrator becomes representative of the plurality of history. As a consequence of his trauma, Odilo is not capable of imagining such historical alternatives. And it is because he cannot imagine other alternatives that it is suggested that Odilo is stuck in history. Even the reverse narration suggests Odilo's fixity; he is forced only to live and relive his story. The final sentences of the novel suggest just this as the narrator notices an arrow flying "Point first" (and no longer backwards, as we have come to expect), showing that time, at the very end of the novel, begins to assume the normal forward-moving trajectory. Odilo cannot deviate from the same narrative, is forced to live and relive in it indefinitely (*Arrow* 165). This temporal stasis may also point to Odilo's inability to construct a future. He can only imagine one past, and is therefore doomed to remain in it.

That Odilo is stuck in his history seems brought upon not only because of his lack of imagination, but also due to his unwillingness to speak of his past, even when confronted to do so. Irene, Odilo's lover, hears him speak German and refer to himself by his real name while he dreams, but she is unable to extract from him the significance of this other name (*Arrow* 21). As the narrator functions as keeper of Odilo's past, and, more importantly, functions also as Odilo's redeemer by initiating multiple possible pasts, there is some evidence to suggest that the narrator, like Odilo's babies, may be understood within the parameters of Derrida's spectre. Even the existential makeup of the narrator seems to suggest a kind of spectrality to his being: the narrator is bodiless, sexless, and invisible. He exists as an abstraction, or, more accurately, an abstraction of history, a reminder to Odilo of the atrocities he has committed and lived through (though ironically). Part of the story's tragedy, then, seems to derive from the split between Odilo and his uncon-

scious, especially 'after' having suffered the trauma of Auschwitz and Treblinka: the split determines Odilo's inability to consider other possible futures because, unlike the narrator, Odilo's alter-ego, he is unable to dream of other pasts.

## TARANTINO'S SPECTRES: RECALLING AND FORGETTING THE PAST

The spectre in *Inglourious Basterds* is most notably observed in the film's climax. Tarantino's handling of this scene, in which Hitler and his Nazis are shot at, burned, and blown up, is as exciting as it is horrific. At the centre of the scene is Shosanna's spectre, and reading this scene in the context of Derrida's hauntology may illuminate on many, but by no means all, of its complexities.

The climax of *Inglourious Basterds* sees the culmination of two plots to assassinate Hitler, both coincidently ignorant of the other: one orchestrated by Lt Aldo Raine and his Basterds, the other planned by Shosanna and her lover Marcel. Before Shosanna is able to realise her plan to burn down her theatre, which hosts Hitler and other top-ranking Nazi officials, she is visited unexpectedly. Pvt Zoller, the star of the premiered film *Nation's Pride*, seeks out Shosanna in her projection room. Throughout Tarantino's film, Zoller has been unsuccessfully courting Shosanna who has been rejecting him at every turn. In the projection room, after another rejection, Zoller forces his way in. When this happens, Shosanna secretly moves towards her purse, takes out her gun, and shoots him. Thinking he is dead, Shosanna remains unguarded and almost immediately begins to regret her decision. In this moment of weakness, Zoller takes out his own pistol and shoots Shosanna dead before he himself dies. Before this bloody scene takes place, Shosanna manages to put into the projector her and Marcel's short film, produced as a message to the Nazi officials who are burned alive while watching their film.

Spliced within *Nation's Pride*, Shosanna's film appears on the screen right before Zoller, as actor, screams out, "Who wants to send a message to Germany?!" (Tarantino *Basterds*). Shosanna's giant black-and-white face responds coolly: "I have a message for Germany – that you are all going to die. And I want you to look deep into the face of the Jew that is going to do it. Marcel, burn it down" (Tarantino *Basterds*). As Marcel ignites the nitrate film piled up behind the screen, the image of Shosanna, laughing manically, remains on the burning white sheet. The Nazis in the theatre begin to panic. Eventually, the screen falls but Shosanna's

face continues to be projected, this time not on the screen but on the smoke from the fire. The effect this has, of course, is that she appears as a spectre, with Figure 9 showing how this comes to be.



Figure 9: Shosanna becomes a spectre in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

Keeping in mind that Shosanna has died only a few moments before, Shosanna's spectral appearance seems apt. She has emerged from the dead and has come to haunt the Nazis responsible for the killing of millions of Jews, her family among the victims as seen in the film's opening scene. Her spectre appears as a reminder to the Nazis of her own Jewish history. Shosanna, a Jew, which she makes clear in her film, portrays herself as the other, both temporal and ethnic other. It is precisely her otherness which haunts the Nazis.

When Zoller rhetorically shouts if anyone has a message for Germany, and Shosanna appears on the screen declaring that she does, she is reclaiming and reaffirming her voice and her presence. She shows that not even in death is she silenced, and silences her Nazi audience in the process, despite their screams. Shosanna's presence suggests a rectification, a revenge, of history. It is in the nature of revenge, of course, that the victim returns, revolts, incites revolution. And it is Derrida's writing on revolutions and their temporal significance with which we may begin to better understand Shosanna's actions.

In moments of revolution, Derrida shows that "the conjuration", or the spectre, "convoked the great spirits …, but only in order to forget, to repress, out of fear, to anesthesize itself … in the face of the violence of the blow it was striking. The

spirit of the past protected the conjuration against its 'own content,' the spirit was there to protect it against itself" (114-15). First, what Derrida suggests is that, in moments of revolution, history tends to repeat itself, history becomes cyclical, also signified by the term 'revolution' itself. "[T]he conjuration", the spectre (the manifestation of the past within the present), "convoke[s] the great spirits", and so the past calls upon the past. Yet within this revolutionary state is a necessary forgetting as the past calls upon the past "only in order to forget,… out of fear". The past forgets itself because it fears its own violence. Remembering itself completely will cause what Derrida calls the "anachronistic dislocation" (115). This means that in revolutions, it is in the past's own interests to remember up to a point, after which it must necessarily forget. It remembers as it recalls itself within the present, and it forgets out of fear of the violence it has perpetrated. The past may therefore be thought of as a self-perpetuating and self-sustaining organism. It cannot bury itself altogether and it cannot become fully self-aware if it is to self-perpetuate. Revolution encourages necessary violence so as to propel itself into the future, but the past cannot remember its past violence out of fear of stasis.

In *Inglourious Basterds*, it seems Shosanna's spectre, as representative of the past, overturns the present in which the Nazis dominate, and replaces it with a present in which the Nazis do not. Shosanna's ghost comfortably straddle the Derridian line of remembering and forgetting. She interrupts Nazi history (as demonstrated in the propaganda film, *Nation's Pride*) by replacing it with a film in which she foregrounds her own history. Shosanna shows that for revolution to occur, for her to justify the presence of her past within the present, there must be a simultaneous forgetting and remembering: the past must forget the violence it had once perpetrated, and remember the violence to which it was subjected. Yet at the centre of this revolutionary act lies a complex moral exchange. It is an exchange other aspects of Derrida's theory may do well in framing, specifically Derrida's writing on mourning, much of which depends on Freudian psychoanalysis.

## Mourning and the Limits of Spectrality

Mourning is among the key characteristics in the discourse of the spectre. Yet it is this concept of mourning which perhaps demonstrates the limits of using Derrida's thesis as a lens through which we may observe and study the role of the

spectre in the primary texts. In establishing his definition of mourning, Derrida makes the following claim:

> It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead …. One has to know. *One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* …. Now, to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its place. In a safe place. (9)

A key characteristic of mourning for Derrida, it seems, is the ability to identify the mourned-for subject in space: "*One has to know it* ….… [To] know is to know *who* and *where*" (9). The implication is that mourning is not an aimless task. In mourning, one does not reference the past in general and vague terms. In becoming aware of the presence of the spectre, in having the past interrupt the present, one's mind is able to identify the face of the past and know its space-time coordinates. The past is without ambiguity to the haunted. But we must also appreciate that we cannot know the spectre fully. By definition, as Derrida reminds us, the spectre is marked by its quality of unknowability (7). This means that we can "*know it*" (9) only insofar as we may identify that it is a spectre.

Knowing the spectre also requires action, and the spectre itself is an active participant in the process of mourning, where Derrida states that the spectre

> does not do nothing. Assuming that the remains can be identified, we know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work. And to cause to work, perhaps more than ever.… As in the work of mourning, after a trauma, the conjuration has to make sure that the dead will not come back: quick, do whatever is needed to keep the cadaver localized, in a safe place, decomposing right where it was inhumed …. (97)

Recalling Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia", Derrida argues that the act of mourning is a natural and necessary reaction to trauma, and that one must become an active participant upon the death of the past, as Derrida speaks not simply of mourning, but the "work" of mourning (97). Explaining this activity in his essay, Freud shows that to begin the work of mourning the subject must fully realise and accept the reality that "the loved object no longer exists, [and the subject] requires forthwith that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object" ("Mourning" 154). This work of mourning, Freud explains, involves "great expense of time and cathectic energy": "Each single one of the memories

and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished" ("Mourning" 154).

Detaching the memory of the loved object from the libido speaks of this work of mourning as one in which the subject appreciates that the object is not only forever relegated to the past, but more so that it cannot ever be realised in the present. Part of the work of mourning seems to mean acknowledging the now altogether new temporal mark with which that loved object is associated. In the same way, with Derrida's work of mourning, "the conjuration has to make sure that the dead will not come back" (97). The dead must remain dead, they must remain past. And it is work that ensures that the past is past.

It is Shosanna's ghost who does the work of a spectre in Tarantino's film. By killing Hitler Shosanna avenges the death of her family, thus detaching herself from and correcting what she feels is an unresolved past, relegating it permanently to history. Through this, the film also demonstrates how alternative histories may symbolically enact the work of mourning that real history may otherwise have left unfinished.

Roth's Philip works through his past in very different ways in *The Plot Against America*. Symbolically, Philip is able to look back onto his past with renewal, and reimagine fresh historical possibilities. It is this reimagining of the past that allows Philip to move forward, suggested most tellingly by the past tense of the narration, which, in turn, suggests that Philip, as adult narrator, has created a future for himself in which he may reside.

While using Derrida's hauntology does well as a frame by which we may read Roth's and Tarantino's respective texts, it is Amis's *Time's Arrow* which demonstrates the limitations of its applicability. Derrida's thesis seems to have been written for the victims of history, not the perpetrators. As Amis's text may suggest, when traumatised by history, the perpetrators of history cannot hide from that history, and their trauma negates any possibility of reimagining that history so as to move on from it. Put another way, Amis's text shows that Odilo suffers from an inability to mourn, a psychological state about which much has been written by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich.

In their work, *The Inability to Mourn*, the Mitscherlichs, following the decades after World War II, use Freudian psychoanalysis to observe the psychological profile of Nazi Germans as subjects who have lost much, but, because of their status after the war as perpetrators of war, cannot mourn in the same way as do victor and victim. Their argument is that the devastated perpetrators of war cannot par-

ticipate in the same natural healing process, a process by which one is able to move into the future.

The Mitscherlichs describe mourning as "the psychic process by which the individual copes with a loss" (xxv), a definition derived from Freud's use of the term, and one which Derrida repurposes to signify the loss of history. Due to the nature of the aftermath of the Second World War, the Mitscherlichs argue that Nazis' and Nazi sympathisers' "inability to mourn the loss of the Führer is the result of an intensive defense against guilt, shame, and anxiety, a defense which was achieved by the withdrawal of previously powerful libidinal cathexes. The Nazi past was derealized, i.e., emptied of reality" (23). The argument here is that feelings of guilt and shame arose because Hitler "was an object on which Germans depended, to which they transferred responsibility" (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 23), and it was this object that underwent a "devaluation by the victors" (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 24). Guarding the subject from this devalued figure, guarding against feelings of guilt and shame, would mean to necessarily erase the Nazi past, to "derealize" them from history. This would signify that history undergoes a denial, and would also imply that the past remains unresolved since mourning cannot properly take place. The spectre remains unacknowledged, unnamed, and continues to haunt, and the future lies beyond reach so long as the past remains denied.

