

Livia Szélpál

The Fantastic Sides of Alternative History through Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*

Whatever is anachronic is obscene. As a (modern) divinity, History is repressive, History forbids us to be out of time. Of the past we tolerate only the ruin, the monument, kitsch, what is amusing: we reduce this past to no more than its signature. (Barthes, 177)

One afternoon I was looking through the library bookshelves for something to read, and pulled out Philip K. Dick's book *The Man in the High Castle*. Previously I had read some blurbs about this novel; I remembered that the plot took place after World War II and I was certain that it was not to my taste. A kind of mind and heart debate is always fighting in me whenever I encounter the history of World War II. The mind of the historian knows that it is our human duty and moral obligation towards the victims of the war and *Shoah* to study and shed light on the horrors, injustice and tragedies of the slaughter because we have to remember and preserve the crimes of the war in our collective memory so as to not let them happen again. Yet the heart of the woman always shies when it has to face the harsh and brutal facts and wants to run away from this world of injustice since one cannot really understand how the Holocaust could have happened; it cannot be explained rationally, it resists representation, it is outside history (Kisantal, 32). When I looked at the title *The Man in the High Castle*, the first thing that came to my mind was the mental image of Hitler in the *Berghof*, the house in the Bavarian Alps which served as both his headquarters and his chief residence during World War II. Once I opened the book and read it carefully "the man in the high castle" turned out to be a fiction writer in the novel and Hitler was only mentioned as a senile old chap with syphilis of the brain. This was my first encounter with the genre of alternative history.

Alternative History as a Genre

The Man in the High Castle published in 1962 is more than a science fiction novel; it presents an alternative history after World War II. The plot is set in the United States, 15 years after the Axis Powers defeated the Allies in World War II and the U.S. submitted to German and Japanese military occupation. The novel takes a real historical event, World War II, and then makes a detour from 'real' history by creating a different scenario about the future.

Alternative history is a genre of speculative narrative representation and belongs to the field of unconventional history.¹ The definition of unconventional history is problematic and highly relative, as Brian Fay argues; "one can be unconventional only in relation to something that is conventional" (1). In this way, Fay – in the absence of a more precise term – describes and de-

¹ See, for example, *History and Theory*, 41. 4. Theme Issue 41: "Unconventional History." (Dec., 2002): 1–144; Szélpál Livia, "A történelem jövője: bevezetés egy nem hagyományos történetírás (unconventional history) elméletébe," *Aetas* 22. 1. (2007): 135–146.

finds the unconventional way of historiography *vis-à-vis* the canon of academic history. Exploring the unconventional ways of history writing, for instance in the form of alternative histories, has the potential to deepen our knowledge about historical representation, find new conceptual resources and shed light on the limits and strengths of academic history (*ibid.*). In this sense, History is not universal, not something that bears absolute meaning that can be reached by empirical research, but a multiplicity of polyphonic histories. Of course, unconventional history sounds like a contradiction in terms, but it is a rethinking of the debate about the “objectivity”, “historical authenticity”, “relation of fact and fiction”, and the “connections of the historical discipline and narrative paradigm of history” that was provoked by the linguistic turn in academic circles (Szélpál, 136). Emphasizing the urge for rethinking history became common in the 1990s. Gyáni argues that rethinking is necessary because of the changed status of historiography and the altered role of the historian and the state of art within the frames of collective memory, public history and mass culture due to the different nature of historical cognition, new perspectives of international historiography and inter- and multidisciplinary challenges (Gyáni, 272).

Alternative history derives largely from historical facts, science fiction, the historical novel, and the fantastic. Alternative history is also depicted by other names such as *allo-history*, *counterfactualism*, *virtual history*, and *uchronia*, though the most common term is *alternative history* (*alternate history* in the US; Rosenfeld, 90). In French, alternate history novels are called *uchronie*. This neologism is based on the word “utopia” (a place that does not exist) and the Greek for time, *chronos*. A *uchronia*, then, is defined as a time that does not exist.² Generally, the plots of alternative history works are set in a world in which the past has diverged from history as it actually happened; more simply put, alternative history asks the question, “What if history had developed differently?” In other words, it is a ‘what if’ approach, which deals with what might have happened if some specific event in history had not occurred or had turned out differently; for instance, what if Hitler had won World War II, if the South had won the Civil War or the American Revolution failed to happen (Rosenfeld, 90).

