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“A Symptom of History:”

The Traumatic Form of the Alternate History

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in English

by

Taly Ravid

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Helen E. Deutsch, Co-Chair

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This project contends with an understudied literary genre: the alternate history novel. I attempt to delineate the boundaries of this literary category as scholars have come to understand them, and then push on its parameters to include works that we might not have thought to consider. I look at the alternate history as a literary form that attends to the relation between history and trauma in its various constitutions. Novels of alternate history tend to focus on the aftermath of catastrophic historical traumas, and attune themselves to the ways that such big traumatic histories beget very ordinary, individual traumas that structure and condition subjectivity. These novels understand trauma much as Cathy Caruth does, as “not so much a symptom of the unconscious,” but as “a symptom of history.” In Chapter One, I look at Philip K. Dick’s

paradigmatic example of the form, *The Man in the High Castle*, attending to its interest in the cultural status of the alternate history as a literary genre, and its correlative emphasis on reading and writing as interpretive acts that beget alternate histories and multiple worlds. Chapter Two engages Philip Roth's counterfactual sensibility, not only by looking at his very straightforward alternate history, *The Plot Against America*, but by looking at his early work on Anne Frank, and at a 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*, housed at the Library of Congress, that centers on an alternate history for this singular historical figure. In Chapter Three, I read Octavia Butler's *Kindred* as a variant of the alternate history, with all the particular ways that the genre interrogates not only our ideas about history and historical narrative or historical representation, but also how we think about and relate to the narratives that govern our own present moment. Ultimately, I argue that alternate histories, with their peculiar derangements of time and knowledge, foreground the power of narrative not only in constructing our sense of history (be it personal or collective), but also in constituting our sense of ourselves as subjects *in* history. They show us that history isn't in the past; it's an unfolding of days, a present moment to be interpreted later on, an unknowable, conditioning, durational force. They offer up ruptured histories, fractured narratives as a means and a mode of contending with the "master narratives" that still have us in their grip. They remind us that we are the stories we tell.

The dissertation of Taly Ravid is approved.

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For Benji.

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VITA

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Introduction

There's a scene in Philip K. Dick's 1962 novel *The Man in the High Castle* where the air is sprinkled with ash, "partly inorganic, [and] partly the burned sifting final produce of life"(Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 124–25). The ash rains down on a starving German boy, in whose immediate vicinity are "huge British tanks," the "stinking, quivering corpse of Berlin," "a single, vast crater of earth," and "dim, gaunt figures that…[stand] silent and then drift away"(Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 124–25). These details don't resonate with anything specific within the fictional world of the novel, but they refer us to the various iconic horrors of World War II that we know from actual history: the firebombing of Dresden, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Those historic events fictionally intermingle here, metonymically standing in for one another. The German boy who stands in the ashy air is not a part of the plot of the novel per se, he too functions as metonymy, meant to trigger real world associations of images of "survivors" that we've absorbed from Holocaust history. He is but a snippet, mere device. He's nested into a metafictional novel-within *High Castle*, a novel called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, that alerts us to the entanglement between the actual and the fictional, and that – within the diegesis – has the power to reinscribe reality.

The Man in the High Castle is a novel of alternate history. It imagines an alternate present where the Axis powers have won World War II and the dismantled United States is ruled

by the Japanese in the west and the Nazis in the east. Within this counterfactual frame, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is also an alternate history: it imagines a world, where the Allied powers, and *not* the Axis, have won the war. One of the protagonists of *High Castle*, Juliana Frink, has been so moved by *Grasshopper* that she seeks out the whereabouts of its author, Hawthorne Abendsen, and risks her safety to make a kind of pilgrimage to his suburban home. When she finds him, he reveals that he's written the text by interpreting hexagrams from the *I Ching*, and together, Julianna and Abendsen somehow become "woke" to the truth of the alternate world that *Grasshopper* depicts, that world which more closely resembles our own. It's as if, by the end of the novel, their entwined labor of writing and reading – the creative work of interpretation and communion with fiction – has actually brought about an alternate history, an alternate reality, another possible world.

The ambiguity of the novel's ending makes it hard to know precisely what Dick intended, whether multiple ontological realities within one world, or multiple phenomenological experiences of reality, or multiple worlds unto themselves. (Dick was not one to revise, hone, or clarify.) Regardless, the novel speaks to the creative forces at play in the refraction between fiction and non-fiction, as well as between the works themselves and their readers. It points to larger questions that are central to the genre of the alternate history, questions about the distinctions we tend to make between fiction and history, between the alternate and the actual, between narrative history and the realities of lived experience. It also speaks to the evocative, performative powers of fiction, and to the generative properties of criticism and interpretation in constructing the worlds we inhabit.

With this dissertation project, I'm attempting to organize the literary category of the alternate history afresh. I hope to delineate the boundaries of this particular narrative form as

we've come to understand it, and to push on its parameters to include works that we might not have thought to consider. I look at the alternate history as a literary form that attends to the relation between history and trauma in its various constitutions. Novels of alternate history generally tend to focus on the aftermath of catastrophic historical traumas, and attune themselves to the ways that such big traumatic histories beget very ordinary, individual traumas that structure and condition subjectivity. These novels understand trauma much as Cathy Caruth does, as "not so much a symptom of the unconscious," but as "a symptom of history" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5). What I think Caruth means is that both history and trauma seek to recover the past; but if history delivers cohesive narratives about it, trauma, even as it is thirsty for such narratives, also alerts us to their illusory or fictive qualities. Alternate history novels, in their antagonistic relationship to history, in their tenderness towards ordinary characters traumatized by its grip, inscribe the intersection of history and trauma.

As various postwar theories of history have shown us, history isn't the past in and of itself, but merely its representation. Historians and other narrators cannot access an event of the past in itself; we can only attend to its various residues. Trauma, too, makes itself known belatedly, less in the moment of its instantiation and more so in our prolonged and perpetual relation to the fact of its unknowability. In that it's experienced belatedly and durationally, trauma "profoundly problematizes the relation between experience and event" and resists "narrative structures and linear temporalities" (Whitehead 5). We recognize and realize trauma in our ongoing, recursive experiences that are anchored by history. But history, whether personal or collective, is constructed and made accessible only in retrospect, only from some future moment. Thus, the atemporal experience of trauma registers as a "collapse of understanding," and it effects a correlative collapse of the illusion of linear narrative cohesion. In other words, trauma

resists history. Thematically and formally, alternate histories speak to this collapse and resistance. They rupture our sense of consensual history, our narratives of progress, our linear timelines. Resonating "powerfully with the broken narratives and disrupted lives which have emerged out of the debris of…traumatic events" (Whitehead 5), the genre articulates a disjunction between historical experience and historical narrative, between how we live and how our lives get represented, between what we experience and how, and when, and by whom, our experiences are given meaning and shape. They ask what we can know, and how and when we can know it.

These novels expose the various modes of violence inherent in the worlds their characters inhabit (not to mention the world that *we* inhabit). But in their attunement to the daily lives of ordinary subjects conditioned by such violence, these novels seem to understand what Eve Sedgwick taught us in the early aughts, that the "effectual force" of the exposure of violence "reside[s] somewhere else than in [its] relation to knowledge per se" (Sedgwick 141). In other words, "the efficacy and directionality of" fiction's exposure of violence most probably won't result in political upheaval or large-scale resistance to the dominant regimes of cultural and political power. It certainly doesn't in the novels I've been reading as I've been working on this dissertation. Rather, as *High Castle* and other alternate histories make clear, the "effectual force" of our engagement with fiction — whether literary or pulpy or popular – is merely evocative. We might call it affective. But the merely evocative, can be enormously powerful.

Alternate histories, with their peculiar derangements of time and knowledge, foreground the power of narrative not only in constructing our sense of history (be it personal or collective), but also in constituting our sense of ourselves as subjects *in* history. As such, the genre might help us "find new ways to describe how we live and interact with each other," might enable "us

to reshape habits, feelings, and even social relations" (Eshel, *Futurity* 7). These novels encourage or even require a critical engagement that approaches them reparatively (to use Eve Sedgwick's term). They ask what literary knowledge does, how it is performative, and how – as critics, as teachers – we might engage without doing violence in the service of our own ideologies. They ask how the affective labor of our criticism might enact the kind of activism, both roomy and intimate, that sees and sits with whatever impasse we encounter when we acknowledge the limits of our capacity to know. Such a criticism might open up some space for a reality shift most powerful: the changing of minds.

A Brief History of Alternate Histories:

To begin, we might ask what *is* a counterfactual narrative or an alternate history? Catherine Gallagher defines it, in its narrowest sense, as "a past tense hypothetical conditional conjecture ('If it had been the case that *a* then it would have followed that *b*), which is pursued when the antecedent condition (the if clause) is known to be contrary to fact" (Gallagher, "Telling It Like It Wasn't" 12). In other words, a counterfactual text is a "what if" scenario, rooted in universally accepted, uncontroversial history—one critic calls it "consensual history"(Vest 54)—but splitting from that history at a specific and critical juncture in order to propose an imaginary alternative.[1] For instance: What if, as in Philip Roth's *The Plot Against*

[1] It is also worth noting here what counterfactual narratives and alternate histories are *not*. Catherine Gallagher offers a pithy synopsis of the different terms: "Counterfactual speculative history is NOT an attempt to convince you that historical events happened differently from the way historians now agree [they] did. In other words, it's not revisionist history. Nor is it secret history, in which some previously hidden component is revealed and added to the chain of cause and effect…Nor is it a view of historical events from some novel perspective that changes their aspect or elicits re-evaluation about whether the event was good or bad; it is not what is often

America, Charles Lindberg becomes the Republican candidate in the 1940 presidential election and defeats Roosevelt? Or, what if Robert E. Lee had won the Battle at Gettysburg? Such an imagined Confederate victory becomes the subject of an essay by none other than Winston Churchill in J.C. Squire's edited volume of 1931 entitled *If or History Rewritten*.[2]

As a generic term, the alternate history resists easy classification, and critics and scholars have generally paid little attention to the form.[3] Historian Gavriel Rosenfeld notes that the genre

called 'counterhistory,' that is, history from below or off to the side" (Gallagher, "Telling It Like It Wasn't" 12).

[2] Churchill's incredible essay of 1931 imagines General Lee having won the Battle of Gettysburg and gaining a "moral and diplomatic victory afterward…by proclaiming the emancipation of the slaves and thus forging an alliance with Great Britain"(McKnight 25). With the abolitionist Lee at the political helm in America, Churchill envisions the creation "in 1905 of the English-speaking Association, an alliance of Britain and the American nations into a single political entity that would prove powerful enough to forestall the outbreak" of World War I (McKnight 27). Churchill writes his essay from the perspective of an alternate present; he writes *as if* Lee had been victorious at Gettysburg and *as if* the English-speaking Alliance had been formed. In 1931, amidst the political turmoil of a great depression, Churchill imagines an alternate England "so rich in assurance and prosperity, so calm and buoyant," that a meditation on what might have happened had Lee *not* been victorious at Gettysburg, might "serve as a corrective to undue complacency" (Squire 259–84).

[3] There are a few exceptions, in the fields of both history and literature. Some pioneering studies include: Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* (Cambridge, 2005); Alexander Demandt, *History That Never Happened: A Treatise on the Question, What Would Have Happened If…?* (Jefferson, NC, 1993); Niall Ferguson, ed., *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counter-Factuals* (New York, 1997). Book length studies by literary scholars include Karen Hellekson's *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (Kent, OH, 2001); two German works (that have not been translated into English) by Jorg Helbig (1987) and Christoph Rodiek (1997); and two American doctoral dissertations: William Joseph Collins, *Paths Not Taken: The Development, Structure, and Aesthetics of Alternative History* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1990); Edgar V. McKnight Jr., *Alternative History: The Development of A Literary Genre* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1994). See also Johannes Bulhof, "What If? Modality and History," *History and Theory*, Number 2, 1999, pp.145-68; Catherine Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate History Novels," *Field Day Review*, Vol. 3, 2007, pp.52-65; Catherine Gallagher, "Telling It Like It Wasn't," *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 45, 2010, pp.12-25; Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "Fallacies and Thresholds: Notes on the Early Evolution of Alternate History," *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2009, pp.99-117; and Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask What If? Reflections on the Function of Alternate History," *History and Theory*, Number 2, 1999, pp.90-103.

"transcends traditional cultural categories, being simultaneously a sub-field of history, a sub-genre of science fiction, and a mode of expression that can easily assume literary, cinematic, dramatic, or analytical forms"(G. D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 3). As far as literary scholars are concerned, the form's affiliation with Sci-Fi (and the related genres of speculative fiction and fantasy) has proven persistent; alternate histories have been studied—when they've been studied at all—predominantly by scholars and fans of science fiction. Certainly, the form abounds within the realm of science fiction, and Karen Hellekson, who has written the only book-length study of alternate history novels to date, claims that "the practical reason that the alternate history is classified as science fiction is simply that the authors of alternate histories tend to be established science fiction writers" (Hellekson 19). Yet even noting just two such disparate figures as Philip Roth and Winston Churchill might indicate that this isn't entirely the case.

Scholars who've studied alternate histories—also called allohistories (from the Greek root "allo" for "other" or "altered") and uchronias (a temporal play on the no place/every place of utopia[4])—all give similar accounts of the form's genealogy, tracing the first instance of counterfactual thinking to antiquity. In Book IX of his Roman History, Livy engages in counterfactual speculation as a narrative tool with which to extol the virtues of his own contemporary Rome. His motives instantiate, from the genre's inception, what will become one of its hallmarks: that its concerns are inherently presentist, and that it relates anachronistically to

[4] Science Fiction critic Gordon Chamberlin coined the term "allohistory," used mostly as shorthand (Waugh and Greenberg). Jorg Helbig introduced the term "parahistory," but the most common term is "alternate history," used by critic Darko Suvin to refer to works "that address contemporary social issues in the context of a fictional culture" (McKnight 3).

its own time, using the (alternate, fictional) past in order to comment on the (actual, lived) present.

In 1823, Livy comes up again when Isaac D'Israeli (the father of Prime Minister Benjamin D'Israeli) publishes an essay entitled "Of A History of Events Which Have Not Happened," considered by critics to have introduced the genre of the alternate history into the literary world. D'Israeli speaks at length about Livy in his essay, recommending the use of "counterfactuals in military history precisely for their ability to present new perspectives on facts…and to wean people from believing that the fortunes of war are decided by supernatural powers, be they interfering classical gods or the special providences of Christians" (Gallagher, "War, Counterfactual History, and Alternate-History Novels" 54). In other words, D'Israeli argues that the extent to which counterfactual thinking puts weight on chance and possibility, it breaks with the concept of divine decree, so that a concept like manifest destiny begins to look less like providence and more like a marriage of accident and enterprise. Catherine Gallagher suggests that D'Israeli's work "places counterfactualism at the heart of modern [historiography], in which secular contingency replaces providential necessity" (Gallagher 54), but she does not attend to the fact that D'Israeli published his allohistorical essay in the second volume of a series he called *Curiosities of Literature*. His title assigns counterfactual speculation to the realm of literature, rather than historiography, and relegates it to the margins by codifying it a "curiosity" (Disraeli).