This denial or "de-realization" of history must, of course, be read as a symbolically psychic, not literal, phenomenon. The facts of history remain. History is derealised only insofar as the libido perpetuates its temporally misplaced attachment to the loved object: the object continues to be loved as if it were in the present, yet it is really in the past, and so the work of mourning cannot be fulfilled. This also negates any possibility of playful engagement one may desire to partake of the past. In the face of an unresolvable history, there can be no next step to reimagine other historical alternatives. (Such an argument may also illuminate on the lack of German engagement with alternative history in the years directly after the war, as mentioned by Rosenfeld (15).) These theories may further explain Odilo's inability to construct a future.

Odilo is able to identify and name the past with accuracy. His dreams are a constant reminder of the fact of the war and his involvement therein. However, as we have seen in his relationship with Irene, who hears him screaming about a baby in one of his nightmares, Odilo is unable to talk about the event (Amis *Arrow* 21); he is unable to engage in the work of mourning. The past remains unresolved for Odilo, and he is unable to detach his libidinal love from his role as a Nazi doctor,

perhaps signified most archetypically through his love and admiration of the affectionately named Uncle Pepi, sadistic Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. Consequently, Odilo moves within a perpetual present, a temporal node that, as Derrida describes it (through his reading of Heidegger), may do well in explaining Odilo's placement therein: "The present … lingers in this transitory passage (*Weile*), in the coming-and-going, *between* what *goes* and what *comes*,… at the articulation between what absents itself and what presents itself.… Presence (*Anwesen*) is enjoined (*verfugt*), ordered, distributed in the two directions of absence …" (25). For Derrida, the present is that moment which on either side resides two equal though opposite absences. It is also the present which is, as Derrida understands it, "ordered", which perhaps aptly describes the inflexibility of Odilo's stagnation in the present. Odilo cannot imagine a future both because of his inability to realise the past as past, and due to his placement within a Derridian present in which past and future cannot be imagined.

Alternative history texts (most notably exemplified by Amis's *Time's Arrow*) have shown that reimagining the past does not necessarily equate to being able to move into the future, as Derrida would suggest. Offering new perspectives of the past does not in-and-of-itself mean that one is able to do the work of mourning the past and realise the future. Some alternative histories show that reimagining the past means conserving the present, and therefore compromising the future. With specific attention on what history would deem its perpetrators, recognising the full potentialities of considering historical alternatives may only be realised if one is able to mourn.

# PART 4: PASTS, PRESENTS, FUTURES

# Chapter 7
# Causality and Ricoeur's Threefold Mimesis

> Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories. (Smith 299)

> To think of time – of all the retrospection,
> To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward.
> (Whitman 1-2)

## Determinism and Time

Theories of postmodern time present useful avenues by which we may begin to think about the particularities of time as it is represented in alternative histories. In its temporal portrayals, alternative history speaks directly to the logic of, and our dependence on, causality. In subverting history's teleologicality, alternative history by extension subverts notions of causality, which Carr believes to occupy the locus of historical enquiry as he writes that "the study of history is a study of causes" (*History* 81). In the same work, *What is History?*, Carr also claims that

> Nothing in history is inevitable except in the formal sense that, for it to have happened otherwise, the antecedent causes would have had to be different. As a historian, I am perfectly prepared to do without 'inevitable', 'unavoidable', 'inescapable' and even 'ineluctable'. Life will be drabber. But let us leave them to poets and metaphysicians. (*History* 90).

Carr is clearly dismissive of art's ability to consider questions of inevitability, as evidenced in his final sentence. Yet it is precisely these same artists, especially those of alternative history, who point out the dangers of the flawed reasoning which drives a belief in the inevitable.

Simon T. Kaye shows that it is precisely the business of alternative histories to challenge inevitability and the myths they generate, three of which are identified by Kaye. He shows that challenging these myths depends on an appreciation of alternative history's defining conceit: the subjunctive (or 'might-be') conditionals in which one presumes that if the *cause* of an event had not occurred, then a resulting *effect* may not have occurred, or may have occurred differently (Kaye 38-39). The first fallacy alternative history fiction may assist in challenging is labelled "*The Assumption of Indispensability*", which assumes that only one thing is responsible for the existence of another (40). Alternative histories challenge this by demonstrating the likelihood of a historical event having occurred because of an entirely different series of events, sometimes in addition to the one correctly assumed to have caused it in the first place. In Kaye's words, one of the objectives implicit in alternative history is that it illustrates that "No one event or outcome … could have had only a single cause, or is the product of only one possible series of events, or could have occurred singularly and unaffected by anything other than what in fact caused it" (41).

The second fallacy which Kaye considers is called "*The Assumption of Causality*" (41). Under this assumption, one may attribute false causes to an event by virtue of these causes having taken place at the same time as the real causes of an event (Kaye 41). He shows that alternative histories, as they sometimes isolate and dramatise individual causes in favour of others, challenge these assumptions by demonstrating that correlation does not necessarily equate to causation (41). Or, while many events occur at the same time, not all of these act as causes to subsequent events. This demonstrates alternative history's ability to speak to the discourse of causal logic, in some instances assisting in undermining specific falsities.

Kaye's final fallacy, invalidated by alternative history, is "*The Assumption of Inevitability*", which is most notably evident in moments of great catastrophe where individuals, in an attempt to make sense of an event which seems to lack sense, would claim that its causes were, in fact, inevitable (41). This reasoning precludes any consideration that, as Kaye argues, "historical outcomes are as often unlikely as they are likely, regardless of whether they actually come to pass" (41). These kinds of fallacious statements occur *after* the fact, and are often accompanied by a sense of certainty that was absent during or before the event. In other words, if events were deemed inevitable, then during a time of great historical significance, an outcome can safely be predicted, but rarely is (Kaye 41).

Countering these fallacies serves to uphold the epistemological tenets upon which good historical practice depends. Kaye argues that these points indicate that "a historian should seek to contextualize his or her own thought processes, and counterfactual thought-experiments are one strong way of doing this" (41). Alternative histories do well in dispelling some of these fallacious assumptions about cause and effect, and it is a challenge that begins with the mode's play and reconfiguring of dominant temporal representations.

In *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*, Karen Hellekson proposes a model of temporal representation in alternative histories which she constructs from a wide range of texts. Making use of existing models of historical narrative, Hellekson's objectives are largely to observe how alternative history (which she terms "alternate history") constructs and reconstructs time (2). Hellekson names and describes these models of historical narrative as follows:

> The eschatological model of history is concerned with final events or an ultimate destiny, be it the ultimate destiny of humankind or of history. Its opposite is genetic history, or history concerned with origin, development, or cause. The entropic model of history assumes that the process of history is one of disorder or randomness. Its opposite is teleological or future-oriented history, history that seems to have a design or purpose. (2)

Importantly, Hellekson focuses almost exclusively on alternative history within the science fiction genre, explicitly stating that, "One important point I wish to stress is that the alternate history is a subgenre of the genre of science fiction" (3). As discussed in the Introduction, it is, however, incorrect to assume that science fiction is the only genre into which alternative history fits. Certainly, some alternative histories are also science fictions, but not all by any means. Further, to focus on science fiction alternative histories is to focus on a different set of narrative possibilities, and, consequently, different temporal frameworks. Because of this, Hellekson considers alternative histories which present parallel universes and time travel (5). With few illustrative exceptions, the texts in this study make no such use of these science fiction narrative devices. Considering the primary texts herein, the physical laws of nature remain adhered to. This is even true of *Time's Arrow*, where the backwards movement of time and the movement of objects within time are depicted ironically: Odilo is never conscious of events playing out backwards; it is only the narrator who experiences the world as such. Odilo's world, for our intents and purposes, remains as it always was.

In analysing the trope of the parallel universe, Hellekson uses Ward Moore's 1953 novel *Bring the Jubilee* as a case study. Driven by his passion for history of the American Civil War, in this novel Hodge, the narrator, uses a time-travel machine to go back to the Battle of Gettysburg (Moore). But while the South loses the war, as in real history, some details are altered which prevent 'future' Hodge from returning to real time as the alterations mean that 'future' Hodge's time machine would not yet have been invented (Moore). Hellekson shows that this text offers a challenge to both notions of time as an arrow and time as circular, doing so mostly by merging them (34). Reading time linearly, as Hellekson argues, especially in narrative form, means to read an event

> that leads from past to present, with events in the past leading to or causing events in the present, which in turn will presumably lead to events in the future. This notion of cause and effect is vital to the conception of time as linear, as time's arrow, and is the metaphor implied in most historical writings. (36)

Reading time as a circle means that "events have no meaning as distinct episodes with causal impact upon a contingent history. Fundamental states are immanent in time, always present and never changing.… Time has no direction" (Gould 11).

Having appreciated the unique characteristics of linear and circular time, Hellekson concludes her reading of Moore's work by stating that "The [novel's] narrative is linear, bound by Hodge's pattern of experience and his own psychological time sense, but the framing device implies circularity: Hodge begins and ends in the same place. Time's arrow and time's cycle coexist here, and the novel refuses to resolve" (42). By creating a blend of two different kinds of time, *Bring the Jubilee* presents an alternative history in which time's arrow is bent, specifically by inverting cause and effect in its circularity.

In her study of parallel worlds, Hellekson examines Poul Anderson's *Time Patrol* series in which characters traverse parallel universes for crime prevention. As characters move from one universe to another, the movement of time is one "from the present to the present", which then changes "the focus from a one-way direction of time – the past moving to the future – to a sideways (or crosswise) direction of time, into another 'stream' that also moves from past to future" (Hellekson 51). Since cause precedes effect, parallel times are rather concerned with "the genesis of events" (Hellekson 60), making time linear, but creating more than one linearity.

In her analysis of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, a novel, such as those studied here that do not rely on time travel or parallel universes on which to base their alternative histories, Hellekson shows that time is disrupted in these kinds of text as there is nothing for the reader to recall. That is, there is no obvious or previously known cause to the effects we witness that the writer depicts, especially as we read the narrative in real time. Memory, for both reader and character, becomes "useless in terms of contextualizing the alternate world, as Dick has negated the role of memory that alternate histories play with" (67). This means that in creating memories, in creating a past, we become susceptible to reading cause and effect incorrectly, and, resultantly, time moves orthogonally, or at right angles to the normal flow of linear time (67). In other words, creating a past within the present means that there can be no true frame of reference by which we may already understand the present. There is no true past to the present, and the past that is created approaches the present from the side, not from below (if we are to consider linear temporality as a movement of time from the bottom up). Hellekson concludes her reading of Dick's novel by arguing that through artificially imbuing certain physical objects and events within the text with temporal meaning, by creating historical narratives that were not necessarily there to begin with, *The Man in the High Castle* demonstrates that time is "a product of mind, not of time [itself]" (75).

Throughout her work, Hellekson's temporal focus is mainly concerned with cause and effect, stating that "The genetic model lies at the heart of every alternate history because the alternate history relies on cause and effect. It assumes that an event in the past caused our present" (2). Referring to cause and effect, Hellekson demonstrates that time in alternative histories may be thought of as parallel (where two streams of linear time run alongside each other), circular (in which the present seems ever-present), and orthogonal (where new pasts and presents are created in relation to the normal flow of linear time, suggesting that this kind of time may be thought of as a product of the mind). Hellekson's temporal models, specifically in their focus on cause and effect, also serve our understanding of how alternative history may challenge assumptions of determinism, especially within historiography and the study of history more generally. The primary texts considered here, to varying degrees, address similar concerns as well.

## DETERMINISM AND TELEOLOGY IN ROTH, TARANTINO, AND AMIS

Deterministic thinking is focused particularly on the cause of events, and teleology is a mode of thinking intent of focusing on where these events may lead, or the future of events. Deterministic and teleological thinking are in some ways mutually dependent, where teleology functions under assumptions of defined and discernible ends. The logic which drives teleology is one which is necessarily anticipatory; it is a form of thinking which is, by definition, forward-looking, demarcating a future point based on that which has come before. If alternative history is necessarily anti-deterministic, if it subverts the assumption that specific causes may necessarily be attributed to specific effects, then it is also a mode of representation which subverts similar assumptions about the opposite end of the spectrum. It is a mode of representation which demonstrates that we cannot know the future, too, especially if we are also willing to concede that the past could have been otherwise. These dramatisations of other pasts suggest not only the instability of causal knowledge, but also the effects borne out of these causes. Hellekson has already demonstrated how other alternative history texts disrupt false assumptions of causation (and, by implication, though less specifically, of effects). This same disruption is witnessed in the texts herein.