In academic historical circles, ‘what if’ speculation has been unpopular due to its counterfactual character. For this reason it is crucial to emphasize that alternative history does not coincide with revisionist history, which intends to rewrite history and change or ignore real historical events like the Holocaust for its own purposes. Alternative history is a kind of literary game of choices in history and a view into the psyche and collective memory of a society. To follow Hayden White, history is also a moral burden since it is always the product of human choices. In the past, history was supposed to provide some sort of training for life or to be a philosophy teaching by examples. Failing to do so, history as a state of art turned out to be practically unable to prepare men for the possible coming of any war or to teach them with its explanations and examples what would be expected of them during the war (White, 120). Historical imagination in ‘what if’ speculations can provide a way out of this dilemma.

² For more information about alternative history visit the internet website, *Uchronia* (<www.uchronia.net>, accessed January 23, 2007).

Modal and counterfactual claims in ‘what if’ speculations³ are playing with mathematical equations like this: “If some event A was the cause of event B, and B is of interest, then the counterfactual ‘Had A not occurred, B would not have either’” (Bulhof, 145). The question arises, however, what is the use of all this? Historians do use modal and counterfactual claims to identify causes and establish causal connections, to explain historical events, judgments and choices of agents in history and to highlight the importance of particular events (Bulhof, 199, 145). What makes alternative histories different is that rather than writing and creating predictions about the past, they employ *scenario writing*, a method for thinking about the future (Staley, 73). This history of the future takes into consideration the new paradigm of science and the driving forces that can manipulate the future in different directions (Staley, 79). Thus, “the goal of scenario writing is not to predict the one path the future will follow but to discern the possible states toward which the future might be ‘attracted’” (Staley, 78).

Posing counterfactual historical questions, as Gavriel Rosenfeld argues, is not a completely new phenomenon. It is inherent in our human nature to raise ‘what if’ questions in order to lament, or express our changing view about the present. Therein lies the main function of alternative histories, notably to explore the past less for its own sake than to utilize it as an instrument to comment upon the present by reflecting on an author’s hopes and fears. Alternative histories assume different typological forms depending on how their authors have viewed the present. Given its subjective character, alternative history lends itself to being studied as documents of memory, and these narratives can shed light upon the evolution of historical memory by giving voice to the concerns and fears of the present (Rosenfeld, 93). Therefore, among the topics of alternative histories are mainly crucial historical events that significantly changed the flow of history, such alternatives being the Nazis winning World War II, the American Revolution failing to occur, Jesus not being crucified, the atomic bomb not being dropped on Japan, or Hitler escaping into post-war hiding. Due to its interdisciplinary character alternative histories have appeared in a multitude of cultural representations such as novels, short-stories, films, television programs, comic books, historical monographs or internet web sites (Rosenfeld, 90). These “vehicles of memory” highlight that the essential issue in “the history of memory is not how the past is represented but why it was received or rejected” (Confino, 1390). This is also the main concern of alternative histories, to quote Confino: “Why is it that some pasts triumph while others fail? Why do people prefer one image of the past over another?” (Confino, 1390).

On the other hand, as Rosenfeld argues, alternative histories can be traced back to Antiquity, when such historians such as Thucydides and Livy wondered how their own societies would have been different if the Persians had defeated the Greeks or if Alexander the Great had waged war against Rome. As a modern literary genre, however, alternative history traces its roots back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the first allohistorical novels were published in post-Napoleonic France. Such works remained almost exceptional, however, well into the twentieth century, and few alternative histories appeared until the 1960s. Thereafter, however, “the legitimation of science fiction as a popular genre of creative expression helped boost the

³ See, for instance, Niall Ferguson ed., *Virtual History* (London: Picador 1997); or Robert Sobel, *For Want of a Nail: If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997). Sobel’s classic work in the genre of alternative history is a perfect example of non-fiction alternative history works by being framed as a “real” historical monograph. The work is full of fictionalized footnotes and bibliographical sources and tells the two hundred years of history that followed after the British general John Burgoyne’s victory over the rebel troops at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777; and of course just the opposite was true in the ‘real’ history.

fortunes of its lesser-known allohistorical offshoot" (Rosenfeld, 91–92). Then the counter-cultures of the 1960s, the rise of postmodern historiography, and political trends such as the end of socialism and the cold war eroded the power of deterministic worldviews and helped alternative history to move from the margins to the mainstream – not to mention recent trends in science such as chaos theory and information technology, which also provide a fruitful springboard for allohistorical speculation (Rosenfeld, 92).