As far as the critical consensus goes—aside from a small cluster of counterfactual texts that appeared throughout the 19th century, and with the exception of isolated instances in the 1930's (such as C.J. Squire's *If or History Rewritten*, which included the aforementioned essay by Winston Churchill)—it was not until after the Second World War that alternate history novels

began to appear en masse in America, mostly as popular off-shoots of science fiction. As such, critics generally consider the alternate history to be a postwar genre. Even as every study traces the form's roots back to Livy, the consensus seems to be that its "proliferation in the late twentieth century has been spectacular" (Gallagher 13). Indeed, the numbers make for an impressive comparison when we consider the handful of counterfactual texts published before World War II and the something like 300 titles (one critic's conservative estimate) published since 1960.[5]

Of these, the most notable of the mid-century Sci-Fi offshoots are Dick's *High Castle* and the novel which influenced it: Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*. Published in 1955, *Bring the Jubilee* is a time-travel novel set in an alternate, impoverished 1950's America that is ruled by rivals: the German Union and the Confederacy (which had won the Civil War). The time-travel element of the *Bring the Jubilee* introduces the notion of multiple, possible worlds, symbiotically entangled, each contingent upon what happens in the timeline of the others. Conceptualizing the effects of time-travel on the historical past and the immediate present raises questions about the precariousness of history's unfolding, and also brings into focus the way that we humans, with our limited faculties, experience and organize and represent our lived experience of time. Both *Jubilee* and *High Castle*—exemplary of several novels they serve here to represent—respond to the insidious traumas of WWII, to the daily social condition of living in a Cold War culture, and to the critical time of transition in racial and sexual politics at the dawn of the Civil Rights Era, when "amidst American's guilt, fears, anxieties, consciousness of gross racial injustice, continuing wars and constant alerts at home about how to protect themselves from the nuclear

[5] After 1950, the number of titles becomes truly impressive—too many to name. For a comprehensive list, see the website *Uchronia* (http//www.uchronia.net).

genie they had let out of the bottle, it was difficult for many to realize that they were supposed to be in a period of peace and prosperity" (Gallagher 65).

It's worth noting here that around the mid-century — alongside Cold War anxiety about mutually assured nuclear destruction — destabilizing developments in quantum physics and quantum mechanics (staples of Sci-Fi intrigue) were pointing towards universal laws governed by indeterminacy and chaos, thus lessening the appeal of deterministic explanations of history. These scientific theories prompted historians like Niall Ferguson to grant new respect to counterfactual speculation, and "embrace something known as 'chaostory.' Such an amended notion of history," he argued, "would aid our understanding of historical causation by considering the probability of plausible alternatives to the real historical record" (Rosenfeld 8). Certainly, in accordance with science fiction's inherent relation to various scientific disciplines, this literary category takes up with (often zany) enthusiasm, the mind-bending questions that, by mid-century, quantum physics was asking about the nature of ontological reality. It's no wonder, then, that critics tended to assign the genre of the alternate history to science fiction. As David Pringle writes in his *Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction: Science Fiction A-Z*, alternate histories and science fiction come of age around the same time: in the 1950s (Pringle ix–x).

But what happens if we uncouple the form from its connection to science fiction? Or if we push a little on that umbrella category? After all, if science fiction defies the literary realist mode, it does so in the interest of pointing at the way our world is framed, and then pointing beyond it. It asks us to consider an alien point of view, which ultimately serves to de-naturalize our own. Science fiction is also an unwieldy literary category, encompassing both fantasy and speculative fiction, as well as dystopic and satiric works (Orwell, Bradbury, Vonnegut, LaGuin, Butler), and running the gamut from the pulpy (Heinlein, Dick, Crichton) to the avant-garde and

highly literary (Barthes, Borges, Pynchon, Mitchell, Ishiguro). By1972, critic Darko Suvin had introduced a broader and oft-quoted definition of science fiction: "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin xx). One might argue that generally speaking such a definition describes most (if not all) of literature and that, to say the least, Suvin's sense of "formal device" leaves quite a bit of room for specificity.

Nonetheless, I'd like to hone in on the idea of estrangement as a primary thematic and formal concern of the alternate history. The term is terribly broad. It registers across the wide spectrum of psychological alienation, physical exile, various forms of alterity and otherness, and temporal or spatial dislocation. Aesthetically it connotes the uncanny (the familiar having become estranged), and it relates to any de-naturalizing effect that narrative self-reflexivity might produce. Traumatic narratives are narratives of estrangement as well. What happens if we think of alternate histories – whether or not we align them with Sci-Fi – as a form of trauma fiction? What might we learn? What happens if we think of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* in this way, for instance? Or of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*? Much in the vein of more straightforward examples of the alternate histories, each of these works, in its own way, asks what might have been and what is now. Each "question[s] accepted notions of time and space, rupture[s] linear movement" (Hellekson 5), forces an intermingling of disparate temporalities, and foregrounds the power of narrative not only in constructing our sense of history (be it personal or collective), but also in constructing our sense of ourselves as subjects in history. Each, in its way, is about traumatic histories, about atemporal experiences of time, about how the traumatized "carry an impossible

history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5).

Traumatic Histories; Traumatic Forms

I'd like to propose that the sudden cohesion of the genre of the alternate history after World War II corresponds, in part, to a more general postwar intensification of literature's concern with self-reflexivity and metafiction, and to the rupture in philosophical thinking after the Holocaust, which Alain Badiou describes as the "heart" of the twentieth century (Badiou), and Maurice Blanchot as the *absolute* event of history (Blanchot). Writing about the literature of the postwar era in her seminal work about postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon ascribes the term itself (as well as the period concept and the myriad discursive forms it designates) to Jean-Francois Lyotard's feeling that modernity had been "liquidated by…a history whose tragic paradigm was the Nazi concentration camp" (Hutcheon 24). Gavriel Rosenfeld writes that the alternate history coheres when it does, in part, because its anti-deterministic approach to history attends to the "progressive discrediting of political ideologies in the West since 1945," and to postmodernism's "rejection of all totalizing 'metanarratives in the 70s'" (G. D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* 6).

Various postwar theories of history have proposed that narrative histories do not (cannot) represent the actual world, but only the bits and pieces that historians, archivists, and other narrators have sought to uncover, interpret, and hold together cohesively.[6] "As English speakers,

[6] Various postwar theories of history speak to the distinction between the actual past and its representation, and to the social construction of history: F.R. Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago UP, 1995) (Ankersmit and Kellner); Paul Ricoeur,

we tend to lose sight of the fact that there actually is a distinction between history—as that which has been written/recorded about the past—and the past itself, because the word history covers both things" (Sturrock 56). Hayden White famously brought this linguistic elision to light in the 1970s by chastising "those historians" who "fail to recognize that every historical discourse contains within it a full blown, if only implicit, philosophy of history" (White, *Tropics of Discourse* 126–27). White — like Rorty and Oakeshott, and other thinkers influenced by hermeneutic philosophy after the linguistic turn — emphasized "the rhetoric of historical writing, the non-reducibility of historical narrative to a sequence of 'facts,' and the degree of construction that is involved in historical representation" (Little). Historians "go about their work" in ways that are "epistemologically, methodologically, ideologically, and practically positioned" (Jenkins 26); the histories they produce, then, must also be historically conditioned. For White, a "philosophy of history" brings the entire "conceptual apparatus by which facts are ordered in the discourse to the surface of the text, while history proper (as it is called) buries it in the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device" (White, *Tropics of Discourse* 127). History is "a shifting discourse," writes Keith Jenkins. "Change the gaze, shift the perspective and new readings appear" (Jenkins 12).

The unprecedented horrors of the war were, in a word, traumatic. They were incomprehensible, inassimilable, and seemingly unrepresentable; literature's response was to

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Memory, History, Forgetting (Chicago UP, 2004) (Ricœur); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1973) (White, *Metahistory*); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton UP, 1980) (Rorty); Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History*, Vol. 5, 1966, pp24-47) (MINK); William Outhwaite, *Understanding Social Life: the Method Called Verstehen* (England, Jean Stroud, 1986) (Outhwaite); Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Harvard UP, 2002); Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (Routledge, 1991) (Jenkins)

shatter any illusion of representation as direct access to historical reality, and to foreground metafictionally the ways in which narrative itself constructs that very illusion. In other words, if we'd collectively mistaken history for the actual past, if we'd mistaken narrative for ontology, the postwar mistrust of totalizing narratives produces the kind of "writing which consistently displays its conventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice, and which thereby explores the problematic relation between life and fiction" (Waugh 4). Hutcheon describes such postwar fiction as simultaneously "metafictional *and* historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this "paradoxical beast" from traditional historical fiction, she labels it historiographic metafiction, which Mark Currie later describes, quite simply, as "self-conscious fiction which raises questions about the knowability of the past and its representation in fictional form (Currie, *About Time* 45).

To that effect, of course, in representing the fictional as the actual and eliding the distinction between the two, an alternate history like *The Man in the High Castle* seems to fall squarely under the umbrella of historiographic metafiction. But perhaps we might call it an extreme subspecies: *counter*historiographic metafiction. The added twist lends the counterfactual novel that inherently estranging quality: by marking and blurring (or marking *by* blurring) the line between the historical past and its fictionalization, alternate histories always already denaturalize our point of view. Frederic Jameson writes that, as a genre, science fiction "entertains a dialectical and structural relationship with the historical novel—a relationship of kinship and inversion all at once." If the "historical novel 'corresponded' to…a sense of history in its strong modern post-eighteenth century sense, science fiction"—and the alternate history specifically—"corresponds to the waning or the blockage" of that strong sense of history, "to its crisis and paralysis" (Jameson 284). In their tendency to use the alternate in order to comment on

the unfolding of the actual, counterfactual novels emphasize the breakdown of the distinction we tend to make between the imagined and the real, between the possible world and the actual world. But alternate histories, even as they make it transparent, also depend upon the opacity of the distinction in order to derive their narrative punch. As such, they force a confrontation with the very tensions inherent between lived experience and narrative, undoing our sense of actual history even as they play on it.

Such counterfactual reframing inscribes and insists on an inherently traumatic relation between the fictional world and the actual present. It explores the problematic relation between "structural and historical trauma without simply collapsing the two or reducing one to the other" (LaCapra 85). If historical trauma designates or can be derived from a "dated historical event" (and its social, political specificities and legacies), structural trauma speaks to the mode of its expression and representation; its "status is more like that of a condition of the possibility of historicity (without being identical to history…)" (LaCapra 84). As a literary form, by honing in on the traumatic intersection of the fictional and the actual, the alternate history helps us to think about "the inchoate experience of living through what has and has not happened, what may or may not be" (Nersessian 311).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, contending with his bafflement about the nightmares of soldiers returning home from World War I, Freud—who could not reconcile such nightmares with his dream theory—finally understands trauma as a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world," as an experience so extreme that it is always already inassimilable to consciousness (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). He explains the soldiers' nightmares as instances of traumatic repetition, as the psyche's continued attempts to grasp or to master the very unknowability of the traumatic event. Necessarily becoming part of the traumatic

experience, the various occurrences or utterances of such traumatic repetition are merely referential: they gather momentum and meaning with each metonymic iteration, recasting and reinforcing and reinventing a trauma that is simultaneously always already and never quite experienced. Traumatic memory, "as Freud recognized" and as Michael Rothberg points out, is "primarily an associative process that works through displacement and substitution; it is fundamentally and structurally multidirectional" (Rothberg 12). Marked by a latency, by an out-of-synchness with itself, the structural experience of trauma is in excess of time and place and history, in excess of either the purely real or the purely hypothetical; trauma names less a singular, self-contained moment or event than a subject's particular and continued relation *to* that moment or event.

Part of the continual, durational experience of trauma has to do with belated apprehension. Whether describing a catastrophic historical event (like the dropping of the bomb), or the aftereffects of such a catastrophe (which may assert themselves days or years or entire generations later), structural trauma inheres in the jarring experience of coming into knowledge too late. Bound up in the recursive traumatic relation between the subject and the primal event is a relentless anxiety about having *missed* something, having not seen it coming, having *not known* in the first place. In a sense, a traumatic experience causes "conventional epistemologies to falter" (Whitehead 5), thus inaugurating a general unease about any given present moment, the meaning of which isn't immediately knowable, but which will be determined only later, retrospectively, in the future. This traumatic anxiety takes on an atemporalizing structure that we might understand as a kind of retrospective projection.

In literary terms, this mechanism takes the form of prolepsis, which structures the grammar of the alternate histories I explore in this project. We tend to think of narratological

prolepsis quite simply as a flashforward, but "lepsis," from the Greek "lambano," refers to taking or grabbing, holding or seizing. And prolepsis— "pro" meaning before or in front of—more literally refers to a suddenness, to the intrusion of something before its suitable time. As a literary structure, prolepsis becomes a temporal term. For Mark Currie, it marks "a kind of time experiment that actually installs retrospect within the present, as the anticipation of retrospection"(Currie, "The Novel and the Moving Now" 324). In other words, prolepsis allows for the recognition of the present as past, in the sense that, in the future, the present *will be* the past. Such a recognition alerts us to the ways in which future representations of the present will retrospectively determine its meaning. Such structural prolepsis—much like structural trauma—resonates with Fredric Jameson's definition of "historicity" 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 historical perspective" (Jameson 284). In other words, the proleptic narrative voice that conjoins the "present moment to a future one from which it will be viewed in retrospect," also jars us into a "perception of the present as history." Such an estranged, atemporal perspective—which seems to me to describe the project of the counterfactual writ large—produces an affective experience that Currie calls a *depresentification*: he describes it as a "process that takes the present and divests it of its presence" (Currie, "The Novel and the Moving Now" 322), thus conjuring for us an uncanny (traumatic) encounter with its very unknowability.

Narratively speaking, in its relation to traumatic anxiety about belated apprehension, prolepsis functions as a kind of paradox, simultaneously relieving and re-living trauma. On the one hand, a proleptic intervention reveals or inscribes a definitive diegetic future. It tells us precisely what's going to happen, or, more correctly—seeing as the narrative has already been

written, its future already an event of the past—a proleptic intervention exposes what *will have happened already*. As such, it grants a reprieve from unknowability. At the same time, in its collapse of narrative time, prolepsis *defers* knowability (from a present moment to a future moment). As such, it functions as representative of traumatic experience in literary form, attending to the repetition compulsion, to the attempts to apprehend the primal event in the first place (or to history's continued and repeated attempts to narrate "accurately"). Traumatic expression inheres in repetitions and retroprojections. Prolepsis, as a kind of temporal loop that anticipates retrospection, seeks to preempt belated apprehension but also responds to the very need for recursive return.