In Roth's *The Plot Against America*, Philip becomes taken by a game in which he, a Jewish boy, follows Christian men from work as they make their way to their homes in Christian suburbs vastly other to his own. As he becomes more invested in these secret pursuits, the game becomes cause for introspection as the adult Philip, the narrator, realises what Christians and Christianity may mean to a Jewish boy at a time when his Jewishness is under threat. He turns to history as a means of investigating his placement in the world.

Philip formulates a linear chronicle of events to aid his understanding: "… [I]f it weren't for Christ there wouldn't be Christians, and if it weren't for Christians there wouldn't be anti-Semitism, and if it weren't for anti-Semitism there wouldn't be Hitler, and if it weren't for Hitler Lindbergh would never be president…" (Roth *Plot* 120). The argument that Philip articulates here, alluring in its bare straightforwardness, shows that history adheres strictly to a certain set of predictable outcomes. There can be no deviation, no new narration. Philip's chronicling of history suggests that there is only one cause to an event, and that there is only one possible outcome to any historical narrative. It is, in its way, a blueprint of a method of reading history that may be described as one-thing-leads-to-another. It

is far too chaotic a model that would suggest that several things lead to several others. Such a form quickly shows history as uncontainable, and perhaps even unpredictable and frightening to a child willing to entertain this kind of history and its awesomeness. Philip's model, though, implies that causes are ultimately knowable, which makes the past predictable and static. Yet at the point at which Philip thinks that "if it weren't for Hitler Lindbergh would never be president…", there is a moment of dramatic irony in which the reader becomes aware that the same set of causes may have led to a different set of effects, whereas Philip shows no awareness of any possible new historical narratives.

Philip's unwitting and unaware alternative demonstrates to the reader the fallacy in entertaining a deterministic view of history and the study and assumptions thereof. History, we glean from Philip's timeline when appreciating its dramatic irony, is not simply one thing that leads to another, but one of several possibilities that may or may not lead to one of several other possibilities. As a consequence of studying history with the benefit of hindsight, one may be drawn to assume that events are inevitable, and that history is a hermetically sealed phenomenon in which incidents are passively laid out to be subjected to scrutiny. Roth's novel undermines this assumption.

The extract above ends with an ellipsis ("and if it weren't for Hitler Lindbergh would never be president…" (Roth *Plot* 120)), where the end of Philip's thought may be taken as the point at which the novel's plot begins. Roth's text, literally speaking, is a dramatisation of a fictitious Lindbergh presidency. Put another way, it is a dramatisation of effects, or an investigation into teleology. It is a novel which demonstrates how one change may create explosive possibilities.

At the text's beginning we are told of Roosevelt's failure at attaining a third term, of the Republican Party's nomination of Lindbergh for president, and of Lindbergh's ultimate rise to presidency. From this one event we are able to witness the multiple and entropic effects which spring from there. This is particularly evident in the novel's final pages, in which the reader is presented with mass rioting, Charles Lindbergh's unexplained disappearance, and Anne Lindbergh's unanticipated institutionalisation into a psychiatric hospital. Just as the novel demonstrates the unknowability of causes, it is equally interested in effects and false assumptions about predictability.

The unknowability of effects is most intriguingly explored in a scene in which Philip, nervous about the state of his country's affairs, engages in a dialogue with his father over the likelihood of the occurrence of the unexpected in relation to

Philip's brother, Sandy, and his cousin, Alvin, who returned from the war in Europe with a missing leg:

> 'But what if Roosevelt is president again? Then there would be a war,' I said. 'Maybe and maybe not,' my father replied, 'nobody can predict that in advance.' 'But if there was a war,' I said, 'and if Sandy was old enough, then he would be drafted to fight in the war. And if he fought in the war, then what happened to Alvin *could* happen to him.' 'Son, anything can happen to anyone,' my father told me, 'but it usually doesn't.' 'Except when it does,' I thought, but I didn't dare to say as much because he was already upset by my questions and might not even know how to answer if I kept on going. (*Plot* 124-25)

What Philip expresses here is the unknowability of the effects of a cause, demonstrating the several possibilities which may erupt from a single event. Herman seems to realise the same thing when he states that " 'anything can happen to anyone' ", but undermines his own logic in the same breath: " 'but it usually doesn't' ". Of course, this is done mainly to appease his young son, who is caught in the midst of an unpredictable and violent history. Philip's analysis of the consequences of an unstable past suggests that it is also the future that becomes unpredictable.

Philip comes to this conclusion by mapping his brother's uncertain future onto the timeline of his cousin, Alvin, whose present pathetic state is acknowledged based on known and frightening causes. In imagining a future Roosevelt presidency, if we are to go by the novel's historical alternative, Philip is reasonable in his assumption that his older brother Sandy would likely be drafted in the war in which Roosevelt would want his country to participate. And under these conditions Sandy " '*could*' " face a similar fate as his cousin. Philip's reasoning seems motivated by a need to control the unpredictability of history. He explores multiple avenues of likelihood, specifying the layers of detail to which future conditions must comply for his scenario to be realised (" 'if there was a war' "; " 'if Sandy was old enough' "; " 'if [Sandy] fought in the war' "). Philip's thoroughness points to his desperation. By knowing what will happen, He believes that he attains a certain command of the future, but there is an irony at the centre of his argument to which he seems oblivious.

When Philip's father claims that the unpredictable tends not to happen, Philip's response, "Except when it does", speaks towards the inability to know the staggering number of futures to which one may succumb. Just as unexpected as Alvin's

outcome was, so too could be his brother Sandy's. The irony is that Philip is attempting to bypass the rule by which he is arguing. He cannot know what will ever happen to his brother in the same way that he could not have known what did happen to his cousin. He is using his rule of unknowability in an attempt to know an unknowable future. The future, and the logic that drives teleology, which by definition looks forward, is corrupted. Philip's reliance on history, and his desire to allay his fears in his belief in the ability to know and understand the past, has tricked him into a false sense of future knowledge. He has correctly identified the causes of unpredictable historical events, but the future remains uncertain despite this. History becomes unreliable, and both cause and effect precarious. The narrative, particularly in its meditations on the effects of history, demonstrates how both cause and effect, precisely because of the other, become indefinable.

Where Roth's novel may be thought of as a dramatisation of effects, Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* may be seen as a dramatisation of causes. It is at the beginning of Roth's altogether linear narrative at which the historical alteration begins and real history ends; it is the beginning at which we witness the "nexus" point, as Hellekson would describe it, that point at which the alternative deviates from history as we know it (5). In these terms, as one looks back on the past, time seems to divert from the linear convention and becomes orthogonal in the same way Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* presents it. The viewer cannot assume a past for the events depicted as there is no real past with which the viewer is familiar. From this point Roth demonstrates the effects of this change.

In Tarantino's film, however, the nexus point lies towards the end. We are privy to the events that cause the alteration, with little dedicated to the effects thereof. We only witness a few minutes of the morning after Hitler's assassination, and we are left ignorant of the global impact of such a momentous occurrence, being privy only to individual characters' actions. Certainly, this does not necessarily point to a shortcoming of the text. It is simply indicative of a shift in artist priorities, specifically when comparing Roth's text to Tarantino's. In Roth's novel we see what the nexus point leads *to*; in Tarantino's we see what leads *to it*. That Hitler dies, and the war ends, a year earlier compared to real history, may suggest that Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* is, at least in part, a work which dismisses the notion of a determined view of the past. That is, Tarantino's film's reworking of history suggests that specific causes need not be seen as necessary precursors to specific effects.

Yet *Inglourious Basterds*' play in the logic of causality cannot be divorced from the intertextuality with which the film is laden. The film's form, interests, and plot are all affected by causality, but the artist's intertextuality complicates the viewer's understanding of what has come before and what after. This muddling of causation is particularly noteworthy when considering the film's historical alternative. In distorting the order of cause and effect, our assumptions of history, and especially its portrayal, are unsettled.

To begin a reading of the significance of the film's use (and perhaps even overuse) of intertextuality, especially as a sign of its play with temporal linearity, it may be of interest to consider the instances in which the director manipulates narrative order. For the most part, *Inglourious Basterds* is a film told linearly. It begins in 1941, portrays the events shortly thereafter, and ends in 1944. Although, there are times at which the narrative briefly deviates from this linearity. In the first third of the film, Raine, in trying to extract intelligence from Sgt. Rachtman, introduces Rachtman to one of the Basterds with whom he may be familiar: Sgt. Hugo Stiglitz. Upon mentioning Stiglitz' name, the frame freezes and the narrator (who only very occasionally makes a voiceover appearance) tells of Stiglitz' history and how he came to be part of Raine's Basterds. After this brief interlude, we return to the frozen frame and Raine resumes his interrogation of Rachtman.

There is another brief return to the past in the scene in which Shosanna accidentally encounters Landa years after he has slain her family. With a look of shock on her face, we are briefly shown what is presumably her memory escaping Landa's tyranny. This differs somewhat from Stiglitz' brief historical interlude: Shosanna's flashback is composed of a (very brief) scene to which the audience has already been exposed. Not only does it function as insight into Shosanna's mental state, but also as a reminder of our reaction of when last these two characters met. Stiglitz' interlude is composed entirely of new imagery. It is a past which we have not yet witnessed, unlike Shosanna's. It is Shosanna's flashback in which we return to the familiar, to a memory shared by both audience and author. But with Stiglitz' historical interlude the viewer fills in a piece of the narrative she was not aware existed to begin with. These moments in which temporal linearity is broken do not seem to be hugely significant to the film's narrative structure, though, and Tarantino has demonstrated narrative temporal play far more radically in his previous work, most notably, of course, in *Pulp Fiction*.

In *Pulp Fiction*, there are three main plots. All are linked, but none are told in linear orthodox order. The narrative skips from one plot to another, and when re-

turning to the same narrative strand, there is no telling where in the strand we may land. For example, after the opening credits Vincent and Jules, the film's two hitmen protagonists, discuss the delicacy of Vincent having been requested by their boss to entertain the boss's wife for the evening. After this we are shown the evening in question. And the film's final scene takes place somewhere between these two events. Unlike in a linear narrative, the viewer can only know the relevance of one segment to another by the film's end. Viewers can only know the effect of a cause, and vice versa, once the entire picture is provided. Cause and effect, as the film generally teaches us, are relied upon for meaning-making, but can only be determined relative to other parts we may label 'cause' and 'effect'. The viewer must create meaning, must reassemble the narrative into a satisfactory form such that the plot eventually reflects a sense of logical cohesion. This means that the viewer must participate in the narrative, or construct the narrative as the director does. *Inglourious Basterds* presents the viewer with an equally adventurous gambolling of cause and effect, though achieved not from cutting and reassembling scenes as they lay, but through different narrative techniques.

In *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino's subversion of cause and effect is done mainly through the reordering of what would be an otherwise linear plot. In *Inglourious Basterds*, the same effect is reached through the film's intertextuality. Tarantino's work is redolent with other films and cultural references both visual and aural. There are references to various World War II films (as discussed throughout this work), a reference to *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming) (when Shosanna's giant face is projected onto the screen, it is reminiscent of the Wizard's large face projected in the same manner), and even *Cinderella* (Caron) (the poster for the 1937 film hangs in Shosanna's cinema, and is referenced again when Landa, after finding a woman's shoe in the aftermath of the bar brawl at La Louisiane, discovers that it is Bridget von Hammersmark's foot onto which the shoe fits). There are dozens of examples more.

In addition to visual intertexts, Tarantino makes various musical references in his film, most notably to scores by Ennio Morricone from films such as *The Mercenary* (Corbucci), *The Return of Ringo* (Tessari) and *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo). These Morricone film scores, most of which were used in spaghetti westerns, provide an interesting, though subtle, play with time and cause and effect. But it is Tarantino's insertion of pop music which presents the most overt kind of temporal play, only because it is the most jarring due the presence of lyrics which the ear may notice more readily.