Legitimation is also the key factor of Rosenfeld's article on alternative history in the thematic issue of *History and Theory* (Dec., 2002). He summarizes and introduces to 'academic history' the genre which was previously known only among the smaller circles of alternative history fans. Although his article is thought-provoking, he focuses only on the history and ideological background of the American alternative histories and leaves open the question whether his assumptions concerning the functions, forms and topics of alternative histories are universal or culture-dependent and vary across national boundaries and over time. According to Rosenfeld, the three most popular topics in American alternative histories are the Nazis winning World War II, the South winning the Civil War, and the American Revolution failing to happen.

As Rosenfeld proposes – in a rather deterministic way by ignoring, for instance, the possibility of different forms mixing – alternative histories have generally two forms: fantasy and nightmare scenarios. *Fantasy scenarios* envision the alternative past as superior to the real historical record in order to express dissatisfaction with the present. *Nightmare scenarios*, by contrast, depict the alternative past as worse than the real historical record in order to vindicate the present (Rosenfeld, 93). In this sense, the original function of allohistorical narratives of a Nazi wartime victory was to convince American readers to support American intervention in the Second World War. Fred Allhoff's *Lightning in the Night* (1940), for instance, reinforced the sentiment that America needed to defeat the Nazis by projecting dark pictures of the consequences of failing to do so (Rosenfeld, 95).

According to Rosenfeld's scheme, the main form of alternative history scenarios changed with the ideological context. In this sense, (1) in the first three decades of the postwar era up until the early 1970s, *nightmare scenarios* dominate by depicting the alleged Nazi wartime victory in moralistic terms as creating a dystopian hell in the world. Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) is a suitable example of this scenario by presenting a dystopian image of the Nazi occupation of the United States. Then (2) in the cold war era of the 1970s and 1980s, as Rosenfeld argues, Americans feared the Soviets more than the Germans, which diminished the sense of horror and portrayed the alternative of a Nazi regime in much more normalized terms as a relatively tolerable event. In short, the alternative ceased to be regarded as a nightmare scenario and increasingly became viewed as a *fantasy scenario*. Of course, the Vietnam War, the cold war tension, the scandal of Watergate, the upheavals of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements affected the forms of alternative histories, as well. The most striking and extreme example for this period may well be John Lukacs's essay "What if Hitler Had Won the Second World War?" (1978), in which he argues "that American neutrality, by ensuring a Nazi victory, would have prevented the advent of the cold war and would have brought such benign trends as European unification under the direction of pragmatic Nazi leaders like Albert Speer" (Rosenfeld, 97). (3) After the end of the cold war *nightmare scenarios* appear again. One example is the 1995 film adaptation of *Fatherland*, written by Robert Harris, in which a brave and keen journalist (of course American in striking contrast to the British original) helps U.S. president Joseph Kennedy to give up the plans of any normalized political relations with the old dictator Hitler, in 1962, by revealing evidence of the Holocaust (Rosenfeld, 95–98).

In my view, there is one crucial element of every alternative history that constitutes the fantastic, which is the *point of divergence* as a common feature in all allohistorical speculations. Generally speaking, the alternative scenarios present pivotal events of world historical importance such as the death of great politicians, decisive military victories or defeats, the rise of crucial cultural or religious movements, and even demographic trends, such as migrations or plagues (Rosenfeld, 94). In alternative history fiction, the point of divergence is used as the starting point for extrapolation and counterfactual speculations. For instance, in Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, the point of divergence is Franklin D. Roosevelt's fictional assassination in 1933.

Another characteristic feature of fictional alternative histories, which constitutes the fantastic element in their plots, is the *point of difference*. "the thing or things that differentiate the world portrayed in science fiction from the world we recognize around us, is the crucial separator between SF and other forms of imaginative or fantastic literature" (Roberts, 6). Darko Suvin coined the term *novum* (meaning new or new thing) to refer to this *point of difference*. Thus, the common characteristic between SF and alternative history is that their plotlines are usually based on a number of interrelated *nova*, such as the futuristic technology. This *novum*, however, "must not be supernatural, but need not necessarily be a piece of technology"; it can be a different model of gender, as well (Roberts, 6–7). For instance, in the novel *The Man in the High Castle*, the technology of Germany is very advanced; air travel from Germany to the U.S. by the Lufthansa Meg-E rocket ships takes only half an hour. In the novel, Germany has even solar colonization programs based strictly on racial discrimination, that is, only a white, blond, potent Aryan can dream about taking part in this extraordinary project. Moreover, this imaginary world is on the verge of a nuclear Third World War between Japan and Germany.