The *depresentification* that alternate histories conjure — by redescribing and "*re*ordering and *re*presenting" historical events — allows "us to view the past differently and…to *re*shape how we conceive of ourselves in relation" to it (Eshel, *Futurity* 8). Amir Eshel describes the "imaginative power" of a literature that "contributes to the process by which a community can reconstitute itself" (Eshel, *Futurity* 7). Such a literature—a counterfactual, proleptic literature—marks a sense of futurity. Not "the artistic celebration of modernity's technological forward thrust" as designated by Futurism, and not "the promotion of a utopian future in which…economic, social, and political contingencies are resolved in a conclusive manner" (Eshel, *Futurity* 5). Rather, futurity, as Amir Eshel describes it, "marks the potential of [such] literature to widen the language and to expand the pool of idioms we employ in making sense of what has occurred while imagining whom we may become" (Eshel, *Futurity* 5).

Delineating A Category

"True" alternate histories – those that invent a point of divergence from actual history and imagine the after-effects of such a reality shift – abound in the realm of popular science fiction in a variety of media (fiction, film, television, podcasts). But whether they are straightforward in their divergence from actual history, or more metafictionally inclined to embed their counterfactual machinations within the frame of a diegesis, alternate histories ultimately concern themselves with the traumatic unknowability of history (both personal and collective), and with the construction of narrative as a means of mastering that unknowability. I'm less interested in studying the formulaic or the mainstream within the genre, and more intent on investigating the outliers, novels that don't seem immediately, obviously to correspond to the genre of alternate history (or to science fiction necessarily), but which, upon closer examination, reveal themselves to hinge on the tropes of counterfactual or allohistorical thinking. In looking closely at the more extraordinary examples of alternate histories, I hope to say something about the proleptic grammar of these novels, the way that they write trauma, how they rupture our sense of history, and how they force us to consider the narratives that have come to shape and define our own sense of ourselves and our worlds. Once I started thinking about the genre in this vein, multiple and disparate examples of texts that fit into this category (from a range of periods, forms, geographies, and media) began to present themselves. Even narrowing the scope to texts produced in America after World War II, when the genre begins to cohere, offers quite an array. I'll offer but a few examples (that must stand for the many) in order to give a feeling for the field.

We might read Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, for instance, as a variant of the alternate history. With the dissolution of Nabokov's homeland and his own traumatic history of exile hovering in

the background, we might recognize that the point or the punch of *Pale Fire* inheres in the reader's ability to discern the difference between the actual and the counterfactual, between what has actually occurred (within the world of the text) and what is the invention of its narrator, Kinbote. The "real"—that is, the context that serves as counterpoint to Kinbote's mad and meticulous narrative (a kind of dramatic monologue in prose form)—is a joint function of the diegetic world of Wordsmith College in New Wye (which we might discern only through the filter of Kinbote's own narrative), and the poem "Pale Fire" itself. Kinbote's narrative constructs a kind of allohistorical version of the actual events of his relationship with the poet, John Shade, and with the Wordsmith community. But Nabokov's work is less interested in dualistic oppositions (true/not true) than it is in a circuit of possibilities and counterpossibilities that all bear some relation to the actual, but can never access it directly. He is interested, I would argue, in indeterminacy and unknowability, in the insidiously traumatic idea that history, is "an enigma that can only be encircled" (B. Brown, *Things* 6). He is interested, too, in the linguistic and literary processes of memory and interpretation (or misinterpretation) that metamorphose fact into fiction and back again, indefinitely.

We might look at the television's "Mad Men," which seems to me an instance of historical fiction (in that it represents the 1960's) with an alternate history at its heart. The series revolves around Don Draper, a man who has constructed an alternate history for himself in order to undo a shameful upbringing and a cowardly act during the Korean War, and to pass as a commanding ad man on Madison Avenue. The business of living as an alternate version of himself is exhausting and alienating, but it fuels his gift for selling products: his campaigns artfully defamiliarize and reframe the most ordinary objects (a Kodak slide wheel becomes a carousel of memory, for instance), imbuing them with affect and historicity, reorienting the

consuming public's relation to objects. In that the show represents the business of constructing narratives for commodities, it is really about the way the stories we tell ourselves—whether they are personal or national histories—intersect with and inform the ways that we live, the way we represent ourselves, to ourselves and to each other.

Finally, we might think about Donna Tart's *The Goldfinch*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2014, as an alternate history. Much like these other alternate histories that engage traumatically with historicity, *The Goldfinch* presents our relation to art as a kind of traumatic relation. The novel offers a counterfactual version of 9/11 by substituting a fictional terrorist attack on The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for the actual attack on the Twin Towers. Spatially, the novel is set (mostly) in a recognizably contemporary New York City, but its strange and traumatic temporality is evocative of some kind of dystopian alternate present. The novel hinges on the appearance and disappearance and reappearance of the famous Dutch masterwork, "The Goldfinch," by the artist Fabritius, deploying the painting's actual historical trajectory in the service of its own construction of an alternate history for the painting within the bounds of the text. The painting, of course, has historicity (both actual and fictional)—that historicity is precisely its power over Theo Decker, the novel's young protagonist. He cannot separate his traumatic (haunting, addictive, destructive, and ultimately redemptive) attachment to the painting from his attachment to his mother who was killed in the bombing at the museum. The attack at the museum ruptures Theo's own trajectory, too, inaugurating a series of events that turn his life into a counterfactual version of what it might have been. At the same time, the bombing forces questions about the nature of accident and fate, foregrounding the synonymous qualities of these seemingly incongruous terms.

In the aftermath of the bombing at the museum, and the ensuing itinerary of metaleptically related, more ordinary traumas (his father's death, the demolition of his childhood home), Theo is essentially left alone, splintered, unbounded, untethered, condemned to grow up and become himself, without a sense of his own life's narrative. He lives out a kind of counterlife, traveling among various alternatives. "Indistinctly governed by chance, fate, or free will," he emerges at once as a subject and as a "self made an object by circumstance" (Shostak 19). Alone in the world, Theo comes to the conclusion that "life is catastrophe. The basic fact of existence, of walking around trying to feed ourselves and find friends and whatever else we do—is catastrophe" (Tartt 767). His existential revelation makes explicit the very ordinary and yet fundamentally terrifying confrontation not only with mortality, but more importantly with meaninglessness, with indeterminacy, with unknowability. What feels catastrophic is confronting the raw, unknowability of subjectivity, of history, of reality. "I'm hoping there's some larger truth about suffering here," he says. At the same time, he feels that "the only truths that matter…are the ones that [he doesn't] and can't understand. What's mysterious, ambiguous, inexplicable. What doesn't fit into a story, what doesn't have a story" (Tartt 767).

Theo identifies with the particular captive bird that he feels must've inspired Fabritius's painting; he imagines the actual goldfinch "bewildered by noise…distressed by smoke, barking dogs, cooking smells, teased by drunkards and children, tethered to fly on the shortest of chains" (Tartt 767). And then he thinks of the painting, "The Goldfinch," in its immutability, in its constancy against history. "Glint of brightness on a barely there chain," he says, conjuring the bird. "Raised yellow streak of paint on the wing and feathers scratched in with the butt of the brush" (Tartt 672). Theo attunes himself to that force that radiates from "The Goldfinch," that force that both ruptures and consolidates the actual world. This same force drives the alternate

history as a form. For Theo, understanding this force becomes a means and a mode of surviving the catastrophe of being alive. He is heartened, somehow, by the way that Fabritius "takes the image apart very deliberately to show us how he painted it. There's a doubleness," he says. "You see the mark, you see the paint for the paint, and also the living bird" (Tartt 579). "The Goldfinch," he says—like trauma, like history, like narrative—is "the thing and not the thing." It resonates for him as "a different and much deeper sort of beauty altogether" (Tartt 579), the sort that speaks to the human condition itself.

* * *

I wanted to begin this project with a paradigmatic example of an alternate history in order to begin to demarcate its formal and thematic elements. In Chapter One, I'll look at Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, attending to its interest in the cultural status of the alternate history as a literary genre, and its correlative emphasis on reading and writing as interpretive acts that beget alternate histories and multiple worlds. The novel, in its preoccupation with the objects of American history as well as its connections to mid-century developments in quantum physics, takes up questions of historicity and world-making. Its investments in these questions, though, are rooted in its inscription of catastrophic historical trauma that spills over into the ordinary, daily lives of its characters. The machinations (substitutions, metonymies) of alternate history construct an analogous relation between the devastations of World War II and the ingrained, ubiquitous racism that conditioned both black and white subjectivity in the Jim Crow era in America.

In his review of the novel in the *New York Times*, David Itzkoff marvels at Dick's disinterest "in the machinations of the Nazi regime," and points out that the book is "more interested in a handful of unremarkable Americans—an antiques store owner, a wayward judo instructor—whose lives would most likely be as mundane and lonely had the Allies been victorious. All these characters suspect that history was not meant to unfold this way, and cannot bring themselves to engage in a world where time's arrow consistently points to their insignificance" (Itzkoff). Indeed, most of these characters turn inwards. They commune with the mysterious formulations of the *I Ching* and the allohistorical speculations of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, participating "in a remarkable circle of intertextuality that leads from historical text to fictional text and back again" (Doležel 53). While these characters cannot and do not effect political resistance or change the status of their insignificance, they make sense of their disjointed world by engaging with texts, and their interpretive acts somehow succeed in dismantling the consensual (fictional) reality they inhabit and reinscribing a new one. Their reading practices are not unlike the practice of literary criticism, where an act of interpretation itself becomes an act of reinscription, of authorship, of world making.

In Chapter Two, I engage with Philip Roth's counterfactual sensibility, not only by looking at his very straightforward alternate history, *The Plot Against America*, but by looking at his early work on Anne Frank, and at a 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*, housed at the Library of Congress, that centers on an alternate history for this singular historical figure. Most critical work that studies Anne Frank in relation to Roth's canon looks at *The Ghost Writer*, as it is *that* 1979 novel that most explicitly engages with *The Diary of a Young Girl*. In the novel, Roth imagines an alternate version of Anne Frank who has survived the Holocaust, and who is living under an assumed name in Massachusetts (she is essentially still in hiding). This alternate Anne

rejects the world's sanctification of her diary, and Roth deploys her as a kind of shield against the claims, by the Jewish community in the mid-century, that his own work would spur anti-Semitic sentiment. Roth has spoken about the Holocaust as a kind of "thematic architecture" that orients much of 1984's *Zuckerman Bound* (those are the first four books in the Zuckerman series: *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, and *The Prague Or*gy), and given Anne Frank's iconic status in American Holocaust consciousness, it is fitting that she haunts those novels, appearing and disappearing, submerged and emerging, hidden, unforgotten. But the critical conversation surrounding Roth and the Holocaust has largely ignored *American Pastoral*. It is astonishing to see how deeply the counterfactual Anne Frank is entwined in Roth's 1972 iteration of 1997's *American Pastoral*, and how deeply his early thinking about *The Diary of a Young Girl* prefigures his later work's concerns with the precariousness of history's unfolding.

In light of this early draft, I argue in this chapter that *American Pastoral* inscribes a kind of counterfactual doubling between Anne Frank and both of its protagonists, the Swede and Merry Levov. Further, looking at the novel in relation to its early iteration reveals the counterfactual sensibility at its core. In his early writing on Anne Frank, Roth addresses the fact that we read her diary proleptically, from the future, knowing her history, knowing how to fill in the blank that follows the diary's final entry. For Roth, the force that cuts off the diary becomes the force of history that is unknowable as it unfolds. In *The Plot Against America*, his paradigmatic alternate history, Roth names this force of history "the terror of the unforeseen." But this same "terror of the unforeseen" governs Levov's life as Zuckerman narrates it in *American Pastoral*, inscribing a traumatic anxiety about belated apprehension and about the precariousness of history's unfolding. Entwined with this anxiety about unknowability is an

obsessive anticipation of retrospection, a looking forward to looking back, a desire for that future vantage point from which we'll have narrative certainty. That proleptic grammar that anticipates retrospect reinscribes traumatic anxiety even as it relieves it. Haunted by Anne Frank's spectral presence, *American Pastoral*, forecasts the way that Roth theorizes our relation to traumatic history (and to his own potentially alternate history) in *The Plot Against America*.

In Chapter Three, I look at Octavia Butler's *Kindred* as a variant of the alternate history, with all the particular ways that the genre interrogates not only our ideas about history and historical narrative or historical representation, but also how we think about and relate to the narratives that govern our own present moment. Dana Franklin, the novel's protagonist, is a fiercely independent black woman writer who is married to a white man. Butler sends Dana back in time to antebellum Maryland to confront her own alternate history within the actual (while still fictional) history of slavery. I suggest that while the machinations of time travel immerse Dana viscerally in this traumatic (alternate/actual) history, they ultimately force a reckoning with with the limits of our capacity to know the historical forces that shape our narratives in our own time. When we read the novel from the vantage point of 2022, in this Trumpian era, in the wake of #MeToo, the trauma that surfaces most achingly has to do with Dana's gendered subjectivity and subjugation even within her seemingly progressive marriage to Kevin. It is a very ordinary trauma, inextricable from and in constant relation to the history of slavery; it is the "crisis ordinariness" (Berlant 5) at the center of Dana's interracial marriage. What Dana cannot see (what perhaps even Butler couldn't yet see), but what the unfolding of history allows *us* to see, is how hegemonic white privilege is blind to its own positionality, how that privilege constructs a shared version of ontology, how that's been a central tension in historiography, how it remains a central tension in our own political reality. At the end of the novel, even as it's written in and on

her body, Dana cannot know or name the ways that Kevin's white male privilege conditions her own subjectivity in the present.

As I've thought about the novels that comprise this project, I've come to think about trauma as related to but neither synonymous with nor even necessarily bound to catastrophe and its after-effects. I take my cue from Lauren Berlant, who writes that "a traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma" (Berlant 10), and from Anne Cvetkovich, who builds on Laura S. Brown's crucial formulation of "insidious" trauma, a term that speaks to the connections between trauma and systemic and "normalized" forms of oppression, whether in a family system, an educational system, a penal system, a social system, etc. (L. S. Brown 122). Without undermining the specificities of diverse lived-histories of trauma (both collective and individual), Cvetkovich sees "connections between catastrophic events and very ordinary ones" (Cvetkovich 6–7). She proposes, for instance, to "think about trauma as part of the affective language that describes life under capitalism" and she feels compelled, she writes, "by historical understandings of trauma as a way of describing how we live, and especially how we live affectively" (Cvetkovich 19). Alternate histories show us that history isn't in the past; it's an unfolding of days, a present moment to be interpreted later on, an unknowable, conditioning, durational force. They offer up ruptured histories, fractured narratives as a means and a mode of contending with the "master narratives" that still have us in their grip. They remind us that we are the stories we tell.