When Shosanna prepares for the night of the premier of *Nation's Pride*, when she carefully applies her mascara and aggressively smears rouge across her face as one would warpaint, it is David Bowie's 1982 song "Cat People" that we hear on the soundtrack. "Cat People", written for the film of the same name (Schrader), with Bowie's distinct pop-rock baritone, presents an anachronistically misplaced text in a real historical context forty years before its time. Tarantino's insertion of this 1982 song functions differently to the ways in which past texts are normally woven into those produced in the present. Bowie's song is not merely referred to, but implanted unaltered. In this way cause and effect, determinism and teleology, lose all meaning and time becomes flattened. Tarantino presents his viewers with a universe in which all temporal nodes, all of history, exist at once, allowing the author to refer to any historical moment at any time. This flattening of time is witnessed again in *Pulp Fiction*, if we may return to it once more. In that earlier Tarantino film, because of the subversion of cause and effect on the level of narrative temporal trajectory, the audience comes to realise that any plot point may be referred to at any moment. This takes place at the level of artistic inspiration and textual reference in *Inglourious Basterds*, in which art comes to assume an intertemporal form, where moments of cultural artistic significance come to exist side-by-side. The film's intertextuality radicalises the neatness one may assume of causality.

Amis's *Time's Arrow* presents an interesting variation on this position. In this novel, the facts of history remain the same for the protagonist as it does for the reader. Both Odilo and reader inhabit the same historical trajectory. But the backwards narration perhaps suggests an affirmation of determinism rather than subverting it as perhaps Roth's novel demonstrates. Since the text is narrated backwards, and since all that has been narrated, we assume, has already come to pass, Amis implies that the events depicted could only have led to one possible outcome. Cause and effect are unambiguously linked to the point where a single cause must lead to its predictable effect. Odilo's life, quite literally, remains preordained; history is inevitable. And with the novel's final words suggesting that all that we have read is to repeat itself again, but forwards (with time's arrow now flying "Point first" (Amis *Arrow* 165)), cause and effect, once again, become predictable, and time unalterably circular. The suggestion is that Odilo is destined to move backwards, then forwards, then backwards again, forever stuck in a Sisyphian loop. Such a depiction may only confirm fallacious assumptions of the inevitability of history. It sets out to incorrectly describe history as predictable,

where one thing must lead to another. And it is order, not chaos, that characterises the narrative.

Yet despite this conservative characterisation of the flow of history, there are other consequences of the novel's playful inversion of cause and effect which may be appreciated. The narrator's reversal, at the very least, demonstrates one's dependency on cause and effect in understanding history and also the values we read into historical narratives. In inverting cause and effect, this version of Holocaust history becomes generative as death camp victims are resurrected. From this we may appreciate that morality itself, and perhaps much else, depends on an assumed flow of historical narrative.

In some ways the text abides by a deterministic temporal framing, observed most notably through the inevitability suggested by the backwards narration, where cause and effect are simplified and predictable. Yet through this *Time's Arrow* also presents the reader with a warning. It increases the reader's sensitivity not simply in cause and effect itself, but also the portrayal of the ordering and complexity of what are history's most irreducible components.

Alternative histories, through their play on cause and effect, serve not only to undermine the premises of determinism in history writing, but also seek to offer new metaphors and forms of how time may be conceived. Yet the framework offered by cause and effect may not be the only way in which to conceive of the kinds of time alternative history presents or seeks to unsettle. Using existing theories of narrative time, the work of Paul Ricoeur may offer interesting insights into other ways in which time is (re)configured within a mode whose most basic trope is a manipulation of time. Ricoeur certainly considers how cause and effect are constructed through language and narrative more generally, but it is his observations on time and how the reader's lived time is affected by narrative temporality that is of interest here. Ricoeur's understandings of time in these terms may prove effective as a unique lens through which to read the primary texts and other alternative histories.

## Ricoeur's Threefold Mimesis

In reimagining history, all alternative histories reimagine time. To formulate a temporal poetics of alternative history, it is essential to be aware of the temporal

realms within which these kinds of text operate. There is the time in which the reader lives, and there is the time of the text, or the time of the narrative. In some ways, the narrative time seems to infiltrate the reader's time. This is because in recalling the present in which the text is produced (or present filmic texts as in *Inglourious Basterds*) the alternative histories discussed here demonstrate that they also, at least in part, recall the time outside the text. That narrative time and the reader's time integrate is also evident in the text's reimagining of orthodox history, where the reader is encouraged to always read the alternative against real history, thereby recalling both temporalities simultaneously. This conceptualisation of time seems literalised in some science fiction alternative histories which adhere to the narrative construction of a parallel universe. But as they are not also science fictions or fantasies, the kinds of alternative histories selected for this study seem to offer yet another (re)construction of our considerations of time in their reference to past, present, and future. Ricoeur's $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$, and $mimesis_3$ may do well in framing our formulation of how time functions within alternative histories, though it should also be appreciated that using such a framework comes with its own limitations. These limitations depend largely upon alternative history's particular reimagining of time, a particularity towards which Ricoeur's theories are not written. We must still remain sensitive to the temporal specificities of this unique mode.

In volume 1 of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur begins his analysis with the following hypothesis: "[*T*]*ime becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence*" (*Time and Narrative* 52). What this speaks towards is the reciprocal nature between time as it is experienced and time as it is narrated. In telling a story, both author and reader must draw on their own temporal experiences to make sense of the narrative as it is narrated in time. To better understand the dynamic of this interaction, Ricoeur compartmentalises his descriptions into three orders: $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$, and $mimesis_3$. Briefly, $mimesis_1$ describes how human action and narrative understanding is coded and symbolised in ways particular to every culture; $mimesis_2$ describes the process by which a narrative and narrative time are constructed; and $mimesis_3$ speaks to the reader's participation in the construction of that narrative and its temporality, especially as the reader draws upon her own understanding of the world and its time.

To explore these tiers in greater detail, Ricoeur describes $mimesis_1$ as that idea which demonstrates that "To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand

what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality" (*Time and Narrative* 64). Mimesis$_1$ recalls the agreed-upon encoded postures that govern how we move about in the world and interact. It describes the figureless language of prenarrativity. By the discourse of semiotics, Ricoeur describes human action and its symbolism, specifically in relation to the dynamism of narrative, as paradigmatic (*Time and Narrative* 56). It is paradigmatic in the sense that each action stands alone in and of itself; it does not (yet) form part of a larger sequence of meaning as one would find in a story. And since these symbols are without narrative they are also without time. One is able to transpose these symbols within whatever narrative without losing a sense of the temporal integrity of that narrative. Lacking time, these symbols are temporally interchangeable. It is also for these reasons, and these temporal characteristics, that Ricoeur refers to mimesis$_1$ as "synchronic" (*Time and Narrative* 56).

For Ricoeur, understanding these cultural codes, these human actions, forms the basis of one's appreciation of narrative, which recalls these human actions and, through its unique sequencing, makes out of them a story. It is understanding these actions and the meanings behind these figures that potentiates "the story's capacity to be followed" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 66), and that there is a story at all is largely the business of mimesis$_2$, to which we now turn.

It is mimesis$_2$ to which Ricoeur dedicates most of his time. This is because it is mimesis$_2$ that links mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_3$: it serves a "mediating function between what precedes fiction and what follows it" (*Time and Narrative* 65). That is, mimesis$_2$ mediates between yet-to-be narrated human actions (as described by mimesis$_1$) and the effect this narrating enacts on the reader engaging in that narrative (as described by mimesis$_3$). It is therefore the narrative act itself, or emplotment, which best describes the function of mimesis$_2$.

In discussing the significance of emplotment, mimesis$_2$'s most signal feature, Ricoeur shows that he "prefer[s] the term emplotment to that of plot and ordering to that of a system" (*Time and Narrative* 65). Opting to describe its role through verbs rather than nouns, Ricoeur argues that emplotment is an act of "configuration": it draws upon existing figures and thereafter produces, or configures, a story. And most important for our purposes, other than this configurative mediation, mimesis$_2$ also mediates temporally: "emplotment combines in variable proportions two temporal dimensions, one chronological and the other not" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 66). The two temporal forms referred to by Ricoeur are episodic time and configurational time, where episodic time "draws narrative

time in the direction of the linear representation of time" (*Time and Narrative* 67). By this, Ricoeur means that episodic time dictates that one event simply follows another, and also suggests that such a linking of events may perpetuate indefinitely as this linking is yet to possess a conclusion (*Time and Narrative* 67).

Configurational time differs from episodic time in key ways. Firstly, configurational time "transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable" (*Time and Narrative* 67). In other words, configurational time weaves together seemingly unrelated events to make of them a comprehensive story. In addition to making a story by connecting the unconnected, by making meaning out of the meaningless, configurational time also makes a narrative, it emplots, by designating an ending onto linked events. It imposes a " 'sense of an ending' " (*Time and Narrative* 67), a phrase Ricoeur borrows from Kermode. Specifically, configurational time imposes an end point to the "indefinite succession of incidents" made manifest by episodic time. And it is precisely this end that makes the story understandable: "To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion" (*Time and Narrative* 67). What is implied here is that configurational time, by demonstrating the "how and why" that connects each episode of a story to another, allows for us to read the links between discrete episodes as causal. Having one episode precede another implies that such an episode, in light of the overall meaning of the story brought about by the conclusion, must be a cause to the effect of the episode which follows. This is true even of a text such as, say, *Pulp Fiction*. Even though whole episodes do not make causal sense when viewing the film in real time, the conclusion allows us to read retrospectively. It allows us to piece together and reorder episodes that best fit so as to satisfy the viewer's need for narrative logic and order.

Before discussing the details of mimesis$_3$, it is from here that we may begin to witness how Ricoeur's threefold mimesis may be used to read the texts herein. This is true not necessarily because they are alternative history narratives, but because they are narratives more generally. While alternative history stories radicalise our perceptions of time and causation, they are also, at the very least, stories. They adhere to the conventions and temporal forms typical of narratives as Ricoeur has detailed. There is a beginning from which follow several episodes made deterministically coherent by a sequentially satisfying ending. As a result, its readers will thereafter be able to repeat the story. The climax of *Inglourious Basterds*, in which Hitler is killed, serves as an ending to its audience which is

"acceptable" (*Time and Narrative* 67) after all. That is, the ending makes the story acceptable not because of the need for vengeance one seeks by whatever political or moral persuasion one imposes onto the film, but because of the structure of the narrative itself. The ending is "acceptable" since the action witnessed preceding the end (the action which shows Shosanna's plotting to host the film premier, and the murdering of her family which precedes that) 'makes sense' in light of the conclusion.

This is seen again in one of the mode's most typical examples, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*. Set in the 1960s, in a prosperous though dystopic Germany, the reader finds it agreeable that Xavier March, SS detective, with the help of his partner, American journalist Charlie Maguire, successfully uncover the history of the Final Solution that Hitler's government attempts to hide. Everything preceding this climactic moment allowed for this to happen. Upon reaching the novel's end, we are satisfied of the reasons behind the mysterious death of Josef Bühler, a Nazi official (many of whom are eventually found dead) of whose murder we are informed in the novel's opening pages. We discover that Bühler is directly implicated in the enactment of the Final Solution, and is therefore formally in possession of knowledge that it ever happened. Certainly, much else instead could have occurred given the text's opening in which a Nazi official is discovered dead by the side of a river, but there is enough to suggest the ending was warranted by such a beginning.

That we may use Ricoeur's configurational time as a frame by which to understand the formal logic of a text may even be relevant in our reading and appreciation of Amis's *Time's Arrow*, this study's most atypical inclusion. In an obvious way, *Time's Arrow* challenges the reader's most irreducible assumptions regarding the temporal flow of a text: narratives are meant to run from beginning to end, not the other way around. Yet in other ways, the text is fairly conventional, still complying with the shapes and expectations of narrative form.