Paradoxically, science fiction can be described as one of the least scientific of fictions in the sense that it owes hardly anything to the facts of experience. Unlike "conventional" fiction, "which accepts the necessities of experience as given and fantasizes from there, SF sets up fictional necessities and then obeys them" (Huntington, 348). This paradoxical freedom within a structured imperative is the crucial feature of SF that makes it possible for its various forms and subgenres, such as alternative history to be connected to other literary genres and even to sciences such as history or sociology. In Suvin's sense the portrayed utopias and dystopias can be called "social science-fictions" and many of them are "analogous to modern polycentric cosmology, uniting time and space in Einsteinian worlds with different but co-variant dimensions and time scales" (381).

The Man in the High Castle as an Alternative History

Dick's story is a *nightmare scenario* and a thought-provoking but depressing contemplation about the possible alternatives of the Nazi victory that depicts a highly dystopian narrative of the Japanese and Nazi German colonization of the U.S., the genocide of the Jews and slaughter of races, for instance, in Africa. It is an intelligent meditation on the nature of history and historicity – a quasi-philosophical work cast in fictional form: an alternative history.

Dick's fictional world is a subversive reality, where a Mickey Mouse watch is valuable, the mass production of fake historical artifacts a general phenomenon, while authentic contemporary art is not appreciated and even misunderstood. The characters simply do not understand why someone would like to make or even buy contemporary art when the supposed historicity of the artifact is what matters. In the novel, history and the value of historicity is

represented as commodity without its sublime ideas. One of the main characters, Frank Frink, of Jewish origin, is working in a factory producing fake colt pistols to be sold on the market as 'real' civil war memorabilia. In a dialogue with her girlfriend, the factory owner, Wyndham-Matson, highlights this paradox of the material reality of historicity and its relative character. He shows her two cigarette lighters by commenting upon historicity:

Look at these. Look the same, don't they? Well listen. One has historicity in it.' He grinned at her. 'Pick them up. Go ahead. One's worth, oh, maybe forty or fifty thousands of dollars on the collectors' market.' (...) 'Don't you feel it?' he kidded her, 'The historicity?' She said, '*what is historicity?*' '*When a thing has history in it.* Listen. One of those two Zippo lighters was in Franklin D. Roosevelt's pocket when he was assassinated. And one wasn't. One has historicity, a hell of a lot of it. As much as any object ever had. And one has nothing. *Can you feel it?*' He nudged her. '*You can't. You can't tell which is which. There's no "mystical plasmic presence," no "aura" around it.* (...) I'd have to prove it to you with some sort of document. A paper of authenticity. And so it's all fake, a mass delusion. *The paper proves its worth, not the object itself!*' (65–66, *emphasis mine*)

Dick's alternative history awakens a crucial question in the reader, notably whether history is just 'out there,' a collection of solid facts like the mass produced historical artifacts or if it is something indeterminable existing only in the minds and memories of people. Of course, this extreme relativism can only happen in a fictional form by transgressing the boundaries of historical discipline while highlighting the repressed creative side of historiography.

The *point of divergence* in the novel between the world of *The Man in the High Castle* and the history as it actually happened in the Rankian sense is the fictional assassination of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, which entailed fatal consequences in world history. The succeeding presidents of the U.S. were unable to cope with the the Great Depression and their isolationist policy led to the disaster of Britain and continental Europe falling to the Axis Powers in the war. The Japanese completely destroyed the American fleet in Pearl Harbor and the U.S. was conquered and divided by the Axis Powers. The Eastern U.S. was under German, while the Western States were under the Japanese. The Midwest and the Rocky Mountains remained a kind of autonomous buffer-zone. After Adolf Hitler was incapacitated by syphilis, the head of the Nazi Party Chancellery, Martin Bormann, assumed the leadership of Germany. They launched space explorations and landed on the Mars, spread and invented new technologies such as television and rocket airplanes. The Germans created a totalitarian colonial empire and continued their slaughter of races in Africa, where they killed the black African people. Meanwhile, Japan went a different way in Asia and territories in the Pacific Ocean. Their rule was also totalitarian but somehow "lighter" than the German madness. The Japanese, for instance, ceased the genocide of the Jewish population in their territories.