Chapter One:

Alternate Histories, Multiple Worlds: Estranged Realities in *The Man in the High Castle*

Set in an alternate version of 1962, Philip K. Dick's counterfactual novel *The Man in the High Castle* presents a world where the Axis powers have beaten the Allies, and the dismantled United States is occupied by the Japanese in the west and the Nazis in the east, with the "Rocky Mountain States" serving as a kind of neutral buffer zone between them. The country has been mostly cleansed of Blacks and Jews (with the exception of those few who are hiding or passing or enslaved), and while the Nazis run a dangerous, Fascist regime in the Eastern Territories, the Japanese—assuming their racial and cultural superiority to be matter of fact—preside over the Pacific States with an arrogant and condescending civility. The novel's overarching plot is a bit of a clunker: an undercover German spy conspires with a Japanese trade commissioner to thwart a Nazi plan to bomb the "Pacific States," wrest power from Japan, and take over the country. But while such convolutions of alternate history provide an important thematic framework for the novel, the real drama unfolds on a plane that is simultaneously zanier and more mundane.

There's a novel-within-the novel at work in the story; it's called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, and—within the counterfactual frame of *The Man in the High Castle*—it, too, is an alternate history. In *Grasshopper*, the Allies and *not* the Axis have won the war, and it seems the United States is not a defeated, dismembered relic of a bygone era, but a dominant world power. Despite a ban in the German territories, it achieves a massive popularity: everyone in *The Man in the High Castle* seems surreptitiously to be reading *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. Even a German bureaucrat finds himself snatching precious stolen moments with the novel behind the

closed doors of his office. “Shivering” at its “vivid” account of the fall of Berlin, he thinks to himself: “Amazing, the power of fiction, even cheap popular fiction, to evoke. No wonder it’s banned within Reich territory” (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 125).

The German ban (and the bureaucrat’s illicit thrill) mark *Grasshopper’s* powerful rhetorical subversion of the political status quo within the world of the novel. In that *Grasshopper* counterfactually reinscribes the outcome of the war, it attends to the spillover of catastrophic history into the everyday, mundane experiences of ordinary subjects *in* history. Like *High Castle* itself (like counterfactuals more generally), *Grasshopper* concerns itself with the aftermath of a particularly traumatic historical event, and with the conditions and textures of daily life (emotional, cultural, technological, social) resulting from the imagined break with history. As such, it attends to the continuum between lived experience and history-as-we-know it, between a locus of trauma and its representation. For *High Castle*’s very ordinary American protagonists, the evocative power of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* signals hope. It disrupts their de facto oppression by the Axis powers, describing for them an (alternate) world where democratic American ideals are noble and heroic, where they can recognize themselves—as Americans—as worthy and significant. *Grasshopper*’s “power to evoke” within the diegetic of *High Castle* thus foregrounds the ways in which lived experience—one’s sense of one’s own subjectivity, for instance—becomes mediated by narrative, be that narrative an alternate history, an actual history, or simply a work of “cheap, popular fiction.”

Towards the end of *The Man in the High Castle*, one of its ordinary Americans—a woman named Juliana Frink— undertakes a pilgrimage of sorts to the home of Hawthorne Abendsen, the author of *Grasshopper* (and the titular man in a high castle). Having uncovered a German plot to assassinate Abendsen, Juliana begins to suspect that the counterfactual world

depicted in *Grasshopper* is actually the true world. When she confronts him at his home, Abendsen confirms her suspicions. In an unrelated sequence of events, a character named Mr. Tagomi—the aforementioned trade commissioner who lives and works in Japanese occupied San Francisco (now known as The City of Winding Mists)—finds himself crossing over momentarily from the counterfactual world of the novel into what seems to be the actual world of 1962. The San Francisco he's come to know is all manicured parks and pedicabs, but he suddenly sees a "hideous, misshapen thing on [the] skyline. Like [a] nightmare of [a] roller coaster suspended, blotting out [the] view." Horrified, he asks a passerby what it is, and is informed, much to his confusion, that it's the Embarcadero Freeway (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 231). As it turns out, within the world of *High Castle*, the power of *Grasshopper* is not merely evocative, it is transformative; it ultimately (actually) reinscribes reality.

Cheap, Popular Fiction

The narrative punch of a counterfactual novel depends upon a metaleptic wink and nudge between reader and author about the distinction between the imagined (fiction) and the real (history). But the moment in these novels that breaks with history and posits an alternative—some critics call it "the point of divergence" (G. D. Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made*), others call it the "nexus" moment (Hellekson, Gallagher)—even as it generally emphasizes the narrative's fictionality, tends to be rooted in a contingent detail, rather than a major historical event. As such, alternate histories end up foregrounding the very breakdown of the distinction we tend to make between the imagined and the real, between the possible world and the actual world.

In *The Man in the High Castle*, for instance, the nexus moment reveals itself, in a self-reflexive turn, as the doubly counterfactual premise of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. The diegetic reality for Dick's characters is that the Allies lost the war, but they're all reading a counterfactual novel that posits an alternate history: that the Allies have *won* the war. An inconsequential character named Rita summarizes the premise of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, and her exposition of its plot reveals (to *us*, *Dick's* readers) the nexus event of the novel that *we're* reading. Rita explains:

> If Joe Zangara had missed him, he would have pulled America out of the Depression and armed it… [*Grasshopper's*] theory is that Roosevelt would have been a terribly strong President. As strong as Lincoln. He showed it in the year he was President, all those measures he introduced. The book is fiction. I mean, it's in novel form. Roosevelt isn't assassinated in Miami; he goes on and is reelected in 1936, so he's President until 1940, until during the war. Don't you see? He's still President when Germany attacks England and France and Poland. And he sees all that. He makes America strong. Garner was really an awful President. A lot of what happened was his fault. And then in 1940, instead of Bricker, a Democrat would have been elected—. (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 66)

Rita here reveals the nexus event of *The Man in the High Castle*—that Roosevelt is assassinated in Miami—and simultaneously refers the reader to our own (actual) history, or, rather, sends the reader scurrying to make sense of several names she does not recognize and cannot immediately designate as either fictional or non. Who is Joe Zangara? (His name has a slightly Sci-Fi ring to it.) What about Garner and Bricker?

A quick Google search offers historical fixity: In February of 1933, a month before his mythical first inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was giving a speech from the back

on an open-air car in Miami, survived an assassination attempt by one Giuseppe Zangara. Small in stature, Zangara couldn't see very well over the heads in the gathered crowd. He fired a bit indiscriminately…and missed. The breadth of on-line information about Zangara left me wondering if perhaps my ignorance and ensuing confusion were simply that: my own. Is the fact of Zangara's attempted assassination of FDR common historical knowledge? How immediately recognizable is the name John Nance Garner, who served as Vice President under Roosevelt for two terms, before running against him for the Democratic nomination in 1940 (with a platform that ultimately opposed New Deal deficit spending)? And what about John W. Bricker, the Republican running mate of Thomas E. Dewy, who ran against Roosevelt in 1944? It's certainly probable that Dick's readers in 1962 were more familiar with Depression era politics than I am, some eighty years later. But in terms of historical notoriety, Joe Zangara is no John Wilkes Booth or Lee Harvey Oswald. His very failure to assassinate Roosevelt renders him historically inconsequential as far as our global narrative is concerned, and, as such, he's been relegated to the margins of our collective historical consciousness.

The acute historical specificity of Dick's references (to Zangara, to Garner, to Bricker, and to countless other such minor historical actors), which brings my own historical ignorance into high relief, also assumes and depends upon that very historical ignorance in order for the text to achieve its ultimate uncanny effect. The novel destabilizes our sense of familiar, recognizable history not only by juxtaposing multiple counterfactual possibilities against one another (even the counter-counterfactual narrative in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* isn't perfectly congruent with our own, actual, history), but even more importantly, by expertly oversaturating the text with contingent historical figures and events that become indistinguishable from their fictional counterparts.

What happens, of course, is a de-naturalization, or a reframing of our sense of actual history. We are suddenly, uncannily, made aware that what we unthinkingly consider to be history is, in fact, partial and incomplete, and is a function of the narratives we have (or have not) internalized. In its refraction of actual events with counterfactual ones, in the interplay between the competing versions of history within the novel, and in its attention to the performative qualities of *Grasshopper* (the doubly counterfactual novel-within-the-novel), *The Man in the High Castle* foregrounds the mode of its own literary construction, and inscribes a traumatic relationship between actual history and the alternate world within the text. And, of course, the interplay of competing versions of history between the levels of narrative *within* the novel also speaks to the constant volley between the diegetic alternate history and the reader's actual world. In the same way that *Grasshopper* has transformative power within the world of *High Castle*, Dick's authorial emphasis on the "power of fiction" speaks metaleptically to literature's performative, affective properties outside the boundaries of the text.

And yet, Dick's German bureaucrat marvels that *even* this kind of "cheap, popular fiction" has the power "to evoke." We might understand such backhanded praise as symptomatic of Dick's own ambivalence about his genre. By 1962, Dick had made his name in the "cheap," pulp market of Sci-Fi magazines and paperbacks, most prolifically in the 35 cent Ace Doubles that offered "two twenty thousand-word novels that were smacked together cheeseburger style into one book with title covers on *both* sides. The cover art kept to classic pulp themes: bug-eyed aliens, rocket ships, strong men, and screaming women" (Sutin 90). Dick had grown up steeped in this "rich mulch" of pulp magazines like *Astounding* and *Amazing Stories* that "covered American newsstands from the end of World War I through the early fifties" (Sutin 2).

He loved science fiction fervently—in 1968, for instance, in an essay called "Self Portrait," he described the "magic" of his first encounter with Sci-Fi, when, at the age of twelve, he went looking for the magazine *Popular Science* and accidentally discovered *Stirring Science Stories* instead.[7] But despite his success in the genre, his various biographers—most notably Lawrence Sutin—describe Dick as a writer who "wanted badly" out of the Sci-Fi "ghetto" and "into the mainstream" (Sutin 3).[8] In fact, in the decade that preceded the publication of *The Man in The High Castle* and the Sci-Fi Hugo Award that came with it, Dick had published seven pulpy-looking Ace paperbacks, but he'd also written eleven novels that, in his mind, were *literary*—none (at the time) were accepted by publishers. With *High Castle*, Dick felt that "at last" he had "merged the best of the Lower and Higher Realms by telling a very serious, beautifully written story about…reality going quietly haywire. But the Higher Realm turned its head away—there was no mainstream recognition for *High Castle*—even as the Lower Realm bestowed its Hugo honors" (Sutin 4).

In 1978, a few years before his death—by which point he'd become profoundly popular as one of the science fiction greats, Dick wrote a speech he never delivered, entitled "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later." In the speech, as if speaking directly

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[7] "I was most amazed," writes Dick. "Stories about science? At once I recognized the magic which I had found, in earlier times, in the Oz books, this magic now coupled not with magic wands but with science." Incidentally Don Wollheim, the editor of the short-lived *Stirring Science Stories*, later bought Dick's first science fiction novel in 1954. (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* 13)

[8] There is critical consensus among the various Dick scholars and biographers—Patricia Warrick, Douglas Mackey, Umberto Rossi, Jason Vest, Samuel Umland, Lejla Kucukalic—that Dick wanted to be taken seriously as a "literary" writer. Kleo Mini Apostolides, Dick's second wife, for instance, told Sutin that "publishing a mainstream novel would have been [Dick's] dearest dream. Not mainstream, necessarily, just *non*-science fiction" (Sutin 86). Other friends of Dick's corroborate the sense that "he hoped to Christ he could get some serious work published" (Sutin 86).

to Jean-Francois Lyotard about totalizing narratives and "technoscience," Dick writes: "unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudorealities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not trust their motives; I do not trust their power…and it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of mind" (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* 262). Ultimately, of course, the writer constructs universes too. And Dick writes that he likes "to build universes that *do* fall apart. [He] like[s] to see them come unglued, and [he] like[s] to see how the characters in the novels cope" (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* 262). While he's describing his own interests, of course, Dick here is also speaking more generally about science fiction's tendency to expose ontology as phenomenology, to point at the way our world is framed, and then "unglue" it, forcing us to consider an alien point of view, which ultimately serves to de-naturalize our own.

By1972, critic Darko Suvin introduced an oft-quoted definition of science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin xx). One might argue that generally speaking such a definition describes most (if not all) of literature and that, to say the least, Suvin's sense of "formal device" leaves quite a bit of room for specificity. Nonetheless, I'd like to hone in on the idea of estrangement—in this case the uncanny, traumatic estrangement from history—as a primary thematic and formal concern of *High Castle* in particular and of the counterfactual novel in general.

Counterfactual Presentism

We might read *The Man in the High Castle* as a traumatic revisiting of World War II. The imagining of a dystopic alternate world in which America lost the war inscribes a kind of traumatic repetition, where various iconic historical horrors get counterfactually rewritten, reinvented, revised. Actual history seeps into the alternate world and vice versa, producing a taut, traumatic relation between past and present, and a confusion of alternate and actual: "They've got one of those camps in New York," for instance, one of "those oven camps" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 63), a German operative tells us. If a "kike" is exposed in the Pacific States, the Japanese might extradite him, and the Nazis will "gas the bugger as soon as they get him across the Demarcation Line" (63). Other details of actual history are metamorphosed throughout the text, uncannily recognizable only in their difference from themselves. The Allied bombing of Dresden, for instance, becomes the "Battle of London," where Churchill's "mass fire-bombing raids" are now cast as "terror attacks" on the "civilian populations" of "Hamburg and Essen" (82). And the Final Solution, in the novel, refers not to the Jewish Question, but to the "African Problem"—the Nazis have successfully wiped out not only European (and American) Jewry, but also the entire continent of Africa (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 25). If it had taken "two hundred years to dispose of the American aborigines," the narrator tells us, Germany has "done it to Africa in fifteen years" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 25). The narrator's reference here speaks doubly, and with awful historical resonance, conjuring for us not only the Native American genocide, but also the forced migrations of the middle passage and the legacies of slavery.

Thus, the novel's textual reproduction of structural trauma—the seamless elision of one historical catastrophe with another, the counterfactual traversal of boundaries between the

historical and the invented more generally—speaks to a traumatic continuum between the past and the present. On one level, the very fictionality of an Axis victory serves simply as a kind of wish fulfillment, underscoring our actual history and its relation to the actual present: the Allies won the war and now we're all ok (no concentration camps in New York, no destruction of the African continent). On another level, the counterfactual nightmare corresponds traumatically to the actual aftereffects of the war: the unsettled power dynamics between Germany and Japan in the novel resonate with the actual tensions of the Cold War, and the perpetual threat of nuclear war in the counterfactual world refers to a lurking, collective guilt about the bomb in our actual world. But more than anything else, in its consistent allusions to historic atrocities perpetrated by *this* country, *High Castle* grapples, too, with the multifaceted traumatic dimensions of race relations that continue to define the actual mid-century present.