In his review of the novel, Frank Kermode argues that despite its compelling though superficial trickery, "the progress of the tale is fairly orthodox, it heads towards a recognition: that is, the supply of information is maximised in quite the usual way. We find out what it is all about as we approach the end, which, under the licence of imagination, is represented as a beginning" ("In Reverse" 11). We are still able to appreciate the beginning precisely because of the ending, as Ricoeur would come to expect of narratives. We are able to make sense of Odilo's identity as a Nazi doctor (revealed to us in the latter stages of the text) based on the

trauma and nightmares he experiences that are so evident in the novel's opening chapters. What such a reading also demonstrates is that despite our appreciation of alternative history's undermining of the false assumptions about the nature of causality (articulated through its temporal play, in its play of historical expectation), narratives within the mode remain narratives in the simplest of senses, especially in Ricoeur's sense. They are narratives which still enjoy the benefits of constructing causal links between one narrative strand and another to form a cogent whole.

As he constructs a poetics of narrative temporality, not only in his three-volume work, but in other smaller essays as well, Ricoeur concedes that his theory is applicable only to "some narratives" ("Narrative Time" 180). Indeed, his thesis is largely based on his reading of classic European fairytales such as "Little Red Riding Hood", and looks back even further to *The Odyssey*. Given the radical temporality of alternative histories, it may be that Ricoeur's ideas do not always do well in explaining stories of such unorthodoxy.

Writing on the distinction between configurational and episodic time, Ricoeur asserts that as it lacks the distinction of a conclusion, it is episodic time, unlike its configurational counterpart, that does not possess the quality of temporal reversibility since there is no larger meaning to this kind of purely episodic narrative. Episodic time is irreversible in the sense that there is no end point from which one may look back and make sense of what has led up to and justified such an end. It is the end point of configurational time that is the distinguishing mark of emplotment. And while all alternative history narratives, simply because they are at the very least narratives, possess this same quality, that they conform to configurational time, it may also be that there is something of episodic temporality which defines this unique mode of representation as well, an assertion which counters Ricoeur's idea of what all narratives ought to resemble. It is perhaps the case that while all alternative history narratives conclude, especially in the way described by Ricoeur, there is also something simultaneously endless about them.

The entire conceit of alternative history texts is that they consider historical narratives which did not happen rather than those that did. Encoded and narrated in ways that are readily noticeable, readers of Roth's *The Plot Against America* will easily recognise the political figures, the common human gestures, and the rhythms of a unique American speech upon which the author hangs his historical alternative. The aesthetic familiarity may lead the reader to believe that it is the same world in which she participates, expect that it is not. The deceptive overlap

between the time of the text and the time of the reader allows for the easy, though sometimes disconcerting, acceptance of Roth's alternative. It also allows us to realise how plausible such an alternative could have been actualised in the reader's time. We may be impressed upon to believe that the occurrence of the unlikely is not only a matter of fiction but of reality too. The reader's current reality is but one among a vast plethora of iterations of the direction to which history points. In other words, even though the novel concludes satisfactorily, upon reading the text's last pages we are still invited to further consider both our own and the narrative's infinite temporal possibilities. Anything can happen from any presented moment.

Such a reading is also possible when viewing *Inglourious Basterds*. When in Tarantino's film we witness Hitler's assassination at the hands of the Basterds, history departs from what the viewer may have expected based on her experience of real history up until that point. Tarantino's narrative deviates from real history only until the film's end (unlike in Roth's novel where this occurs at the very beginning). It is from this point on that nothing in the narrative can align with the audience's expectations of history, and the audience is left to consider the various possibilities the narrative may entertain onwards from there.

Through its own poetic devices, through its backwards narration, even *Time's Arrow* invites its readers to think about the Holocaust's many phenomenological and historical possibilities. The alternative we are meant to consider is this: What if the Holocaust was an act of creation rather than destruction?; What if the events of 1939 to 1945 in Europe were enacted by the Nazis for the purposes of good rather than bad? Like the other two texts, historical alternatives remain considered, only through different means. And also like the other texts, by the end one sits at a new beginning of multiple paths the narrative may take, especially given how the narrator demonstrates that history could have been something other than what we know. It is in this way that alternative history narratives, upon their conclusion, become endless, despite that their conclusions also imply a sense of termination by Ricoeur's framing. It is in this way that alternative histories simultaneously harbour both a sense of finitude and infinity, of both episodic and configurational time.

By the end of the alternative history story, the reader is left with the impression that the narrative to which she has just bore witness is but one of any number of other narratives that could have been. Such an argument, it is important to note, depends largely on the impetus of the reader. It is the reader by whom such a con-

sideration is made apparent. And it is the reader, and her role as contributor and instigator of narrative, who becomes worthy of more consideration and thought within this exchange.

It has been discussed that mimesis$_2$, in its emplotment, is the component of Ricoeur's thesis which acts as a pivot between prefigured time (the time before narrative), and the reader's time. And it is this reader's time which is of special interest in Ricoeur's formulation of mimesis$_3$. Mimesis$_3$, by another understanding, describes the place at which text and reader meet. As Ricoeur shows: "… I shall say that mimesis$_3$ marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality" (*Time and Narrative* 71).

The act of reading begins with the reader's understanding of the codes and symbols that define the world and narrative conventions. These codes aid in having the reader recognise "the formal rule, the genre, or the type exemplified by the narrated story. They furnish guidelines for the encounter between a text and its readers" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 76). Such symbols come to enable reading, and show reading to be an act lacking in innocence. The reader must first know and demonstrate sensitivity to the conventions of narrative and culture before embarking on the narrative that relies on those codes to form a story. And by recognising these conventions, the reader, along with the author, is able to configure a plot (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 76-77). "[I]t is the reader", Ricoeur asserts, "who completes the work inasmuch as … the written work is a sketch for reading.… [I]t is the reader … who carries the burden of emplotment" (*Time and Narrative* 77). What this demonstrates is that the status of the reader's temporality enables an appreciation of the text. It is the time before the text, the time of the text, and the time of the reader that come to intermingle in reading a narrative. Using such an understanding of the operations of literature as a lens through which we may view alternative history may prove useful in some respects, but perhaps not in others.

Alternative histories intend to make a lie out of the reader's temporality, out of the reader's history. Lies, generally speaking, do not perturb Ricoeur, especially as they form so integral a foundation in narrative fiction. He considers with seriousness the consequence of "falsity, lies, or secrets" (*Time and Narrative* 79), especially in relation to the relevance (or irrelevance) they may bear on the reader's time. Despite this, Ricoeur briefly reflects that "reading poses anew the problem of

the fusion of two horizons, that of the text and that of the reader, and hence the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 79). That is, we may accept that the "fusion" of the time of the narrative and the time of the reader is a problem, that it is largely irrelevant and absurd to consider the narrative time as in some way contributing to our broader understanding of real-world time. But this is also to adhere to a debilitating kind of positivism which too easily dismisses the value we might find in anything that cannot be proved through the scientific method (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 79). Further, we may also be guilty of ignoring the ability of literature to critique and offer productive commentary of the world in which it exists (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 79).

Much the same may be said of alternative histories. Overtly or covertly, alternative histories offer the same kind of value as they prompt us to reconsider the fundamental nature of determinism and our reliance on history to make sense of the real world and its real historical trajectory. The mode achieves this despite its superficial assertion that it is defined specifically by a separation between reader and narrative time. We even find that the texts in question often reach beyond the confines of their pages and covers and offer comment and critique on the reader's temporality, both politically and philosophically. The preceding chapters attempt to make this case.

But we may also consider that the lies told to us by alternative histories more generally cannot be understood under the same philosophical assumptions as offered to us by Ricoeur. In other words, even when it most clearly alludes to the reader's time, we must appreciate that such allusions are always hinged upon an assumption that the text at hand bears no connection to the world outside of it. This is perhaps the greatest irony at the heart of every alternative history text. It may be of interest, therefore, to consider the consequences of alternative history's playful severance from the reader's temporality, and how this impacts on the reading of such a text.

## Alternative History and The Reader's Time

Ricoeur describes the sentence as the most basic "unit of discourse" (*Time and Narrative* 78). And with the sentence, this unit of discourse, "language is oriented beyond itself. It says something *about* something" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 78). Language, in other words, reflects, at the very least, on itself, but it gazes beyond its own sphere, or "horizon" (*Time and Narrative* 78), as Ricoeur puts it. This is true of all literature, and is therefore also true of alternative histories. All narratives speak both for its own sake, and augment the reader's world in the process. Ricoeur continues this argument by showing that

> All experience both possesses a contour that circumscribes it and distinguishes it, and arises against a horizon of potentialities that constitutes at once an internal and an external horizon for experience: internal in the sense that it is always possible to give more details and be more precise about whatever is considered within some stable contour; external in the sense that the intended thing stands in potential relationships to everything else within the horizon of a total world, which itself never figures as the object of discourse. (*Time and Narrative* 78)

To flesh out and paraphrase this single sentence of densely compacted thought, we may say that Ricoeur begins by showing that experience is composed of two things: that which differentiates its particularity, and that which determines its potential, or that which demonstrates the plural forms it could assume. These experiential "potentialities" are at once comprised of "an internal and an external" component. And this internality, in turn, shows how one may more accurately define the experience about which one already possesses knowledge. The externality refers much more broadly to possibilities that lie outside of that experience, and extends to the much larger total world in which that referred-to experience resides.

As this relates to the sentence, and to the act of writing and reading, Ricoeur argues that, "What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience" (*Time and Narrative* 79). Ricoeur is optimistic about the text and its ability to reach into the reader's time. The reader's experience and appreciation of the writ-

ten sentence is not "extralinguistic" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 79). It does not exist exclusively outside the reader's temporality, but really constructs a world that forms part of a much broader external reality, and is even part of the much larger world to begin with. Ricoeur claims this to be the case for all of literature, and, indeed, there is little reason to doubt that this is so. Much of this project has been testament to this point. Alternative history texts, like all works of literature, tell its tales by making use of cultural and narrative codes that already exist in the world. And, as is the case with the alternative histories which form the primary focus of this study, readers and viewers are prompted to draw comparisons between false and real history, finding new meaning in their past or present through the lies of the text.

But alongside our ability to appreciate alternative history as in some ways an extension of our own time, there exists also a temporal representation enacted by these kinds of text which knowingly attempts to play with such associations. Through its play, alternative histories are also resistant to any comparisons that may be drawn between reader and narrative time. Alternative histories teasingly claim to in some ways have nothing to do with the reader's time.

Within the first sentences he presents to his readers, Roth, in *The Plot Against America*, fearfully imagines another America, and, in turn, another Philip Roth: "Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn't been president or if I hadn't been the offspring of Jews" (*Plot* 1). These first sentences demonstrate the many forms of Roth's temporal play. As if preparing the audience for the unorthodox temporality observed in alternative history, Roth seems to subtly demonstrate to his readers that narrative time need not always conform to what is expected. The first sentence of this extract demonstrates this. The narrator manages to refer to past, present, and future all at once within the novel's opening words. Writing in the present tense, the narrator speaks of his personal history, his "memories", as "perpetual". This signifies both that his attitudes to his past remain unchanged, and also that they continue to haunt him within his present and perhaps even beyond. These simultaneous temporal forms, this ability to refer to all of time all at once, is an iteration of the types of temporal play Roth employs as it relates to history and its representation.

In the second sentence of the extract, Philip imagines his life had he not been Jewish. This is an alternative that is never truly realised either in the text or the reader's time, though one may argue that Philip imagines a version of this history

in his desire to be an orphan. But it is the other alternative within the sentence which is of greater interest and complexity.

Philip conceives of a world in which "Lindbergh hadn't been president". What is implied is that the narrative that follows literalises the opposite; it assumes the alternative, that Lindbergh is, indeed, president. In this moment, Roth inverts the reader's comprehension of her own world and its history, as well as the world and history of the text. Though the reader may recognise the language and the famous characters to whom Philip alludes, though there is a vague reference to our own world and its aesthetic, it is through Philip's negative description that we come to understand that this narrative holds no bearing, at least literally, on our own history.