Similar to the cold war tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union after World War II, there was a political tension between Germany and Japan, involving an extended spy system that interweaves the plotlines of the novel. One of the turning points of the novel is when Bormann dies and Joseph Goebbels and Reinhard Heydrich compete for the office of Reich Chancellor. In the end Goebbels became the leader and his faction of the Nazi party sought war with Japan by launching Operation Dandelion, while Heydrich is the "good guy" who sent a spy (Rudolf Wegener/Mr. Baynes) to the U.S. to negotiate with Japan and prevent the war since his side of the Nazi party 'only' wants to colonize the solar system. As one character, Juliana contemplates upon their history:

He (Frank) and I could sign up for one of those colonizing rocket ships. But the Germans would disbar him because of his skin and me because of my dark hair. Those pale skinny Nordic S.S. fairies in those training castles

in Bavaria. [...] Their trouble (Germans) is with sex; they did something foul with it back in the thirties, and it has gotten worse. Hitler started it with his – what was she? His sister? Aunt? Niece? And his family was inbred already; his mother and father were cousins. They're all committing incest, going back to the original sin of lusting for their own mothers. That's why they, those elite S.S. fairies, have that angelic simper, that blond babylike innocence; they are saving themselves for Mama. Or for each other. *And who is Mama for them? She wondered. The leader, Herr Bormann, who is supposed to be dying? Or – the Sick One. Old Adolf, supposed to be in a sanatorium somewhere living out his life in senile paresis. Syphilis of the brain, dating back to his poor days as a bum in Vienna... the long black coat, dirty underwear, flophouses. [...] And the horrible part was that the present-day Germany was a product of that brain. [...] The views had infected civilization by now, and, like evil spores, the blind blond Nazi queens were swishing out from the Earth to the other planets, spreading the contamination.* (39–40, *emphasis mine.*)

The Man in the High Castle has no central plot but rotates around several interconnected storylines by telling the personal histories of the following characters: (1) a German spy (Rudolf Wegener/Mr. Baynes), (2) Mr. Tagomi, (3) Robert Childan, (4) two San Franciscan industrial workers, Frank Frink and Ed McCarthy, (5) the factory owner Wyndham-Matson and his lover, (6) Frink's ex-wife Juliana and (7) "the Man in the High Castle," named Hawthorne Abdensen, the author of another alternative history: *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*.

The plot of the novel shifts in time and space with these different storylines. Rudolf Wegener/ Mr. Baynes is a German spy and travels under cover as a Swedish merchant to meet Mr. Tagomi who is the head of the Japanese trade commission that rules the territories both economically and politically. They want to prevent a possible war, which is the ambitious intention of the ruling Nazi regime. Meanwhile, Mr. Tagomi undergoes a personal crisis and has to decide between his loyalty to the totalitarian regime and his humaneness. Robert Childan is a merchant and the main carrier of "American historical artifacts" such as comic books to the Japanese and Mr. Tagomi. He also goes through a kind of moral development by giving room, among the fake historical artifacts, to the authentic contemporary American art in his shop. Frank Frink and Ed McCarthy give up their jobs in Wyndham-Matson's factory to begin a small jewelry business and create authentic pieces of American art. Their work has a kind of supernatural effect on the Americans and Japanese who get in touch with these items. Mr. Tagomi, for instance, gets a kind of revelation from a small triangle-shaped brooch made by Frank Frink and sold by Childan while meditating upon it in a park. In the end, Mr. Tagomi indirectly saves Frank from the concentration camp by refusing to sign the order for Frank's transportation back to Germany because of his Jewish origin. Frank's ex-wife Juliana travels through the States to find and save the author of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, which is popular but banned because in it the Axis Powers lost the war. She is accompanied by Joe who becomes her lover and claims to be an Italian veteran of the war but is a Gestapo agent hired to kill the "man in the high castle" hiding somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. In the end, Juliana saves the author by killing Joe.