In 1963, in his posthumously published *A Nation of Immigrants*, John F. Kennedy spoke of "Americans in a monumentalizing fashion as a heroic people…whose love of freedom and independence made them build a great and new democratic nation" (Behdad 95). Ali Behdad describes a "celebratory discourse of mid-twentieth century liberalism" that "idealizes the nation as a plural society of equals and as an asylum for oppressed humanity" (Behdad 95). *Grasshopper*'s doubly counterfactual narrative paints a similarly idealistic picture of the country. After spending an hour engaged with its allohistorical speculations, Juliana Frink—who, at the end of the novel, determines that the world *Grasshopper* depicts is the *true* world—declares that she feels the author's "got a lot of courage to write that book. If the Axis had lost the war," she says, "we'd be able to say and write anything we wanted…we'd be one country and we'd have a fair legal system, the same one for all of us" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 88). Rereading *High Castle* in 2020, after the murder of George Floyd and the riots and protests that followed, I

felt a sad pang encountering Juliana's counterfactual fantasy about a "fair" American legal system. In 1962—with the country still gripped by Jim Crow on the one hand and with a burgeoning national discourse about civil rights on the other—it's hard to say whether Dick's readers would have felt a similar pang. But for Dick, as we'll see in a moment, the performative, transformative qualities of literature (even cheap, popular fiction) are paramount, and the utopian vision of a liberated country that *Grasshopper* evokes for Juliana *within* the text resonates doubly in its relation to the *actual* world.

On one hand, Dick imagines an alternate reality where minority cultures are either extinct or enslaved, and so it seems likely that Juliana's fantasy about America is meant as an earnest reminder to *us*, to Dick's readers, of the greatness of our pluralistic democracy. In other words, for Juliana, a sense of what *might have been* (had the Allies won the war) evokes a longing and a hope about what possibly *could be* (one country, with a fair legal system), which is meant to resonate for us—or, at least, for Dick's readers in 1962—as what *already is*. On the other hand, Dick presents a nuanced system of racial and cultural politics between Japanese and whites in the Pacific States that refers us to the complex Jim Crow dynamic between whites and blacks in this country, where—especially in cities outside of the South, cities like San Francisco (where most of the narrative takes place)—an ingrained, ubiquitous racism sustained itself beneath a veneer of polite, respectful civility. And so perhaps I wasn't meant to feel a pang about Juliana's fantasy; perhaps Dick intended that I roll my eyes at her naïveté. Perhaps, even in 1962, while the president celebrated American plurality and prosperity, *Grasshopper*'s vision of democracy—which is meant to correspond to the actual world—might have resonated, for some ordinary subjects in history, as counterfactual.

Mid-century American politics of race are recast in the novel as the politics of "place." *High Castle* opens, for instance, on a scene between a white antiques store owner named Robert Childan and a Japanese businessman—the aforementioned Mr. Tagomi—who feels he's been waiting too long for a package from Childan's shop. Irritated, Tagomi deliberately mispronounces Childan's name. Recognizing the "insult within the [Japanese] code," Childan feels his "ears burn," feels he's "falling into some distant sea" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 7). Immediately, his "aspirations and fears and torments [rise] up and expose themselves, swamp[ing] him, stopping his tongue." Tagomi has "pulled place," reminding Childan of the "dreadful mortification of their situation"—"their," in this case, refers to all Americans; the insult isn't aimed at Childan alone, but at the entirety of his defeated, spiritually enslaved nation (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 7). Moments later, when a young Japanese couple wanders into his store, Childan—mesmerized by their "cultured, educated" presence and their kindness—wonders if perhaps "these new young people, of the rising generation" would be "the hope of the world. Place difference [does] not [seem to] have significance for them." Referring the reader to the actual Civil Rights movement, spearheaded by a younger generation (especially at Berkeley in the 60s), Childan thinks in a language evocative of civil rights discourse, echoing the anthemic refrain of "We Shall Overcome": "it will end. Someday," he thinks, "the very idea of place. Not governed and governing, but people" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 7).

At the same time, alongside the galvanizing vision of equality, Childan finds himself fantasizing about the young Japanese woman in his store. In a counterfactual inversion (and interrogation) the Western cultural standard that equates desirability with fairness, Childan is drawn to "the lovely dark colors of [the woman's] skin, hair, and eyes" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 108). Drawing on *actual* mid-century miscegenation laws, and speaking to the way

the prohibitive taboo might condition desire, Childan feels he wants to "fall in love with a girl like that," but then quickly reminds himself that such "aspirations" border "on the insane if not the suicidal." Later in the text, when Childan finds himself invited to the home of the young couple for dinner, he exposes the degree to which he has internalized the notion of Japanese supremacy, thinking himself "foolish and loud," and "like an animal" in the spare and elegant apartment. "How much I have to learn," Childan thinks. "They're so graceful and polite. And I—the white barbarian. It is true" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 107).

At certain moments in the novel, Childan, obsessed with maintaining his own (very precarious) "place," seems to want to prove the worth of his nation by mastering Japanese customs, performing properly—and "bowing mentally" (29)—whenever he interacts with the Japanese. At other moments, his narrative reads like a passing tale: he has nowhere near the right phenotype, but he's nonetheless adopted a Japanese cadence, dropping articles and inverting syntax even when he's merely thinking to himself. And yet, right alongside his covetous desire of the Japanese "place," he's also embraced a kind of white supremacist ideology, rehearsing Nazi anti-Semitic and racist proclamations (that we're all familiar with from *actual* history). His own "place," at least, is higher than that of the Jews and the blacks.

Childan's double consciousness thus points away from Dick's alternate version of America and towards the actual world, resonating with the kind of postwar writing about blacks' relationship to whiteness that, by 1962, we'd seen from Richard Right, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, Ann Petry, and Ralph Ellison. The complexity of Childan's contradictory desires, affiliations, and prejudices—he is, effectively, a colonial subject of a Japanese regime on his native land—resonates with Stuart Hall's description of "the traumatic character" of the colonial experience. "The ways in which black people, black experiences were positioned and subjected

in the dominant regimes of representation," writes Hall, "were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of [colonial] regimes," he says, but those regimes "had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'" (Hall, Stuart). Of course, Childan's not black—he's white. But his experiences within the text play on recognizable tropes of racial oppression, and, as such—demonstrative of Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which describes the cultural circulation and transmission of trauma via deeply etched narratives, images, and cultural markers (Hirsch)—Childan's diegetic experiences register for us as the traumatic experiences of a black man contending with Jim Crow.[9]

In fact, Childan's whiteness is very much subordinated to his Americanness within the text. (He ultimately achieves a kind of spiritual liberation within the novel by defying a Japanese businessman in order to stand up for the sanctity and the value of American artistry; he keeps a

[9] It's worth noting that Childan's plight registers not only as a counter*factual* account of race relations in postwar America, but also as a kind of counter-*history*, that is, as a history "from below or off to the side" that brings to light events or groups or other historical actors that have gone unnoticed by the dominant regime of historical representation (Gallagher, "Telling It Like It Wasn't"). It should come as no surprise that counter-histories—of women, or of minority cultures—begin to infiltrate the discourse of history in the postwar period at around the same time that counterfactuals cohere as a literary genre. Does not Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, for instance, offer an alternate history for *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason? Rhys's novel, published in 1966, objects to the historically dominant narrative that informed Bronte's version of Bertha: primitive, lustful, vengeful, mad. The alternate history that Rhys imagines for Bertha/Antoinette interjects, reinterprets, and reconstitutes for us a sense of her history and humanity. At the dawn of an era that saw the dismantling of British and French colonial structures, at the burgeoning of the Civil Rights era in America, counter-histories and counterfactuals are not "historical revisionism…but a form of historical disclosure" (Biemann). *The Man in the High Castle*, like *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, attends to the distinction between lived experience and circumscribed history, to the discontinuity between dominant historical narratives and minority subjects who often fall outside of a national discourse. Robert Childan, like Antoinette Cosway, points to the effect of traumatic histories on very ordinary lives.

line of hand-crafted American jewelry from becoming totemic, mass-produced kitsch for the Japanese.) In light of Hall's words and by the same (counterfactual, inverted) logic, Childan's experience of himself as a *white, American* other within the novel exposes for Dick's readers the very mechanism by which dominant regimes produce and normalize categories of knowledge and cultural power. Such a superposition of the counterfactual with the actual—we might call it counterfactual presentism—makes tangible the relation between the historical past (in the sense of consensual, constructed history) and the cultural, political ideologies of the present moment.

There's an argument to be made that Dick's mobilization of multiple real-world forms of historical oppression in the construction of Childan's counterfactual narrative actually masks or obscures the very real and disparate traumas of colonialization and slavery and genocide and Jim Crow. But, as Amir Eshel points out in his critical work on literature's relation to futurity, to insist on an equivalency between events in history and events in literature might "undermine our ability to grasp the capacity of figurative language to redescribe our circumstances" (Eshel, *Futurity* 11). To read for such practical historical specificity in a counterfactual novel is to miss the point: in its very counterfactuality, the novel aims *not* to expose or interrogate or even describe the historical past (such would be the arduous work of a historian), but to estrange our sense of familiar, consensual history in order to reframe our sense of the present moment, and to gesture towards a potentially different future. One might even say that the alternate history novel offers a (counterfactual) objection to consensual history and, as such, to the social, political status quo. In other words, in the same way that the doubly counterfactual *Grasshopper* depicts postwar America as a country of equals, inspiring Juliana to reimagine her own diegetic reality, *High Castle*'s portrayal of a white, American man psychologically wrenched by the systemic

oppression of a racist regime, might trigger an affective response for Dick's readers that begins to chart a course towards a change in political outlook.

Writing for *Science Fiction Studies*, Darko Suvin argues that counterfactuals are often "directly applicable to…the ideological evaluations" of the era in which they are written, and that they're "often on the verge of outright allegory" (Suvin 150). Indeed, as we've seen, in the patent racism that undergirds the counterfactual Japanese regime in the novel, we recognize the normalized and systemic racial violence that governs the Jim Crow era in the actual world. But the literary mechanism specific to the counterfactual leap from the alternate to the actual moves beyond mere allegorical resonance. That Robert Childan is humiliated by his whiteness (as opposed to blackness or Jewishness or some other marker of racial, cultural difference) undoes our sense of the actual present even as it plays on it. Such counterfactual reframing inscribes and insists on an inherently traumatic relation between the textual world and the actual, present moment. It explores the problematic relation between "structural and historical trauma without simply collapsing the two or reducing one to the other" (LaCapra 85). If historical trauma designates or can be derived from a "dated historical event" (and its social, political specificities and legacies), structural trauma speaks to the mode of its expression and representation" (LaCapra 84). As a literary form, the counterfactual hones in on the traumatic intersection of the fictional and the actual. Or, to put it differently, trauma describes the formal mechanism at the heart of the counterfactual novel.

The structural experience of trauma has to do with belated apprehension—whether a catastrophic historical event (like the dropping of the bomb), or the aftereffects of such a catastrophe (the experience of living through it), or an ordinary instance of insidious racism (like the "insult within the code" that "stops" Childan's tongue and sets him adrift)—structural trauma

inheres in the jarring, experience of coming to knowledge too late. “That is the trouble,” says Frank Frink, one of the characters in the novel. “Later on, when it has happened, you can look back and see exactly what it meant. But now—” (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 102). The abrupt and indeterminate dash that cuts off of Frank’s thought marks the indeterminacy of his referent as well. “It” here describes not one traumatic event in particular, but, rather, it designates a general unease about a present moment, the meaning of which will be determined retrospectively, in the future.

Frank’s reverie attends to what is an inherently traumatic distinction between an ontological moment in time and its subsequent representation (whether by history or literature or mere conversation). It speaks to the ways in which traumatic expression—whether it’s attempting to reconstruct a catastrophic event or a very ordinary one—takes on an atemporalizing structure that we might understand as a kind of retrospective projection. In literary terms, this mechanism takes the form of prolepsis.

In the rhetorical sense, prolepsis is future oriented in that it anticipates an objection to an argument (itself a particular kind of narrative) and incorporates the objection into the narrative itself, thereby dismantling or neutralizing it. Counterfactual presentism—in its objection to consensual history—might then best be understood proleptically. As a literary structure, prolepsis becomes a temporal term. For Mark Currie, it marks “a kind of time experiment that actually installs retrospect within the present, as the anticipation of retrospection”(Currie, “The Novel and the Moving Now” 324). In other words, prolepsis allows for the recognition of the present as past, in the sense that, in the future, the present will be the past. Such a recognition alerts us to the ways in which future representations of the present will retrospectively determine its meaning. A moment in *High Castle* might help illustrate the point: Mr. Tagomi—the Japanese

trade commissioner who insulted Robert Childan—suffers deep distress in the immediate aftermath of having killed two German operatives who were part of a German plot to drop an atomic bomb on the Japanese Pacific States. Traumatized simultaneously by what he's done and by the still immanent potentiality of the German plot, Mr. Tagomi is beside himself to the point of distraction. A disembodied narrative voice suddenly intrudes upon the scene, telling us that "time would give Mr. Tagomi perspective. Either that or he would perhaps retreat into the shadows of mental illness, avert his gaze forever, due to a hopeless perplexity" (Dick 201). We've not encountered this particular omniscient point of view up to this point in the narrative, but now it intervenes proleptically, reassuring us to a certain extent (that time will grant Tagomi perspective), but also speaking to the very mechanism of retrospective projection itself: Tagomi's future perspective implies his continued relation to this particular present moment. In other words, the proleptic narrative voice "conjoins the present moment to a future one from which it will be viewed in retrospect" (Currie).

The proleptic intervention, while it prescribes an indeterminate future, nonetheless releases us from the immediate grip of the present tension, allowing some breathing room, some distance. We don't know that things will be ok, but we're reminded that they'll continue to be, that "time will grant perspective." Such structural prolepsis—much like structural trauma—resonates with Fredric Jameson's definition of "historicity" 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 historical perspective" (Jameson 284). In other words, the proleptic narrative voice that conjoins Tagomi's "present moment to a future one from which it will be viewed in retrospect," also jars us into a "perception of the present as history." Such an estranged, atemporal perspective—which seems

to me to describe the project of the counterfactual writ large—produces an affective experience that Currie calls a depresentification: he describes it as a "process that takes the present and divests it of its presence" (Currie, "The Novel and the Moving Now" 322), thus conjuring for us an uncanny (traumatic) encounter with its very unknowability.

Narratively speaking, prolepsis often reveals or inscribes a definitive diegetic future. But, as we've seen, the proleptic narrator in *High Castle* insists on a future that has yet to be determined, that exists as multiple potential possibilities: on one hand, Tagomi may work through his trauma, on another he may surrender to a "hopeless perplexity; Frank Frink, too, makes a point of not knowing what the present moment will become. I'd like to suggest that Dick's insistence on unknowability and indeterminacy within the text speaks to the multidirectionality of historical and traumatic memory outside of the text. The metaleptic interplay between the alternate and the actual brings "multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing" postwar present (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* 4).