Through comparable means, by at least hinting at the reader's temporality as if it were the alternative historical narrative, Philip K. Dick, through his *The Man in the High Castle*, presents similar thoughts on the nature of the reader's time. Set roughly during the period of its publication, Dick's text demonstrates the effects of Franklin D. Roosevelt's assassination in Miami in 1933, where years after, a traumatised America has been colonised by both Germany (from the east) and Japan (from the west). The alternative within Dick's alternative comes in the form of another novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. Written by fictitious American author, Hawthorne Abendsen, *Grasshopper* tells of a story in which much like, but not completely overlapping with, the reader's history, Roosevelt is not assassinated in Miami and is president only from 1936 to 1940, after which Rexford Tugwell assumes the presidency; and the ships stationed at Pearl Harbour are not destroyed since they are out to sea at the time (Dick 68-69). The Allied forces win the war, instead of the living nightmare experienced by the text's American characters. It is a history that only just skirts around the edges of the reader's time, without ever overlapping with it.

*Grasshopper* proves a popular sell, especially among Americans despite it being banned in several states, particularly those occupied by Germany. Fascinated by the prospect of a freer America, some Americans read Hawthorne Abendsen's work as an act of defiance, but it also serves another purpose, especially for the readers of Dick's novel. In reflecting the alternative mode back on his reader, but only slightly askew (where the Allies win but not as we know it), Dick's text seems to draw the reader into considering the function and fabrication of her own history. Just as Abendsen is able to create a history so similar to the reader's own, history, Dick's novel seems to say, could so easily have been the one of Dick's

creation. Any history is possible, and history's textual malleability, its constructedness, is so easily susceptible to sway merely by virtue of a willing author. Roth's *The Plot Against America* functions in the same way given that it refers to the reader's time as an alternative to the novel's narrative. Yet, more to the point, this reference to the reader's time as one fundamentally different to the text's own may also serve another position. That is, both novels show that we, their readers, discover that we occupy a past, present, and possible future distinctly other to the text's trajectory.

Turning to more visual representations of alternative history, Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* spends almost all of its time aligned with the viewer's temporality. Because we can neither confirm nor deny it, we may be left to believe that, in some way, the history depicted until the film's final moments is one which may very well be our own. The individual narrative strands, in the larger historical context, are mostly inconsequential, and the experiential horizon, the much broader historical context, is one effectively shared between viewer and film. Of course, this changes at the film's climax, in which Hitler is killed a year earlier than the viewer anticipates. We are now led to believe that the history of the film is decidedly other to our own. This moment forces us to second-guess ourselves, and we are prompted to believe that the reference to our world was largely coincidental.

Before this moment, Tarantino warns us of its approach. Before Hitler is killed, before the Basterds' and Shosanna's plan come to fruition, Landa presents Raine with an ultimatum: either Landa exposes the Basterds' plan thereby preventing any chance of killing Hitler, or the Basterds claim that Landa was part of the plan all along so that Landa appears in good standing with the Americans once they have won the war. Putting Raine's options into plain terms, Landa simply presents the following argument: "[I]n the pages of history every once in a while fate reaches out and extends its hand. What shall the history books read?" (Tarantino Basterds). The question invites the Basterds to imagine future possibilities, but they are future past possibilities as they imagine the future they will eventually look back upon from an even more distant future. Also implicit in Landa's question is a suggestion perhaps only appreciated by the audience: his question is really a choice between history as the audience knows it (where Hitler does not die a year early), and history as it eventually comes to be upon the film's ending, a history quite unlike that of the audience's. The present becomes one fraught with plural futures,

and, by extension, the audience may recognise the many forms that the past could have assumed if they are to entertain the same logic.

Unlike *Inglourious Basterds*, and produced in 1965, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's *It Happened Here*, an alternative history film (of which there are very few), is one whose nexus point lies at the beginning of the narrative, allowing its viewers to witness the consequences of the proposed alternative. In Tarantino's film, history's unexpected turn is made quite apparent at the end, leaving us to wonder what might happen next. Also very unlike Tarantino's cartoonish aesthetic, *It Happened Here* is shot in black and white, with documentary-style cinematography, and even begins with a brief pseudo-documentary film illustrating, with simple animations (as shown in Figure 10), how the world has gotten to this point. These devices are the filmic equivalent of, say, Roth's use of memoir in his own alternative history in that it is utilised to garner a sense of verisimilitude within a narratively deceitful context. Brownlow and Mollo's realist aesthetic means that the text is encoded in such a way that the viewer may more readily read her own history and world into the narrative, though the content is far from similar.



Figure 10: Brownlow and Mollo's pseudo-documentary style in *It Happened Here*

The story is set in the early 1940s, and shows how Nazi Germany has occupied England. In small but significant ways, some citizens resist this occupation, but others are happy to comply, welcoming the Nazis' fascist anti-Semitic practices and ideologies. Especially as an alternative history, the title is reminiscent of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, showing the effects of the unlikely but this time in Europe, unlike in Lewis's America. The film also acts as a warning. Its documentary aesthetic, and the title in particular, demonstrate to the viewer the ease with which history could have taken a nightmarish turn. It demonstrates how the viewer's time may have mimicked the time of the narrative, thereby also firmly setting itself apart from our world.

While Ricoeur's ideas may be useful as a way to read and understand some aspects of alternative history, one may be tempted argue that Amis's *Time's Arrow* is the exception to this rule. But this is not entirely so. In some ways *Time's Arrow* does not at all refer to the reader's time, but in other ways it certainly does. Amis relies on the same kinds of narrative conventions and encoded humans actions with which the reader is familiar. There is overlap in the language of both the text and the reader's time. This is true even in the text's most ironic moments. When Odilo works as a medical doctor in America, harming people instead of healing them, the reader must draw upon her knowledge of the codes being recalled to appreciate its absurdist usage.

But we must not overstate the matter and recognise that the novel also remains an alternative history. The world we are presented with requests that we imagine a different set of temporal circumstances in which large camps were set up not to harm Jews but to heal them. To appreciate this reading we must first believe that, even with the backwards narration, the contours of temporal flow remain the same. In other words, the narrator draws causal links between different episodes and constructs a narrative from merging these units of time. Yet despite this, the content of this history suggests that this world has nothing to do with the reader's. Read literally, the text is not an instantiation of the reader's temporal experience; it is a world unto itself, which may be an argument whose claims can be made of alternative histories more generally.

The alternative history an author creates both is and is not the world of the reader. Using the language of Ricoeur, alternative histories refer to commonly understood actions and cultural and narrative markers, and, in this way, are borne out of the same time as that of the reader. There is also overlap in the abstract decontextualised figuring of time. That is, this unique mode merely imitates the flow of history with which readers will be familiar without reproducing its contents. Some alternative histories, through its irony, even provide commentary on the reader's time through its historical othering.

Yet, in ways that perhaps playfully undermine the principles upon which Ricoeur builds his thesis, these narratives are also distinctly not of this world. The alternative history text asserts itself in such a way that its referential horizon seems isolated to the world it creates, and cannot be read as part of the much larger experience of the reader, unlike Ricoeur would claim of fictional narratives more broadly. Alternative histories playfully suggest that the text and the reader's world are, indeed, discrete realms. It is also an insincere device, one which claims

to have nothing to do with the reader's world, but, at the same time, seems to have everything to do with it.

Insincere though it may be, this conceit is not without value. It is one which serves to explore a much larger point of our reception of history, and our temporal assumptions that underlie our reliance on history to construct identity, or to configure time. As such, it is one which prompts readers to explore greater concerns of our abstract metahistorical and temporal attitudes. Alternative histories demonstrate that all of time is susceptible to interpretation and change. Through altering the past, the reader becomes aware of the myriad possibilities pregnant within each moment. Because of how alternative histories are able to mimic the temporal forms of the reader's time, the reader comes to realise that her own pasts could have been forged much differently, could have led to any number of possible presents in which she resides. And the present in which she now finds herself is simply a nexus point poised for any number of possible futures. In the same way, she is left to wonder at the time of the text and how it could have been otherwise, and the explosion of possible futures left open upon its conclusion. All of time and its postures, for both reader and text, proliferate and explode.

# Conclusion

> The book contains historical inaccuracies, which may, however, be deranged metaphors for truths of another kind. (Bolaño 193)

> 'It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,' the Queen remarked. (Carroll 246)

## Alternative History Applied

One of the key uses of alternative history fiction is its ability to alert readers to the fallacies of causation into which one may fall when considering a historical trajectory. Alternative histories demonstrate that the past need not have been what it was, that some causes may lead to other unexpected effects, and that several factors, no matter how minute, may be attributed as the cause to any event, no matter how large. To expand slightly upon the ideas expressed in the previous chapter, Gavriel D. Rosenfeld observes another benefit of entertaining that which was not. Rosenfeld points out that

> by imagining history turning out differently, alternate histories can help us cope with the unpredictability of our contemporary world.… In attempting to understand where we are headed, we can profit by consulting alternate histories of worlds that never were. By familiarizing ourselves with them, and with the mode of counterfactual thinking underlying them, we may be better equipped to fashion the world as we would like it to be. (397)

In short, alternative histories may act as a guide for us to expect the unexpected. This is a thought not entirely new. It is even a consequence of the mode that is almost self-evident: any outcome to any cause may not always be what was

predicted, which also implies that the actual past may not necessarily be the greatest predictor of the future. Historians such as E. H. Carr have dismissed notions of prognostication, arguing so specifically in light of the belief of the inevitability of human progress: "The notion of a finite and clearly definable goal of progress in history … has proved inapplicable and barren. Belief in progress means belief not in any automatic or inevitable process, but in the progressive development of human potentialities" (*History* 113). Despite this assertion, Carr also concedes that he "shall be content with the possibility of unlimited progress – or progress subject to no limits that we can need or envisage – towards goals which can be defined only as we advance towards them, and the validity of which can be verified only in a process of attaining them" (*History* 113). The implication is that while we may not be able to predict the future with absolute and refined certainly, it is safe to predict events in its broadest sweep. There will be wars fought, but we cannot say between whom. Prominent leaders will die unexpectedly, but we cannot say how or when. It is precisely the unexpected, the kink in time, which prevents us from knowing this with any precision. Along with the study of real history, alternative history has taught us to make provision for the unexpected, the unpredictable, and the uncertain as best we can, limited only by the reach of our imagination.

By way of fairly recent example at the time of this writing, this form of thinking, that we must always anticipate the unlikely, has led many to keep a cautious eye on the 2016 American general election in the months leading up to the event. In circumstances not before witnessed in the American political imagination, a realty billionaire and reality television celebrity, Donald Trump, flung himself into the Republican nomination for the American presidency. Many were left confused at the unlikely nomination of an outwardly misogynistic, racist, islamophobic, and xenophobic candidate. Both during and at the time leading up to Trump's nomination, many critics, journalists, and historians turned to sources of alternative history as a guide to make sense of a seemingly senseless situation, thereby anticipating with trepidation the unexpected, though eventually realised, occurrence of a President Trump.

Writing for *Signature*, Jennie Yabroff argued that "[*The Plot Against America*] is more than a decade old, but, as the headlines report Trump's seeming unstoppable steamroll to the Republican nomination, may have never been as relevant as it is now" (n. pag.). Yabroff looks to Roth's novel not only as one which demonstrates what happens when extreme right wing politics dominates America, but also how this may affect social structures at their most basic level: the family. Other critics

have placed greater emphasis on the novel's politics in relation to Trump's populist rise.

For *The New Yorker*, David Denby argued that Trump had "substituted anti-immigrant fervor and specifically anti-Muslimism for the anti-Semitism of the thirties – the anti-Semitism of, say, Charles A. Lindbergh" ("Rhetoric" n. pag.). The pointed comparison Denby draws is one inspired by his reading of Roth's *The Plot Against America*, a 2004 novel which Denby, in his 2015 article written at the time of America's primary elections, cited as a cautionary tale: "Roth's novel could use another reading in light of the very real possibility that Trump might be the Republican nominee. The counter-factual may be merging into fact just as virulently as Roth imagined" ("Rhetoric" n. pag.). Denby capitulates that similarities between Trump and Lindbergh, while not perfect, are enough to treat the possibility of a Trump presidential victory with seriousness. Trump may not be fascist in its common iteration of the word, but there is worrying evidence, as Denby argues, of "sickening echoes in his speeches of the Fascist movement of the twentieth century – extreme nationalism, the appeals to bigotry and fear, the emphasis on humiliation, the shrewdly gangsterish, undermining contempt for anyone who stands in the leader's way" ("Rhetoric" n. pag.). Denby even reluctantly admired Trump's skill at wielding his audience, noting his ability to "[embody] what the audience fears and desires" ("Rhetoric" n. pag.). It was especially evident at the time of Denby's writing that fear defined the emotion of the millions of Americans who sought Trump's leadership, but it was most certainly not the same kind of fear that defines Roth's Philip, who fears because he recognises his placement as being the subject, and not the instigator, of racism and hate.