The two elements that connect the diverging storylines are the alternative history novel entitled *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* that most of the characters in the novel read and the use of the *I Ching* or the Book of Changes, a kind of prophecy book that most of the characters consult before making any decision. The fact that they are heavily dependant on its predictions gives Dick's novel its uncertain and discontinuous character.

The Grasshopper Lies Heavy is an alternative history within Dick's alternative history. It is a piece of cult fiction in which the Allies won the war. Although closer to actual history, the novel portrays another scenario of World War II, according to which Roosevelt survives the assassination attempt and the U.S. enters the war. In this scenario the British are the determining factor in the history of the war and win against Nazi Germany. Great Britain, still

led by Churchill, remains a colonial empire after the war. In the end, the British form a superpower with racist tensions. The author Hawthorne Abendsen is rumored to be living in exile in a highly guarded fortress in the Rocky Mountains. Thus, he is called “the man in the high castle”. The title of the book, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, is actually a line from *Ecclesiastes* (12:5), generally interpreted to refer to the infirmities of age (Rickman, 377).

Consultation of the *I Ching* features throughout *The Man in the High Castle*. Several characters, both Japanese and American such as Mr. Tagomi, Robert Childan, Frank and Juliana Frink, consult it for important decisions. The use of the *I Ching* spread through the Japanese territories of the U.S. with the ‘advent’ of Japanese colonization. As Mr. Tagomi says in the novel:

‘We are absurd,’ Mr. Tagomi said, ‘because we live by a five-thousand-year-old book. We ask it questions as if it were alive. It *is* alive. As is the Christian Bible; many books are actually alive. Not in metaphoric fashion. Spirit animates it.’ (72)

According to an anecdote, Dick himself claimed that he wrote *The Man in the High Castle* using the *I Ching* to decide on plot development. In an interview Dick revealed that he had been using the *I Ching* in his private life since 1961, “to show me a way of conduct in a puzzling or unclear situation” (Warrick, 28). In later years Dick explained the puzzling and enigmatic end of his novel by putting the blame on the *I Ching* for the ending it provided him. As he argued, “When it came to closing down the novel, the *I Ching* had no more to say. So there’s no real ending on it. I like to regard it as an open ending” (Rickman, 374).

In the novel the *I Ching* prophecies connect and interweave the personal histories of the characters. Often they get a similar prediction although they are remote from or even do not know one another. The ironic twist at the end of the novel is that the truth dawns on Juliana that Abendsen used the *I Ching* to write *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* to decide on the plot development, as Mrs. Abendsen reveals to Juliana:

One by one Hawth made the choices. Thousands of them. By means of the lines. Historic period. Subject. Character. Plot. It took years. Hawth even asked the oracle what sort of success it would be. [...] So you were right. You must use the oracle quite a lot yourself, to have known. (245, emphasis mine.)

Finally Juliana decides to ask the *I Ching* in the presence of the Abendsen couple why the author wrote the alternative history of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. The answer of the *I Ching* is that because it was the truth and it only used Abendsen to write it:

Oracle, why did you write The Grasshopper Lies Heavy? What are we supposed to learn? [...] She began throwing the coins; she felt calm and very much herself. Hawthorne wrote down her lines for her. When she had thrown the coins six times, he gazed down and said: ‘Sun at the top. Tui at the bottom. Empty in the center.’ [...] ‘It’s Chung Fu,’ Juliana said. ‘Inner Truth. I know without using the chart, too. And I know what it means.’ Raising his head, Hawthorne scrutinized her. He had now an almost savage expression. ‘It means, does it, that my book is true?’ ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘With anger-he said, ‘Germany and Japan lost the war?’ ‘Yes.’ (246–247, emphasis mine.)

This means that the history in the novel was not the result of science, politics or technology but that of a supernatural phenomenon, and their world turns out to be a fictional one. This revelation fascinates Abendsen, who compares Juliana to a daemon who will spread the truth to the world:

This girl is a daemon. A little chthonic spirit that [...] roams tirelessly over the face of the earth.’ [...] She’s doing what’s instinctive to her, simply expressing her being. She didn’t mean to show up here and

do harm; it simply happened to her, just as weather happens to us. I'm glad she came. I'm not sorry to find this out, this revelation she's had through the book. She did not know what she was going to do here or find out. I think we're all of us lucky. So let's not be angry about it; okay?' Caroline said, '*She's terribly, terribly disruptive.*' '*So is reality,*' Hawthorne said. (247–248, *emphasis mine.*)