In other words, its forging "together of now and then, here and there" (Rothberg 5), *High Castle* represents the metonymic and anachronistic qualities of historical memory that are not only bound up with the structure of traumatic experience (whether that experience is catastrophic or ordinary), but also bound up with the performative qualities of its representation. To that effect, part of the point of constructing a counterfactual history is to foreground the relationship of a potentially different future to an alternate present. The *depresentification* that counterfactual presentism produces—by redescribing and "*re*ordering and *re*presenting" historical events—allows "us to view the past differently and…to *re*shape how we conceive of ourselves in relation" to it (Eshel, *Futurity* 8). Amir Eshel describes the "imaginative power" of a literature that "contributes to the process by which a community can reconstitute itself" (Eshel, *Futurity* 7).

Such a literature—a counterfactual, proleptic literature—marks, for Eshel, a sense of futurity. Not "the artistic celebration of modernity's technological forward thrust" as designated by Futurism, and not "the promotion of a utopian future in which…economic, social, and political contingencies are resolved in a conclusive manner" (Eshel, *Futurity* 5). Rather, futurity, as Amir Eshel describes it, "marks the potential of [such] literature to widen the language and to expand the pool of idioms we employ in making sense of what has occurred while imagining whom we may become" (Eshel, *Futurity* 5).

Determining Worlds

Within the world of *High Castle,* the Japanese fetishize the pre-war American culture that they've helped to stamp out, collecting relics of Americana and what they consider to be American objets d'art: a Mickey Mouse watch, a 1920s Victrola cabinet, a Civil War recruiting poster, a framed and signed picture of Jean Harlow. Making no distinction, in terms of aesthetic or monetary value, between high art and kitsch, between the mass produced and the artfully crafted, what matters to Japanese collectors is authenticity. What they want from the objects they collect is *historicity*. "What is historicity?" asks the mistress of a corrupt businessman in the novel. The businessman, who produces counterfeit guns aged to look as if they're relics of the Civil War era, tells her plainly that historicity is "when a thing has history in it" (Dick 63). This, of course, is Dick's definition, not Jameson's, but the two are inextricably related. Jameson speaks to historicity's defamiliarizing properties, and calls it "essentially a process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as 'present')

and grasp it as a kind of thing—not merely a 'present,' but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties" (Jameson 284).

The counterfeiter thinks the "whole damn historicity business is nonsense" (Dick 63). To prove his point, he puts two Zippo lighters on the coffee table in front of his mistress. "Pick them up," he tells her. "One's worth, oh, maybe forty or fifty thousand dollars on the collector's market." Impressed, the woman picks up the lighters. He informs her that one of them "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" (Dick 64). The woman examines the Zippos in her hand, perplexed. He teases her: "Don't you feel it?" he says. "The historicity?" Clearly, she does not, thus serving him in his conquest that night in more ways than one. "It's all a big racket," he tells her. "I mean, a gun goes through a famous battle, like the Meuse-Argonne, and it's the same as if it hadn't, *unless you know*. It's in here," he taps his head. "In the mind, not the gun" (Dick 64).

Dick's counterfeiter thinks like a thing theorist. It is Bill Brown, after all, who contests "the ontological distinction between thoughts and things" (B. Brown, *A Sense of Things* 3) and Peter Schwenger who writes that despite our perception of an object as alien (in that it is outside of us, thus *other* than us), "the thing is not that object but that perception; the thing is a psychic state, and is in us, not in the world" (Schwenger 10). And in a sense, while Jameson is not a self-identifying thing theorist, Dick's counterfeiter here is really describing Jameson's proleptic sense of historicity as a process of depresentification that reifies historical narrative, allowing us to step outside of it momentarily, to perceive it *as* narrative, "to grasp it, as a kind of *thing*" (Jameson 284, emphasis mine).

It is this very defamiliarization or estrangement or historicity that alternate histories perform and produce. Dick, for instance, flattens actual history (the bloody battle of Meuse-Argonne during WWI) into counterfeit history (the assassination of Roosevelt) in the service of making a self-reflexive point about the slipperiness of historicity, which is itself—like structural trauma—a locus of referentiality. This *process* of historicity—the process that "simultaneously fragments and consolidates" our sense of history (Vest 92)—is a narrative process. It speaks to what Bill Brown might call the *thingness* of history. Brown tells us that "the story" of thingness," is really "the story of how the thing names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (Brown 4). For Brown, then, thingness describes the uncanny encounter with historicity, with the distinction between ontology and narrative, between the thing-in-itself and the story we tell ourselves about it. The story of thingness, too, is just that: a story. But it's a story that produces a particularly jarring effect, an effect that—in *High Castle*—has the power to reinscribe reality.

Very much concerned with the performative qualities of literature, the novel casts the subject/object relation as a relation between a reader and a text—be that text a Zippo or a Colt .44 or an alternate history novel. The climactic events of *High Castle* are kicked off by a communion of sorts between Mr. Tagomi and a silver pin from Robert Childan's shop. The pin is an abstract squiggle of silver, "a piece of metal which has been melted until it has become shapeless. It represents nothing" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 175). What is more, it "has no history in it;" it isn't an antique. A man named Frank Frink made the pin, and he's the only American artisan crafting contemporary American objets d'art. A Japanese executive who evaluates the pin for Childan finds himself "deeply moved" to discover that that—while it represents no history, while it "does not have *wabi*"—it nonetheless "partakes of the Tao." The pin, he tells Childan, "has *wu*" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 175).

Childan's unclear about *wu* and the executive explains: it is "customarily found in least imposing places, as in the Christian aphorism, 'stones rejected by the builder.' One experiences awareness of *wu* in such trash as an old stick, or a rusty beer can by the side of the road"—or, Dick may have added, in a trashy, pulp paperback? (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 177). In other words, in the Japanese tradition, *wabi* speaks to an object's perceived narrative history; it signifies a historical remainder, it emanates from a relic (like Roosevelt's Zippo). *Wu*, the Japanese executive explains, resides "within the viewer" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 176). It is triggered by the contemplation of an object (or a text) around which no consensual history coheres. If Frank Frink's pin has *wu*, then, its *wu* inheres in its immanent content, in its narrative capacity, in its blankness.

Tagomi—for whom meaning (and value) is customarily inextricable from an object's *wabi*, from its narrative history—comes into possession of the history-less pin while contending with trauma both acute and ordinary: he's had to kill those two German operatives in his office in order to survive their assault (an event that shook him to his core), and he's also more generally troubled by the non-specific, still lingering threat of the Nazi plan to drop a nuclear bomb. Tagomi feels that "all [his] instincts" have been "perverted" by what he's done; he feels "there is no answer" for him, "no understanding." He is traumatically, proleptically seized by "the present," its "actuality…too tangible." He understands suddenly that his killing of the Germans has no meaning yet, that "what has happened" will be "justified or not justified by what happens later," depending on whether or not his actions have thwarted the German plot (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 201). Unable to return to his office, he wanders around the city, fugue-like, thinking about the trauma: "It in my grip, I in its," he thinks, "Yet I must go on living day to day anyhow" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 221–22). His state of proleptic

uncertainty renders Tagomi somehow more open to potentiality, and—sensing in the *wu* of Frink's jewelry the "new life of [his] country," the "concentrated germ of the future,"—Childan pushes the silver pin on Tagomi as a kind of spiritual remedy for what ails him, insisting that the pin will conjure "a new view in [Tagomi's] heart" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 225).

Tagomi sits on a park bench with his new pin and studies it: "What is clue of truth that confronts me in this object?" he asks (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 229). He shakes the pin and curses it. "Yield," he says to the silver squiggle. "Cough up arcane secret" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 229). At length, he holds the pin up to the sunlight and simply contemplates it. He is suddenly awash with *wu*, with a kind of cathartic understanding. The pin, he realizes, comprises both yin and yang: the earthy, silver metal is yin, the lower realm, the world of "corpses, decay, and collapse;" but in the sunlight the pin glitters, "pulsing with life," with yang, with the higher realm. "That is artist's job," Tagomi suddenly knows, to "take mineral rock from dark silent earth [and] transform it into shining light-reflecting form from sky." In other words, for Tagomi the pin suddenly and simultaneously exposes and resolves the incongruity between raw experience and its representation.

The artist's job (or the writer's or the historian's) is to sift through the raw materials of the "lifeworld" and to reconfigure them, thereby "chang[ing] that lifeworld" (Eshel, *Futurity* 7). This realization yields two more for Tagomi: this pin is a "microcosmos in my palm," he thinks, suddenly understanding the pin (the text that he's been reading) as metaleptically relational to the actual world. And then he suddenly feels "the past has yielded to the future" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 230); he seems here to understand the reciprocal relationship between the representation of the past and the inscription of the future. In other words, the various ideologies that condition our collective, consensual representations of history also condition the ways we

imagine the future (the ways we constitute race relations, for instance, or economic policies, or social and political ideals). Thus, a reinscription of the past (a counterfactual) that denaturalizes our sense of consensual history, marks potential for a reconstituted future.

Tagomi's realizations suddenly propel him into an alternate world, a world resembling the actual world of San Francisco in 1962. Walking out of the park, he's terribly startled to find himself face to face with the concrete structure that is the Embarcadero Freeway. Diegetically speaking, it's hard to make sense of Tagomi's quantum leap—and critics have much maligned the strange ambiguity of *High Castle*'s denouement. There's an instinct to read this world-crossing as another instance of allegory, whereby the narrative reaches past its own counterfactual boundaries to expose a certain congruence with the actual present. Tagomi has another shock, for example, when he wanders into a luncheonette outside the park to find that white Americans are sitting at the counter, and worse, that none will "yield their stools to him" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 232). When he tries to insist, one of "the whites" puts down his coffee mug and says "Watch it, Tojo" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 232) Thus, Tagomi's whole world view is metaleptically shaken by ours, where the presumed hierarchy at the lunch counter and the white man's racial epithet suddenly recasts *Tagomi* as the barely tolerated racial other. At the same time, of course, such reframing further underscores the point that, to a certain extent, for minorities in America in 1962, the counterfactual dystopia that *High Castle* imagines might actually represent reality.

But within the diegesis of the novel, Tagomi's world crossing is not presented as a metaphor. It's an ontological event that signals to us (if not to him) that the version of the world presented in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is an actual, alternate world (not unlike our own), and that Tagomi—after communing with the pin—has somehow, inexplicably tunneled into it.

Juliana, too, begins to suspect that the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* might, in fact, be *as* real or even *more* real than the one she's been inhabiting, and feels certain that "nobody else really understands *Grasshopper* but" her (Dick 248). She and Tagomi do not know each other, but what they have in common—what most of the characters in the Japanese Pacific States have in common—is their devotion to the *I Ching*, the Chinese book of divination. The novel's various protagonists refer to the *I Ching* as "the oracle," and each of them consults it regularly, seeking meaning and guidance from the hexagrams it offers them. Like the silver pin, like *Grasshopper* itself, the *I Ching* functions as another circulating text within *High Castle,* and like the others, it, too, has "the power to evoke."

The process of consulting the *I Ching* constructs an active relation between the subject seeking counsel and the oracular text. At first, the relation seems arbitrary: the reader throws coins or yarrow stalks in order to randomly determine which six of the *I Ching*'s sixty-four hexagrams will present themselves, and in what order. As such, the *I Ching* accommodates the contingency and indeterminacy of lived experience—you never know what you're going to get. But Frank Frink, (artisan of the silver pin), explains that "the hexagram, brought forth by the passive chance workings of the [yarrow] stalks," is both "random, and yet rooted in the moment in which [one] live[s], in which [one's] life is bound up with all the other lives and particles in the universe" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 13). The novel formalizes Frink's sense of universal connectivity in the sense that its protagonists—unbeknownst to them—are all interconnected in some way: the counterfeiter employs Frank Frink, Frink's jewelry makes it to Childan's shop, Childan gives Frink's pin to Tagomi, Tagomi and Juliana both cross over to new worlds, and Juliana (it turns out) is Frink's ex-wife.

Such connectivity reflects the novel's Taoist notion that "the constant flux and incessant transformation of nature are a universal process binding all things into the Great One" (Warrick 45). At one point, Frank consults the *I Ching* and gets a negative hexagram. Feeling blue, he wonders "who else in the vast complicated city of San Francisco" is consulting the *I Ching* at the same moment (we happen to know that Tagomi is), and whether he or she is feeling the "tenor of the moment" in the same way (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 15). Frank feels as if his own gloominess is somehow affecting the Tao—that web of time and motion and matter that constitutes a single, indivisible unity—and that his mood has therefore somehow already determined which hexagrams the *I Ching* will present. Much in the same way that Tagomi's revelatory *wu* "resides within him" even as its triggered by his contemplation of the pin, Frink's logic of Taoist connectivity seems to shift the source of the *I Ching*'s divination from the text itself to the reader who animates it, who brings it to life.

The novel pushes this logic further when Juliana makes a climactic pilgrimage of sorts to the home of Hawthorne Abendsen, the author of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. She intuits somehow that his novel is true, and thereby suspects that he's written *Grasshopper* with the help of the oracle.[10] Juliana's arrival disrupts a party that Abendsen and his wife are hosting, and when she questions him and he admits to having consulted the *I Ching* in the writing of the novel, there seems suddenly some suggestion—amongst the party guests—that he may be a bit of a fraud. But Abendsen takes umbrage: "One by one [he'd] made the choices. Thousands of them. By means of the lines. Historic period. Subject. Characters. Plot. It took years" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 256).

[10] Absendsen's an Oz figure: the titular "high castle," where he's rumored to live, turns out to be a single story, stucco, suburban home. He functions as a kind of double for Dick himself, who famously consulted the *I Ching* in the writing of *The Man in the High Castle*.

What Abendsen seems to be saying is that the reader of the *I Ching* must perform an exegesis of sorts, making order and sense of the paratactic tangle of cryptic, imagistic phrases that are the hexagrams themselves. But the practice is less like solving a riddle with a singular, superlative answer, and more like interpreting a poem, where meanings are multiple and necessarily contingent upon a reader's frame of reference. The *I Ching* thus offers a model for arranging and rearranging the same elements into different and alternate wholes, where the act of interpretation itself becomes an act of reinscription, of authorship, of world making. Thus, Abendsen's interpretative work becomes interchangeable with authorial work, reifying interpretation as creativity.

When Juliana asks the oracle, at Abendsen's party, what they are supposed to learn from *Grasshopper*, the *I Ching* presents her with a hexagram of "Chang Fu," or "Inner Truth." Together, she and Abendsen take this to mean that the *true* world is the alternate world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*—the world in which the Allies had won the war (the world closer to our actual world). The suggestion here is that Abendsen and Juliana have *determined* reality in the double sense of the word: they have simultaneously ascertained and impelled it. Their collaborative interpretive actions have somehow succeeded in dismantling the consensual (fictional) reality they inhabit and reinscribing a new one—this new world, while still circumscribed by the novel itself, begins to resemble our actual world.[11]

[11] It's worth noting here that we might think about the writing of history in this same way: "the past has gone, and history is what historians make of it when they go to work" (Jenkins 6); a historian or a scholar looks at a tangle of archival material and makes a series of interpretive decisions: some things are included, others are excluded, and thus a narrative is constructed that forms the basis of our own consensual reality.