In an e-mail interview with Philip Roth, published by *The New Yorker* less than a week into Trump's presidency, Judith Thurman also recognised the broader and more obvious racist overlap between Trump and Lindbergh. But Thurman further pointed to more specific comparisons between the two, writing that, in *The Plot Against America*, "a foreign power – Nazi Germany – meddles in an American election …. In real life, U.S. intelligence agencies are investigating Trump's ties to Vladimir Putin and the possibility that a dossier of secret information – *kompromat* – gives Russia leverage with his regime" (n. pag.). As quoted by Thurman, Roth himself concedes that the extraordinary circumstance of Trump as president is an event perhaps even beyond his own fiction, as he stated that, when viewed alongside Trump, " 'It is easier to comprehend the election of an imaginary President like Charles Lindbergh' " (n. pag.). Roth continues, saying that " 'Lindbergh, despite

his Nazi sympathies and racist proclivities, was a great aviation hero who had displayed tremendous physical courage and aeronautical genius in crossing the Atlantic in 1927.… Trump is just a con artist' " (n. pag.). What Roth perhaps points to here are the limitations and faults of reading his text as a felicitous futural representation.

Other critics have looked further afield into the World War II alternative history oeuvre, and have drawn comparisons between Trump's right-wing popularity and that of Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Sinclair Lewis's fascist American president in the novel *It Can't Happen Here*. Of course, it *does* happen there, and critics writing at the time of Trump's ascendency did not rule out the possibility of it happening again, this time in reality. Michael Harris, writing for *Salon* in September 2015, shows that Lewis's 1935 novel is certainly one for its time, where "Lewis used his position as one of the nation's top novelists to show his countrymen exactly how authoritarianism could rear its head in the land of liberty" (n. pag.). Yet despite this, "80 years later the novel feels frighteningly contemporary" (M. Harris n. pag.). Indeed, political analyst Jacob Weisberg shows that Windrip's rhetoric is certainly reminiscent of Trump's (n. pag.), where Lewis's fascist, like Trump, blames the previous administration for his audience's plight and poverty, and promises "to make America a proud, rich land again" (Lewis 135).

Yet it is not only the broad similarities between its right wing leaders that one may appreciate Lewis's text during the time of a President Trump. There are also some quite specific details which may be recognised between the two. When the book's left-leaning protagonist, Doremus Jessup, editor and proprietor of the "*Daily Informer*", argues with R. C. Crowley about the ease with which America in its current state seems to embrace a fascist leader, Jessup makes his position clear: " 'Not happen here? Prohibition – shooting down people just because they *might* be transporting liquor – no that couldn't happen in *America!* Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!' " (Lewis 17). As a reflection on American social ills during Trump's presidential campaign, and even during his presidency, one could easily substitute " 'people' " for 'black and Muslim American youths' in Jessup's speech, given the scores of attacks and killings for which this group has been made a target. With more temporal overlap, in response, Crowley suggests that perhaps a Windrip presidency may be a welcomed change, as he "[doesn't] like all these irresponsible attacks on us bankers all the time.… [O]nce Windrip gets into power he'll give the banks their proper influence in the administration and take our expert financial advice" (Lewis 17). Indeed,

after having won the presidency, Trump's sympathetic and supportive stance towards the rich and superrich is starkly evident in his positioning of the likes of Steven Mnuchin as Treasure Secretary, and Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. Mnuchin is a former executive of Goldman Sachs, and Tillerson a former chairman of ExxonMobil.

It would be incorrect to appreciate these comparisons as indicative of the presumed prognosticative qualities of each respective text, both Roth's and Lewis's. With enough time, all politically-driven fiction comes to bear some resemblance to reality, however tangential. There is a subtle though profound difference, however, between a text which happens to, one day, align its fiction with future fact, and an alternative history which dismisses the fallacious belief that certain causes will always lead to certain effects, or that the past may be read as a blueprint for the future. Saying that Roth's text 'predicted' a Trump win would not appreciate the anti-determinism inherent in the novel and the mode of alternative history overall. It would be more helpful to demonstrate that Roth's work, perhaps, may be seen as an indictment that anything can happen, rather than arguing that a Trump victory was inevitable. Indeed, as he is even at times doubtful of the comparisons many have drawn between Lindbergh and Trump, in his e-mail interview with Thurman, Roth himself would agree with such a position. Roth argues that, just as we learn from alternative history narratives, Trump's presidency indicates that all things, both virtuous and wicked, were and are possible: " 'As for how Trump threatens us, I would say that, like the anxious and fear-ridden families in my book, what is most terrifying is that he makes any and everything possible, including, of course, the nuclear catastrophe' " (n. pag.).

The value in comparing such works to our present moment stems mainly from recognising these texts as alternative histories. It is an appreciation which marks these works as those which demonstrate that time may not always be thought of as an arrow – straight, purposeful, and unidirectional – but as in some ways compressed, where all pasts, presents, and futures are possible all at once. It demonstrates that new metaphors are required for the kind of relationship to both the time being dramatised and the time through which we live. These works show that, to use Karen Hellekson's term, the present may always be thought of as the nexus point. In recognising that history could have turned out otherwise, in appreciating the tenets upon which alternative history operates, we realise that the present is continually pregnant with possibility, that the future may turn in any which way based both on decisions made now and the very randomness of the

world. Recognising how alternative history affects such considerations of time relies upon an appreciation of the mode's play with history, and very often it is a play with what some would deem to be a sacred history.

As we have observed from Rosenfeld, the success and proliferation of World War II alternative history texts produced in America and Britain directly after the end of the war far outstripped Germany's production of those texts (15). Rosenfeld shows that this may likely be attributed to Germany having been defeated in the war: "Given that the Nazi era brought unprecedented misery to their country, Germans understandably have been reluctant to confront the Nazi experience through a genre of narrative representation whose chief characteristics and underlying motives may easily be dismissed as shallow and merely commercial" (G. D. Rosenfeld 15). But this may be changing, as seen with the enormous success of texts such as Timur Vermes's comic *Look Who's Back*, and the adaptation of the book into a film, which imagines Hitler's inexplicable arrival in modern history as a stand-up comic. This was also seen with the release of Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* in Germany.

Speaking of the reception of the film in Germany, Dave Intzkoff tells of various German critics who praise the film both for its artistry and the entertainment it affords a German audience accustomed to consume film of this subject with staid sobriety (n. pag.). The German government even helped finance the film, issuing $11 million towards its production (Hockenos n. pag.). Alongside Brad Pitt, who plays Aldo Raine, Tarantino speaks of the same phenomenon in an interview conducted by Elvis Mitchell (which may be found as extra material on the UK DVD release of *Inglourious Basterds*). In the discussion, Tarantino articulates his initial reservations about a German audience's reaction to his playful portrayal of the past. As an audience, Tarantino notes that Germans are "used to watching these movies through the eyes of guilt". But witnessing Germans enjoying his film, Tarantino asserts that the audience appreciates the film because it is "liberating". He also argues for the desire of newer generations of Germans to subvert their own history in a similar fashion to the film: "I mean, if anyone has bringing-down-the-Third-Reich fantasies, it's the last couple of generations of Germans." Younger generations of Germans now seem more welcoming of the idea of interacting with their own history in ways both unorthodox and un-prescribed. Time seems to have afforded German audiences enough distance to justify such attitudes to their past.

That alternative history has found place in Germany's culture speaks also of the mode's increasing scope. This may be true both internationally and, as we shall

see, in terms of the subject matter authors are willing to narrate by the framing of an altered past. Though alternative history has most often been associated with World War II (as well as the American Civil War to quite a large extent), many recent authors have come to use the mode to tell stories influenced by histories well outside the war. For example, there is *Hystopia* in which a Vietnam veteran, through state-initiated psychotropic drugs, conceives of an America in which John. F. Kennedy is not assassinated, and even serves a third presidential term (Means). Referring to histories even more recent, there is also Matt Ruff's 2012 novel *The Mirage*. In this work, America and the Middle East swap roles of power. Beginning with events in World War II in which Arabia is responsible for the beheading of Adolf Hitler, the Middle East becomes a world power in the 2000s while America is a divided third-world nation that harbours globally active terrorist organisations (Ruff).

Even in the United Kingdom, there are authors willing to explore other kinds of historical alternatives. A writer famous for several novels chronicling, in particular, Britain's Tudor period, in 2014 Hilary Mantel published a short story that fictionalises and alters much more recent history. Mantel's story, "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher: August 6th 1983", details the plot to kill Britain's prime minister by a nameless sniper. The sniper positions himself on the top floor of a middle-class suburban home in Windsor, overlooking the town's hospital. He waits for Thatcher to walk out of the hospital after she receives "minor eye surgery" (Mantel 210).

Some ambiguity arises as the flat's resident, also nameless, mistakes the sniper for a photographer: " 'How much will you get for a good shot?' " (Mantel 217). The sniper, acting on this ambiguity, responds: " 'Life without parole' " (Mantel 217). This double identity is played upon again later in the text. The resident suggests that, in anticipation of being caught, the sniper make an easy escape by leading him out the door of the adjacent flat, and thereby pretend to have had nothing to do with the incident. This doubling shapes the text's broader concerns of history and its potential plurality, as the resident meditates: "History could always have been otherwise. For there is the time, the place, the black opportunity: the day, the hour, the slant of the light, the ice-cream van chiming from a distant road near the bypass" (Mantel 238). The text shows that very little depends on history to be "otherwise", arguing that even "the slant of the light" could make it so. This seems to point to history's fragility and infinite potentiality. It is also exactly this premise which inspires the existence of Mantel's narrative overall. The text seems to sug-

gest that in history, both fictional and factual, all is made possible by circumstances big and small, by an assassination or by the play of the light.

Despite this continued popularity of alternative history, some authors, and specifically some nations, seem less comfortable portraying their history in ways which may be deemed frivolous. Such may be the case with South Africa's literary landscape. This may be so given that, more than twenty years after the inception of its democracy, the country continues to struggle to negotiate its traumatic past. In an attempt to gain a semblance of the racial dynamics of the nation, Derek Hook, in his *(Post)apartheid Conditions*, draws on various psychoanalytic theories, particularly the work of Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich who speak of the inability of a post-war Germany to mourn the downfall of the Third Reich. Hook believes that the work of Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich may be of value in constructing a framework of understanding South Africa's own present, as he discovers similar phenomena evident in the collective postapartheid psyche. He argues that in postapartheid South Africa, "Such losses [of an oppressive regime] remain unspeakable for … a nation whose founding definition relies precisely on the repudiation of all that apartheid signified. Apartheid is not an object over which grief can be authorised" (167). As in post-war Germany, for Hook there is no space in which present South Africans can find comfort in the memory of their failed past. There can be no grieving over this selectively beneficial establishment with which past South Africans identified because present South Africa cannot celebrate it in its current context. Interestingly, for Hook it is both white and black South Africans who express this inability to mourn their shared past, as both, to varying degrees, may identify with a past for which they share the burden of "unprocessed losses" (168). Neither group can sympathise with a past for which subjugation and unjustified dominance were its defining characteristics.

Brock and Truscott, whom Hook also sites, make a similar point regarding this inability to mourn. They state that present South Africa has, rightly, based its identity on the belief that "apartheid should not be a loss at all; the end of apartheid can only be a sign of progress, and those who lament the loss of apartheid become 'the other from the past' against which the post-apartheid nation has constituted itself, the other that impedes national cohesion" (Brock and Truscott 325). In such a worldview the success of the present is defined not because of the past, but despite it. One must belong to the present fully if one is to be included amongst the majority of others who do the same. The fact that one becomes othered at the risk of looking upon a morally corrupt past with lament and nostalgia speaks to the

limited temporal identifications inherent within such a system. Or, as Hook puts it, such a paradigm "neglects the complications of the multiple symbolic … attachments … of past and present, conscious and unconscious identifications" (168). In such a mindset, in one that is closed to a profusion of past and present identities, it is impossible to identify simultaneously with both past and present to any degree, and time assumes a singularity and unidirectionality quite dissimilar to the forms of temporal plurality so celebrated by postmodernism, a form of temporality upon which alternative history relies. Indeed, some South Africans have expressed disdain at the possibility of indulging plural pasts.