Therefore the *I Ching* and the philosophy of the ancient Tao turn out to be the main anti-Nazi symbol which represents the perpetual changes of time and “absorbs the dualities of good and evil, light and darkness, and understands them as equally essential to creation and to life” (Simons, 266). According to oriental philosophy, transgressing the universal principles that hold together the universe is like separating yin and yang, the necessary destruction and creation, which results in division and imbalance. Paradoxically the Nazi quest for the “high castle” of the uniformly white Aryan absolute culminated in their denial of life, their dark, empire-obsessed, genocidal ruin of the earth (*ibid.*). At the end of the novel, the final *I Ching* prophecy also reveals the fact that whatever *scenario* of world history is working in any of the possible realities, the totalitarian Nazi regime could only bring disastrous consequences. This is the moral burden of our history, which is determined by human choices.

What conclusion can be drawn? The novel remains open-ended; and every answer to its questions can only be either sentimental or pathetic cliché within the literary game of ‘what if.’ Nevertheless, many characters make moral decisions that can be considered ‘correct’ ones. Juliana discovers that there is at least one ‘better’ universe and saves Abendsen’s life. Tagomi finds enlightenment by saving the lives of Frank and the spy Wegener, who saves the world from a possible world war by passing on information to the Japanese about the forthcoming German operations. Childan discovers the true value of authentic American art in contrast to the cult of the fake historical artifacts.

Alternative histories reveal the psyche of a given society, its fears, projections, and traumas. They ask those questions inherent in our human nature that cannot be asked in a “scientific” work due to the constraints of the discipline. In sum, alternative histories with their fantastic and nightmare scenarios make us think and address issues that are decisive in our reality such as technology, gender, race and history.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1990. *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments.* (1977) Trans. Richard Howard. London: Penguin.
- Bulhof, Johannes. 1999. “What If? Modality and History”. *History and Theory*. 38. 2: 145–168.
- Confino, Alon. 1997. “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method”. *The American Historical Review*. 102. 5: 1386–1403.
- Dick, Philip K. 1962. *The Man in the High Castle.* New York: Penguin.
- Fay, Brian. 2002. “Unconventional History”. *History and Theory*. 41. 4: 1–6.
- Ferguson, Niall ed. 1997. *Virtual History.* London: Picador.
- Gyáni, Gábor. 2006. “A történetírás újragondolása”. [Rethinking History]. *Történelmi Szemle*. 48. 3–4: 261–273.
- Huntington, John. 1975. “Science Fiction and the Future”. *College English*. 37. 4: 345–352.
- Kisantal, Tamás. 2006. „...egy tömegmészárlásról mi értelmes dolgot lehetne elmondani?” *Az ábrázolásmód mint történelemkonceptió a holokauszt-irodalomban* [Can Any Rational Thing Be Said about Genocide? Representation as Historical Concept in the Holocaust Literature]. Jvaskylä: University of Jvaskylä.

- Rickman, Gregg. 1989. *To the High Castle. Philip K. Dick: A life 1928–1962*. Long Beach, Calif.: Fragments West/The Valentine Press.
- Roberts, Adam. 2000. *Science Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel. 2002. "Why Do We Ask 'What If?' Reflections on the Function of Alternate History." *History and Theory*. 41. 4: 90–103.
- Simons, John L. 1985. "The Power of Small Things in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*. 39. 4: 261–275.
- Sobel, Robert. 1997. *For Want of a Nail: If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga*. London: Greenhill Books.
- Staley, D. J. 2002. "A History of the Future." *History and Theory*. 41. 4: 72–89.
- Suvín, Darko. 1972. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *College English*. 34. 3.: 372–382.
- Szélpál, Livia. 2007. "A történelem jövője: bevezetés egy nem hagyományos történetírás (*unconventional history*) elméletébe". [The Future of History: introduction to the theory of unconventional history] *Aetas*. 22. 1.: 135–146.
- Uchronia: the alternate history list. Available at <www.uchronia.net>. Accessed January 23, 2007.
- Warrick, Patricia S. 1983. "The Encounter of Taoism and Fascism in *The Man in the High Castle*." In Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander ed. *Philip K. Dick*. New York: Taplinger.
- White, Hayden. 1966. "The Burden of History." *History and Theory*. 5. 2: 111–134.