Ultimately, the novel ends vaguely: even as the "tenor of their moment" changes, even as they register that they're now inhabiting a present moment that isn't cohesive with consensual reality, Abendsen and Juliana never seem actually to cross over into *Grasshopper*'s world. In the last moments of the novel, Juliana leaves Abendsen's home "pleased and excited," charged "with the revelation" they've had about Grasshopper's "truth" (Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* 258–59). When she steps out into the street, we're expecting that the world around her will have shifted accordingly, as it did for Tagomi in San Francisco. But Abendsen lives on a quiet street in the neutral Rocky Mountain States, and the suburban evening that Juliana steps into simply doesn't have much going on—just "shadows" and "lawns" and "black sidewalk." There's no Embarcadero Freeway nearby, no geographic or cultural marker that might register a shift. And Dick offers no descriptive indication that anything has changed. We're left not knowing exactly what's happened. But while most critics, as we've seen, found the end of the novel exceedingly annoying (and while it may, in fact, simply point to some of Dick's hack habits—he wasn't much for revisions), I'd like to suggest that its very ambiguity might also point to the bigger questions that are central to the counterfactual project, questions about the distinction between the realities of lived experience and their historical representation.

What we *can* say assuredly about *High Castle* is that *Grasshopper*'s alternate world comes true, at least for those characters who recognize its truthfulness. On one level, this amounts to the hokey, bumper-sticker sentiment that "reality is what you make it." But on another level, such ambiguity suggests that, by the end of the novel, there isn't necessarily *one* present moment, but multiple. Not only are there multiple ontological worlds (the version of 1962 that Tagomi tunnels into, for instance, does not necessarily correspond to the vision of 1962 put forth by *Grasshopper*), but also—within the *one* ontological world that the characters

share, there are two very different versions of reality. There's the overarching reality where the Axis have won the war, and the one that Juliana and Abendsen discover, where the Allies have won. In other words, by the end of the novel, the diegetic world—which we *thought* was a counterfactual 1960s America where the Axis has won the war—ultimately reveals itself to be only one possible world among potentially many. This leaves us wondering: *is* there such a thing as an actual world, or actual history, that is experienced the same way by everyone it assumes to represent?

Jameson proposes "the possibility that, at an outer limit, the sense people have of themselves and their own moment of history may ultimately have *nothing* whatsoever to do with its reality" (Jameson 282), that is, with the version of consensual reality that is determined by cultural critics or historians (or anthropologists or economists or literary scholars). As we know and as we've seen, the assignation of historical or cultural narratives on to a period of history (or literature) assumes a certain monolithic quality to the era the narrative (or the period concept) purports to represent. Such periodization necessarily bends, glosses over, omits, or effaces individual lives. Attending to the wide plurality of lived experience within any given period, Jameson points to what he calls a "radical possibility":

> period concepts finally correspond to no realities whatsoever, and whether they are formulated in terms of generational logic, or by the names of reigning monarchs, or according to some other category or typological and classificatory system, the collective reality of the multitudinous lives encompassed by such terms is nonthinkable (or nontotalizable…) and can never be described, characterized, labeled, or conceptualized. This is…what one would call the Nietzschean position, for which there are no such things as 'periods,' nor have there ever been. In that case, of course, there is no such thing as

> 'history' either, which was probably the basic philosophical point such arguments sought to make in the first place (Jameson 282).

We might, in fact, read the ambiguity at the end of *High Castle* as Dick's literary affirmation of this Nietzschean position: whatever the (rhetorical, representational) consensual reality in the diegetic world might be, it is canceled out by the fact of Abendsen's and Juliana's lived experience of difference. The "tenor of *their* moment" at the end of the novel determines, for them, an alternate version of reality.

The novel's inscription of such alternate versions of reality serves to remind us that, as a postwar genre, the counterfactual "emerges in dialogue with the dynamic transformations…that define the era of decolonization," (Rothberg 7). In its correspondence to theories of history that speak to the radical subjectivity of phenomenological experience, *High Castle* articulates "a post-Second World War sensibility of the limits of epistemological certainty and a focus on the uses and abuses of the past for the construction of identity and nationhood" (Elias xxvi). Such theories of history—which attend to the distinction between lived experience and its narrative representation—indeed contextualize and help explain the novel's ambiguous ending.

But let us not forget the novel's other climactic moment: Mr. Tagomi's *actual* world crossing, which registers as an ontological event within the world of the novel. Theories of history leave us dry there. And here's where it's important to remember that, while counterfactuals share the concerns of postwar literature writ large, they're *also* a sub-genre of science fiction. Dick in particular is interested not only in questions about the representation of reality, but also in the nature of reality itself. (He describes the "two basic topics" that comprise his oeuvre as "what constitutes the authentic human being?" and "what is reality?" (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* 260).) Thus, to help makes sense of Tagomi's quantum leap

towards the end of the novel, we might look not to theories of history but to theoretical physics, the scientific discipline that begins to saturate the popular imagination postwar (and post bomb). If postwar philosophies of history speak to multiple versions of one reality, quantum mechanics insists on multiple realities in themselves.

In 1957, a physicist named Hugh Everett III proposed the Many-Worlds Interpretation of quantum mechanics. His work harkens back to 1935, to a thought experiment designed by Erwin Schrodinger (known eponymously as Schrodinger's Cat), and to a dispute in the community of modern physicists about whether or not Heisenberg's uncertainty principal—which applies to the behavior of quantum systems—might apply to our macroscopic reality as well.

The uncertainty principal has to do with the particle-wave duality of quantum systems; it explains that we can never measure or observe in such systems certain *pairs* of properties (like momentum *and* position), because measuring one will necessarily change the course or the status of the other. Quantum theory teaches us that that an electron, for instance, exists in a superposition of potential states as particle and wave. "The electron has no precise location. Instead, it exists in a superposition of probable locations." But "the act of measuring somehow focuses a matter wave—which carries all physical possibilities—into a particle with very specific properties…Only when an experimenter observes the electron does the wave function 'collapse' into one specific location" (Ouellette 182).

In much in the same way that Abendsen *determines* the reality of *Grasshopper* in the double sense of the word (in the sense that he simultaneously ascertains and impels it), Heisenberg's uncertainty principal concludes that the observation of a quantum system in fact "determines" its state. In other words, we simply can't observe or measure *potential* states; the act of observation necessitates a definite outcome. But in 1935, a paper known as the EPR

Paradox emerged. Co-written by Albert Einstein, the EPR Paradox challenged the prevailing theory, arguing instead that a quantum system can exist as multiple states, which—independent of intervention by an observer—would correspond to *multiple outcomes*. While the paper was a revelation, Einstein and Schrodinger—who exchanged a series of letters—felt strongly that while the EPR paradox holds on a quantum level, it does not describe our macroscopic reality.

To illustrate the point, Erwin Schrodinger theorized a thought experiment: he imagines a cat placed inside a closed box alongside a vial of cyanide. The vial (given various theoretical stipulations on a quantum level) has a 50 percent probability of shattering, and immediately killing the cat. As soon as we open the box, we'll *determine* (in the double sense of the word) whether the cat is living or dead. Of course, this doesn't mean that the cat is *both* alive *and* dead inside the box—it just means that we can't know which until we observe it. This was Schrodinger's intention, to expose the ridiculousness of the presumption that the cat—like a quantum system—might exist as multiple states simultaneously.

But in 1957, Hugh Everett III took up Schrodinger's Cat in order to theorize the opposite: that given what we know of quantum superposition and the EPR paradox, the cat's multiple potential states *can* correspond to multiple outcomes. It *can* be both living and dead at the same time…just not in the same world. Everett's Many-Worlds Interpretation—which has yet to be disproven and which has led to numerous variations and reinterpretations—proposes that the universe consistently splits into multiple and independent duplicates, thus accommodating the multiple potential outcomes of any given quantum system. (Vaidman). The observer who opens the box to determine whether the cat is living or dead, for instance, becomes entangled with cat, so that, from that point on, the "observer's state" and the "cat's state" correspond. A process that Everett called quantum decoherence ensures that the different potential outcomes (the possible

world where the cat is alive and the possible world where the cat is dead) never interact. This same mechanism of decoherence becomes paramount for what quantum mechanics calls "consistent histories" (Vaidman).

In a pulpy, Sci-Fi way, then, the proposition of multiple worlds might account for the coexistence of *both* an Axis victory *and* an Allied victory in *High Castle*. And in light of Everett's theory, we might understand Tagomi's world crossing at the end of the novel as a malfunctioning of quantum decoherence: entangled with the silver pin (which points to a vital, living, American creativity), Tagomi—who normally exists in a world where the Axis won the war—somehow tunnels into a parallel world that accommodates the outcome of an Allied victory.

Thinking about quantum mechanics then, it begins to seem as if *High Castle* formalizes two coexistent yet irreconcilable "truths." In terms of the novel's climactic moments, Dick leaves us with two very different possibilities. On the one hand, we have Juliana's and Abendsen's assertion of the difference of their phenomenological experience within the objective reality they inhabit. Such an ending speaks to a postwar rejection of totalizing narratives, opening a space for the kind of radical subjectivity that undoes consensual history. It speaks to the dismantling of objectivity in the face of subjective experience. But on the other hand, we have Tagomi's world crossing as an ontological event within the diegesis. Tagomi's quantum leap, in light of quantum mechanics, keeps objectivity firmly intact: there are multiple worlds, and each adheres to its own, objectively determined reality. In other words, while Juliana/Abendsen attest to multiple versions on one reality, Tagomi points to multiple realities within themselves.

2-3-74

In February and March of 1974, Dick suffered a kind of psychotic break. He'd struggled with various phobias and physiological symptoms from the time he was a child (trouble swallowing in public, Agoraphobia, anxiety, etc.), and he'd been abusing drugs for years—but he'd apparently been off the amphetamines for a while when he began to experience the events that he came to call "2-3-74."

In February, after having a wisdom tooth pulled by the dentist, and still high on the vestiges of sodium pentothal he'd been given, Dick opened the door of his house to get a prescription from a pharmacy delivery girl—"and had a vision that dominated and damned the last eight years of his life" (Gopnik). Dick noticed that the delivery girl was wearing a gold necklace bearing a fish medallion, and he casually asked her about it. As she started to explain to him that it was an ancient Christian symbol, Dick had an "overwhelming, numinous experience of 'unforgetting'" (Gopnik) or *anamnesis*, a "vast and total slippage into vast and total knowledge" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* xiv). The vision cohered in bursts, but he suddenly understood that "he and the girl were both early Christians in flight from Roman persecution and exchanging a coded language of gesture" (Gopnik). It wasn't that he suddenly remembered that he'd been a Christian in an earlier life:

> …the point was that he was one now. The entire phenomenal world around him was an illusion created by a fallen female God, twin to a good immaterial God; he was experiencing not a flashback but a flash-in. Sometime in the first century—he later pinned it down to the year 70 C.E.—the passage of time had been deliberately stopped by the Empire, [which he later called] the Black Iron Prison. There was no 1974; there never had been. It was still the year 70. The Roman Empire had never ended (Gopnik).

In March of that year, Dick went through two separate, "nightlong episodes of visual psychedelia," he heard "dire messages on his radio (which played whether or not it was plugged into the wall)," his cat died and "the apartment was flooded with memorial light," he was "visited by a 'red and gold plasmic entity,' which he came to call, variously, Ubik, the Logos, Zebra, or the plasmate," and—most memorably—a pink beam of light informed him of an undiagnosed hernia "that threatened the life of his son,"—the diagnosis was later confirmed by doctors (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* xii).

Dick spent the rest of his life attempting to explicate and theorize his way around his hallucinations, writing through most nights in a prolonged, eight-year fever, and producing thousands of handwritten pages—part philosophical speculation, part theological treatise, part journal, part notebook—that he called his *Exegesis*. In obsessive, recursive, iterations, he tried to work out the complexities of his own idiosyncratic Gnosticism, whereby the phenomenological world we experience is the false world, created by a demiurge convinced he is the true god. In Dick's metaphysical cosmology, a central conception of the *true* world is the figure of his infant sister, Jane, his twin, in fact, who died of malnutrition when she and Dick were both six weeks old. In the *Exegesis,* Jane is transformed into *the* supreme deity, and is often synonymous with Christ or Sophia or what Dick called VALIS, for Vast Active Living Intelligence System.

The *Exegesis* is a maddening behemoth of a document, and—along with Lawrence Sutin's magnificent biography of Dick, as well as various letters and essays—it presents a portrait of the artist as a Romantic, maniacal, emotionally stunted, supremely intelligent, dilettante. In his piece on Dick in the *New Yorker,* Adam Gopnik writes of the *Exegesis* that it makes Dick seem like "the kind of guy who can't drink one cup of coffee without drinking six, and [who] then stays up all night to tell you what Schopenhauer really said and how it affects

your understanding of Hitchcock and what that had to do with Christopher Marlowe" (Gopnik). Enormously resentful that the literary establishment never embraced him, Dick famously blamed science fiction—his status as a genre writer—for his exclusion from the mainstream. But science fiction, as we know, is a broad and malleable literary category, spanning high and low, and "the trouble" writes Adam Gopnik in the *New Yorker*, is that as "much as one would like to place Dick above or alongside Pynchon and Vonnegut," he had "a hack's habits" and "he never really got over them…He once wrote eleven novels in a twenty-four-month stretch. But one thing you have to have done in order to write eleven novels in two years is not to have written any of them twice" (Gopnik). Dick's relentless, off-the-cuff analysis in the *Exegesis* feels inextricable from this speed-addled approach to writing a novel.

Over the years that he worked on the *Exegesis*, "Dick increasingly came to view his earlier writings—specifically *High Castle* and his science fiction novels of the 1960s—as intricate and unconscious precursors to his visionary insights" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* xiii). He refers to several "key parallels," for instance, between his earlier work (both fiction and non) and certain "insights of quantum physics" (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* xxv). As Lawrence Sutin points out, these parallels "do not seem based on reading, but rather on an experiential grappling on Dick's part that proved synchronous, as it were" with his take on physics or mathematics or Platonic ideals or any combination of these and other disciplines. (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* xxv). In such moments of the *Exegesis*, the grating enthusiasm that Adam Gopnik identifies comes through. Here's an example:

> My dope insight of last night: If and when Kathy can be rendered into geometric form she can be distributed throughout reality and hence will be—become—permanent; this is

> how the particulars are stored. And this is what Plato calls the forms […] It has to do with memory storage; the 'form' is a way to store permanently a whole lot—millions, billions—of unique particulars. *This is it!* And I saw it. (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 695)

Dick put such "insights" to work in his retrospective analysis of *High Castle* as well. Tagomi's world crossing, for instance, becomes, in the *Exegesis*, a function of "mitosis-like" splittings of the present (due to time dysfunctions, perhaps in our past, that result in alternate worlds…)" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 142). It becomes clear in the *Exegesis* that Dick—much like his critics—was never satisfied with the denouement of *High Castle*; he, too, felt that the ending was vague. He'd always wanted to work on a sequel, but he never felt he had an idea that was good enough. The visions of 2-3-74 changed that, as he wrote to Peter Fitting in June of 1974: "Based on my experiences from March of this year on," Dick says, "I believe I have indeed, finally, come up with an idea good enough, and am deep into it" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 14). In fact, Dick wrote two chapters of the proposed sequel, which make it clear in no uncertain terms that *Grasshopper*'s doubly counterfactual world *is*, in fact, meant to be the *true* world. It seems that, in light of his revelations of 2-3-74—that the world *we're* living in is a false world—Dick hoped to fulfill for his own readers a "role analogous to that of Abendsen for his: to alert them that the consensual reality that grimly covered their daily lives (the 'Black Iron Prison' as Dick would come to call it…in the *Exegesis*) might not be as impregnable as it seemed" (Dick, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* xiii).