In a 2013 article for the *Mail & Guardian*, Khaya Dlanga takes issue with the Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition to the country's leading party, the African National Congress (ANC), where the ANC, significantly, is also the party who, to a large extent, was responsible for South Africa's liberation. Dlanga's dissatisfaction was based on what he believes is the DA's "tenuous attempt to link itself as a party of the struggle [for liberation against apartheid]" (n. pag.). With what he feels is a gross misrepresentation of true history, Dlanga describes the DA's efforts as "laughable", and offers a brief and mocking alternative history narrative in response, inverting the colour of apartheid in the process: "It was a dark time in South Africa, a country where white people were oppressed by the racist apartheid ANC government for many years. When the DA was formed in 1912, it had the sole mandate to dismantle the systematic dehumanising of white people" (n. pag.). Dlanga continues his tit-for-tat alternative, his reversal of racial historical identities, describing how in 1955 the DA "adopted the Freedom Charter in Kliptown", and cites the 1976 Sandton (instead of Soweto) youth uprising, in which "White school children took to the streets against apartheid because the racist black ANC government forced Xhosa as the medium of instruction in all schools" (n. pag.). The narrative ends with a description of how the "DA became the first democratically elected government in South Africa in 1994 after the release of political prisoners in the late 1980s and early 1990s" (Dlanga n. pag.).

If there is a sense of whimsy in Dlanga's narrative it is meant ironically. The author ends his essay with a plea to his readers to "keep history honest. History is not a fantasy we wish could have been" (n. pag.). Dlanga's view of history is decidedly singular. The past must be contained within a rigid and absolute set of prescribed narrative possiblities, and considering history otherwise may only be done with insincerity, even if such alternative considerations are narrated for morally cogent political ideals. Dlanga appears unwilling to engage with the trau-

mas of the past in ways that may be considered playful. Indeed, there is little evidence of South African authors engaging in the kind of play Dlanga opposes.

David Medalie, in his essay "The Uses of Nostalgia", finds evidence for these sentiments within numerous South African memoirs. Medalie describes memoirs by white South Africans, particularly those that depict an apartheid childhood: "The typical trajectory is of an idyllic white childhood, which, the child eventually comes to realize, is a false idyll since, unbeknown to him or her, it has been tainted all the while by apartheid. This realization is so painful and shocking to the protagonist that it may lead to a scarred, even spiritually paralyzed adulthood" (37). Like German authors after World War II, contemporary South African writers may find the idea of inverting the country's history as an artistic project that is both distasteful and unearned. Yet it is precisely this kind of play which should be encouraged if one's aim is to illustrate the dynamism and depth of a difficult and irrational time.

There are a few examples of contemporary texts that challenge South Africa's sacrilegious history, and sometimes invert our historical narrative expectations. Published in 2014, Jacob Dlamini's *Askari* traces the history of "Mr X1", the book's titular askari, a Black footman who is informally assigned the task of intelligence gathering and capturing and torturing black political dissidents of the apartheid government (1). Observing the few, though violently collaborative, ways in which white and black South Africa cooperated to uphold apartheid, Dlamini's project is one which asks the following question: "How different would the history of apartheid sound" if we were to frame that history with these painfully ironic incidences in mind? (2). Dlamini at once presents a tragic historical story both factual in its content and uncomfortable to acknowledge. In foregrounding the intentions of his work, Dlamini states that "Mr X1's metamorphosis from insurgent to counterinsurgent was not a straightforward transformation in which black became white, night became day, and wrong became right" (2). *Askari* certainly does not dismiss the nation's history, it does not invert it, but, as with alternative history, it forces us to consider other ways in which we may conceive of our shared past from a postapartheid South African vantage point.

Another text which performs a similar function is South African journalist Ferial Haffajee's *What if there were no Whites in South Africa?* Deceptively, as stated in the preface, this 2015 work of nonfiction is not an alternative history (Haffajee ix). Haffajee does not consider erasing South Africa's colonial past, or undoing its institutionalised racism, as may be expected from such a title. Instead,

the text focuses on the perceptions and misconceptions of black struggle within contemporary South Africa, and the country's perceived levels of continued white dominance: "My thesis is not to diminish or compact the equality of voice of white South Africans, but to highlight a narrative I find both interesting and disturbing; it is a false consciousness constructed out of our past" (Haffajee 18). While perhaps sometimes overstating the level of progress evident in postapartheid South Africa throughout her work, Haffajee, like Dlamini's text, serves to operate within the confines of, and project, South Africa's history. In so doing, she offers a reinterpretation of the past not through remodelling it (as is the case with alternative history) but rethinking it. It is perhaps encouraging that there are at least a few current examples in South African writing that are willing to challenge the idea of a singular past without resorting to a thoughtless historical denialism. But to observe the specific temporal play witnessed in alternative histories and other postmodern texts, we cannot concentrate on contemporary texts, but must look further back into South Africa's literary past.

South African historian Arthur Keppel-Jones is one such author who has demonstrated the kind of play with time and history which attempts to enlighten the present through counterfactual history. Not strictly an alternative history, it resembles Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, in that it looks forward from the present moment rather than back, anticipating what history may eventually be told from the early 1950s onwards. Because of this, Keppel-Jones' text is not so much an alternative history as it is an alternative future. There are also tonal overlaps between Lewis and Keppel-Jones' works: both authors depict future versions of their respective nations that are distinctly dystopian. Lewis writes of America's fall into fascism, and Keppel-Jones describes a South Africa not dissimilar to the country's very real apartheid history. There is also evidence that the two texts hold similar positions on history and the assumptions of history's inevitability. In his "Introduction", Keppel-Jones refers to the same cliché phrase used as a title in Lewis's book: "*It can't happen here*" (n. pag.), demonstrating, like Lewis, the moment before one realises that history does not submit to an assumed prescribed trajectory.

The book's title, in full, is *When Smuts Goes: A History of South Africa from 1952 to 2010 First Published in 2015*. It was really first published in 1947. The text, therefore, aims to narrate the likely outcome of a South Africa in which then-Prime Minister Jan Smuts is no longer in power. The book's opening chronicles South Africa's history from 1652 to the point at which Smuts loses his position. The year

1652 marks the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, from whom Keppel-Jones traces South Africa's Afrikaner dominance to the then-present by way of explaining Smuts's defeat. One may assume that the author's detailed chronology of South Africa's white settler history may be used to extrapolate inevitable outcomes. But this reading would be to ignore the author's introductory remarks regarding the misuse of history as a text whose purpose is to project likely futures that fit comfortably into one's preconceived beliefs about the flow of time. In other words, it would be to undermine the significance and meaning of Kepple-Jones' introductory phrase "*It can't happen here*". What the author, simply, demonstrates in his text is one of the likely narrative consequences to which South Africa's history seems to point.

All names and characters referred to after Smuts's defeat are fictitious, and it is Commandant-General Jukskei who succeeds Smuts. And so it begins that Jukskei comes to increase the power and influence of the Nationalist Party. In real history, it was the Nationalist (or National) Party who was the political organisation infamous for institutionalising racial segregation. This, and much more, follows in Keppel-Jones' book. Other political organisations, especially those with communist leanings (11), and those that serve the interests of, and are led by, black South Africans (44-45) are disbanded and made illegal. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Professor Obadja Bult assumes the country's highest position (63), continues to oppress black South Africans, and violence against white South Africans increases (43). We also witness the formation of the "Elders of the Ethiopian Zion", an organisation intent on fighting and defending against white supremacy through black-led militarisation (43). Around this time, South Africa is no longer part of the Commonwealth and the government enforces the "Official Language Act", which enforces Afrikaans as "the sole official language of the State" (57), particularly in schools (58).

Keppel-Jones' imagined South Africa continues as he writes that by way of sanctions, in the 1970s America influences the International Monetary Fund to decrease the price of gold, a mineral in which much of South Africa's wealth was embedded (121). And in 1977, with Russia desiring to spread its international influence, and with Bult's government in violation of United Nations human rights laws, America, Russia, and Great Britain begin their war with South Africa (134). On 23 August of the same year South Africa is liberated (166), and shortly thereafter the country experiences its first "colour-blind" elections (168). In 1989, after a long period of nation-building, the African Progressive Party governs the country under the leadership of Lincoln Mfundisi (182). In the years that follow, South Af-

rica's leaders fall from grace through a morally dubious abuse of power for the purpose of simply gaining more power: "Corruption became under the third republic the main road to riches, and one got to this road by way of official jobbery" (186). In the 2010s, the country falls victim to a plague, exacerbated by the inferior infrastructure set in place by corrupt leaders (200).

At its closing, the narrator offers a meditation on what may be gleaned from the narrative:

> There are many people still living in the Republic whose memory takes them back to the period with which this history opened. How many of them, one wonders, are able to see the events of those sixty years as a logical series, every change the necessary consequence of those that had preceded it? How many, as they let their minds wander over the past, can remember the crossroads and signposts where their national ox-wagon took the wrong road though another road was available? (202)

The narrator assumes a double temporality. Just as in alternative histories, Keppel-Jones' alternative future demonstrates how both the time of the text and the time of the reader is susceptible to several temporalities. It would be a mistake to assume that Keppel-Jones offers these words in the extract above as an indictment of history's ineluctability. It is precisely the author's description of history as a "crossroads" which demonstrates his willingness to concede that his narrative is among one of many histories South Africa may choose. His narrative simply acts as a warning against the dangers of one of the worst possible scenarios, one which was not too far off the mark of history as we have come to know it.

Real history shows that all of the above occurs, more or less, as predicted. The National Party successfully extended its white supremacist policies into South Africa's media, education, and economic sectors; with the assistance of international pressures, Afrikaner nationalism was successfully overturned by a magnanimous black struggle stalwart who assumed leadership in the country's highest office towards the latter half of the twentieth century; and relatively soon after democratic freedom was reached, South Africans became increasingly embittered by their liberators' nepotism and greed after having entrusted their leaders in positions of state authority.

Certainly, it is remarkable that there is any overlap between Keppel-Jones' fiction and the reader's lived history. Yet if we are to assume the position of a pedantic reader, we would see that, fact for fact, specific details do not align with

the history in which the reader resides, particularly history now as we view it in 2017. Readers in postapartheid South Africa will know that the National Party does not take over in 1953, but in 1948; more than one hundred thousand English-speaking White South Africans do not emigrate (or trek) out of the country during the 1950s, but remain; and 1970s America was defined not by its conflict with South Africa, but with Vietnam. It would certainly be incredible if Keppel-Jones offered a narrative perfectly aligned with what was to be, but it would be unfair to expect such a feat of this or any author. This is especially true given how relatively far into South Africa's future Keppel-Jones projects, and it would also be to miss the point. To appreciate his project means to read *When Smuts Goes* with a light touch, to read it for its more sweeping significance. Our appreciation of the text's futural interests must be done from afar.

By linking the coincidences between real history and Keppel-Jones' imagined future, exercised with a degree of generosity, we recognise the author's skill at illuminating on the pattern in the warp and weft of time. We also recognise that future readers' agency and participation in drawing these links are vital in understanding such a reading of the text. Yet of greater interest is Keppel-Jones' disruption of the orthodox historical narrative, and our realisation that such a disruption allows readers to question the value placed in certain common tropes of the mode. Through Keppel-Jones' witty manipulation of time, we understand that the histories and historical identities we generate need not attach themselves to a sclerotic temporality, and much the same may be said of how alternative history texts may be received.

There are currently only a handful of examples in South Africa's literary oeuvre that exemplify the kinds of temporal play enacted by many postmodern texts, and alternative histories in particular. Yet it is precisely this form of play, one specifically defined by its deliberate retelling of history as we know it, which presents opportunities that more conventional historical narratives may lack. To discourage or limit thoughtful play would be to make simple a history that is appreciated and studied precisely because of, and not despite, its complexity.

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