And there's the rub, it seems to me, because so often, in the pages of the *Exegesis*, Dick's own "Black Iron Prison" seems to overwhelm him. While it comprises such mind-numbing passages like his riff on Plato's forms, the *Exegesis* is often also terribly moving, offering a

picture of a mind at war with itself. Various entries begin with valiant inquiry (about the nature of derangement, say, or state sanctioned violence, or the Tao), then move to an ardent defense of the *truth* of the hallucinations, and end with a quiet nod to insanity and to the realization that "no answer, no explanation of [our] mysterious reality is forthcoming" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693).

There are moments Dick worries that he's "slowly going crazy in Santa Ana, Calif." (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693), but mostly, he maintains an absolute certainty that he's been granted some kind of divine wisdom: "my vision indicates that I am a Buddha—one whose eye of discernment has opened" he writes (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 442). Or, turning again to physics: "What I have shown—like the Michelson Morley experiment—*is that our entire world view is false; but, unlike Einstein, I can provide no new theory that will replace it*" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 694).[12] Less grandiose there and palpably helpless, Dick perseveres: "However…what I have done is extraordinarily valuable, if you can endure the strain of not knowing, *and knowing you do not know* (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693).

Of course, such *not knowing* speaks to the crux of traumatic experience: Dick's crisis of revelation expresses itself in his continued attempts to grasp its very incomprehensibility. The *Exegesis*—in its relentless, recursive, reiterative analysis—in fact performs traumatic repetition. As Jonathan Lethem and Pamela Jackson assert in their introduction, "the creation of the *Exegesis* was an act of human survival in the face of a life altering crisis…a revelation that came to the person of Philip K. Dick in February and March of 1974 and subsequently demanded, for

[12] The Michelson Morley experiment, ultimately led to the discovery that the speed of light is constant and paved the way for Einstein's special relativity, disproving the prevailing theory of the day that the speed of light, like everything else in the universe, would be relative to the "aether," the granular field that physicists postulated must exist in space in the absence of a vacuum.

the remainder of Dick's days on earth, to be understood" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* xii). Because 2-3-74 is inherently unknowable—the visions cohere belatedly—the work of the *Exegesis* is referential. As the pages stack up, as Dick recasts his visions and reinvents his cosmology, the explications gather meaning, but they're never sufficient. Dick can never get at this *thing* that he seems to already, not quite know.

More often than not, he cannot endure the strain of not knowing. A terrible need for certainty and knowability belies the mad scribblings of the *Exegesis*. If *The Man in the High Castle* is interested in multiple worlds, what the *Exegesis* (and the sequel) make clear is that Dick is interested only in two: the true and the false. Such a binary might shore him up against unknowability, against the traumatic forces of history—and madness—that threaten erasure and indeterminacy.

Dick turns to (his version of) quantum mechanics to explain the two worlds of *High Castle,* and to circumscribe the properties of the one *true* world. Ultimately though, the Many Worlds Interpretation doesn't suggest that one world is truer than another, but that only one is discernable to us at any given moment, depending upon our frame of reference. It concerns itself with the inherently unknowable relationship between a universal ontology and our phenomenological experience of reality. But Dick could not abide such unknowability. And in the aftermath of 2-3-74, he often felt he knew the whole truth, the *truest* truth. He felt it his job to communicate this truth—about the falseness of our world—to his readers:

> The core of my writing is not art, but *truth*. Thus what I tell is the truth, yet I can do nothing to alleviate it, either by deed or explanation. Yet this seems somehow to help a certain kind of sensitive, troubled person, for whom I speak. I think I understand the common ingredient in those whom my writing helps: they cannot or will not blunt *their*

> own intimations about the irrational, mysterious nature of reality, and, for them, my corpus of writing is one long ratiocination regarding this inexplicable reality, an investigation and presentation, analysis and response and personal history. My audience will always be limited to these people (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693).

Thus, while he had a mad need for certainty and ontological fixity in the actual world, what he offered readers in his fictional worlds "wasn't the clarity and rigor of a philosophical vision, but the imagination and ambiguity of a literary one" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693). He felt acutely that part of the power of his fiction lies in its consistent representation of the very slippage between the real and the constructed, the experienced and the not, between knowing and not knowing, between one kind of truth and another. As Simon Critchley points out in his commentary on the *Exegesis*, Dick's doesn't judge his concern with *truth* over art "in opposition to fiction," but rather, "as a consequence of fiction and a work of fiction" (Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* 693).

In an insightful review of *High Castle* in the *New York Times*, David Itzkoff marvels at Dick's disinterest "in the machinations of the Nazi regime," and points out that the novel is "more interested in a handful of unremarkable Americans—an antiques store owner (Childan), a wayward judo instructor (Juliana)—whose lives would most likely be as mundane and lonely had the Allies been victorious. All these characters suspect that history was not meant to unfold this way, and cannot bring themselves to engage in a world where time's arrow consistently points to their insignificance" (Itzkoff). Indeed, most of these characters turn inwards. They commune with the mysterious formulations of the *I Ching* and the allohistorical speculations of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, and they read these texts in such a way that they "disclose the morphological principles of history and historical representation" (Nersessian 326).

Their reading practices—while they cannot and do not affect political resistance or change the status of their insignificance or even grant them certainty about the nature of reality—ultimately inscribe for them an *emotionally* truer world. Precisely in the way that Dick feels that his work "help[s] a certain kind of sensitive, troubled person," the characters in *The Man in the High Castle* engage in a kind of reparative reading practice, teaching us "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from objects of culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (Sedgwick 151).

In 1944, Erwin Schrodinger gave a series of lectures at Trinity College that were later collected and published in a slim little volume called *What Is Life*. In the epilogue to the text, he puts forward his (very Taoist sounding) theory that all matter and energy in the universe is singular, that the idea of a plurality of organisms is a myth—that everything in the universe is essentially all part of one same thing. (Dick might call it a Vast Active Living Intelligence System.) In the last pages of his little book, Schrodinger—not unlike Dick—seems to try and solve once and for all the ontology/phenomenology divide:

> There are, of course, elaborate ghost stories fixed in our minds to hamper our acceptance of such a simple recognition [that all matter and energy in the known universe—including all of humanity—is the same thing, that it is a *singulare tantum*, that there are not plurals.] E.g., it has been said that there is a tree there outside my window, but I do not really see the tree. By some cunning device by which only the initial, relatively simple steps are explored, the real tree throws an image of itself into my consciousness, and that is what I perceive. If you stand by my side and look at the same tree, the latter

> manages to throw an image into your soul as well. I see my tree and you see yours (remarkably like mine), and what the tree in itself is we do not know. For this extravagance, Kant is responsible. In the order of ideas which regards consciousness as a *singulare tantum* it is conveniently replaced by the statement that there is obviously only one tree and all the image business is a ghost story. (Schrödinger 90)

While he devised Schrodinger's Cat to disprove the idea that macroscopic reality might be governed by quantum behavior, here Schrodinger, the man, seems to be saying that all *perceived* plurality (whether macroscopic, microscopic, or sub-atomic) is really just one living singularity. The subject/object relation that so troubles Kant (not to mention Heidegger, Saussure, Brown, et al), the distinction between experience and representation (so critical to Jameson, to Currie, to Dick)—for Schrodinger, it's all moot. "All the image business is a ghost story." There *is* no ontology/phenomenology divide for the quantum physicist. Only *singulare tantum*, only superpositions, Dick's oeuvre asks after the nature of reality and the nature of the human. Schrodinger doesn't distinguish between the two.

Rather, his answer to "what is life," is that energy and matter are inextricable, that consciousness—of which there "seems to be a plurality"—is "merely a series of different aspects of one thing" (Schrödinger 90). What we refer to as "*I*" is "namely the canvas," the "ground-stuff upon which" memories and experiences are collected. As days and weeks and years go by, the coalescence of memories and experience shifts, and what we call "*I*" today bears little resemblance to what it was: "The youth that was '*I*,' you may come to speak of him in the third person, indeed the protagonist of the novel you are reading is probably nearer to your heart, certainly more intensely alive and better known to you" (Schrodinger 91).

It isn't a matter of a novel's performativity, then. There's simply no distinction between reader and text. If Robert Childan moves me, he seamlessly *is* me, without "blotting me out." What emotional energy is emanated from a text is always already part of the same continuum that makes up the very bones in my own body. And those ordinary lives that history elides, it cannot blot them out either. Once they've lived, even before and after they've lived, they, too, are part of the *singular tantum*. They, too, are me. "In no case is there a loss of personal existence to deplore. Nor will there ever be" (Schrodinger 91). I wish Dick had really read Schrodinger. The "certain kind of sensitive, troubled person" that Dick was, I think Schrodinger would've "helped."

Chapter Two

The Philip Roth Fix: Alternate Histories and The Terror of the Unforeseen

In the summer of 2015, I was sitting in the reading room at the Library of Congress, looking through Philip Roth's papers, giddy with the feeling of exclusivity that archival research engenders and with the sense of nearness to Roth. When I encountered these mind-blowing lines in "Folder B" of the 1972 draft of Roth's *American Pastoral*, I actually lifted my head and looked around, trying to find someone with whom to lock eyes and share my astonishment:

> Dear Kitty,
>
> I have met a man and I want to tell you about him. His name is Milton Levov and he comes from America. The first minute I saw him I thought: 'This is the man I was supposed to marry. He has taken his time about it, and for that he does deserve a stern reprimand, but now at long last he is here to take me away.' I know that is a silly thought for a forty-three-year-old woman to have, especially one with my kind of reputation. I know I ought to be perfectly content with all that I have…..But he is very handsome Kitty, and very rich, and very American.[13]

Anyone who's ever read Anne Frank (or seen the movie version of the diary or the Broadway play or the myriad other cultural productions associated with her) would immediately recognize "Dear Kitty" as Anne's apostrophic address at the beginning of each entry of her diary. But this little snippet (clearly) isn't from *The Diary of a Young Girl*. As we all know, the historical Anne Frank did not grow up to be a forty-three-year-old woman (with a "reputation"). She died of

[13] From: Roth, Philip. Draft of American Pastoral. 1972. TS. Library of Congress, D.C.

typhus in the Bergen Belson concentration camp at the age of fifteen. Her diary's last entry, a wistful plea about "trying to find a way to become what [she]'d like to be and what [she] could be if . . . if only there were no other people in the world" (Frank 568), is so haunting and so vivid, in part because of what she didn't yet know about herself that we, her readers, have always known about her: that she was about to die in a horrific manner, a victim of one of the worst atrocities in human history.

But what shocked and delighted me about this snippet of the draft from 1972 wasn't that Roth imagined Anne Frank as a grown woman, having somehow survived the Holocaust, and having fallen in love with an American. Such counterfactual imaginings about Anne Frank are not necessarily widely studied as an integral part of Roth's cannon, but they are certainly widely known. What is stunning here, is the association between this imaginary, post-war Anne Frank and "Milton Levov," who is, himself, an alternate version of "Seymour Levov," aka "The Swede," the beleaguered protagonist of Roth's Pulitzer Prize winning *American Pastoral*. As readers of Roth's oeuvre are well aware, in the Rothian universe, it isn't The Swede who becomes embroiled with the figure of Anne Frank, it's Nathan Zukerman, Roth's most notorious fictive alter ego.

An alternate history for Anne Frank is at the heart of *The Ghost Writer,* the novel that first introduced readers to Nathan Zuckerman and inaugurated the Zuckerman series. In the novel, a young writer, the up-and-coming Nathan Zuckerman, goes to the Berkshires to visit the home of his literary idol, the aging novelist, E.I. Lonoff. There Zuckerman meets Lonoff's mistress, a young creative writing student named Amy Bellette. Going on her slight build, her "outmoded look," her dark hair, and her accent, young Zuckerman transforms Amy in his mind into Anne Frank, who has survived the Holocaust and who is living anonymously under an

assumed name, having an affair with the elderly Lonoff. Ablaze with anguish and anger at the Jewish community's criticism of his *own* fiction—Zuckerman's Jewish critics read his short stories as self-loathing, and fear they will spur anti-Semitic sentiment—Zuckerman imagines himself becoming romantically entangled with Anne/Amy, and marrying her. Thus Anne Frank, the icon of Jewish suffering and exceptionalism, becomes a kind of shield for Zuckerman, allowing him to expose and satirize the paradoxes at the core of the criticism lodged against him, and putting "a Jewish stamp of approval" on his work (Shostak 126). "Oh, marry me, Anne Frank," Zuckerman shouts into his own imagination at the end of the novel, "exonerate me before my outraged elders…Heedless of Jewish feeling? Indifferent to Jewish survival? Brutish about their well-being? Who dares to accuse of such unthinking crimes the husband of Anne Frank!"(Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 170–71).

But in 1972, when Roth wrote this draft that I read at the Library of Congress, where "Anne Frank" is the one imagining a marriage to an American man, he hadn't yet invented Nathan Zuckerman. He wouldn't publish *The Ghost Writer* until 1979. And *American Pastoral* – 6th in the Zuckerman series, where Zuckerman narrates the story of Seymore Levov and his daughter, Merry – wouldn't be published until 1997. What a thrill to see the bones of *American Pastoral* so clearly articulated in this draft—it reads about 100 pages long and lays out neatly the plot and characters as they will eventually appear some 25 years later in the published novel. And how astonishing to see how deeply the counterfactual Anne Frank is entwined in Roth's early iteration of this book. Roth has written about the Holocaust as a kind of "thematic architecture" that orients much of *Zuckerman Bound* (those are the first four books in the Zuckerman series: *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, and *The*

*Prague Or*gy), and critics have written voluminously about Roth and the Holocaust. But never in relation to *American Pastoral*.

Indexed by the Library of America as part of Roth's American Trilogy (along with *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*), the Pulitzer-winning *American Pastoral* seems finally to have landed Roth in that rarified class of canonical American novelists he'd so longed to be one of. He'd famously chaffed against his designation as a Jewish American writer, rather than simply an American writer, as if the human concerns of Jewish American life, so often comprising his content, were separate and apart from those of American life writ large. With *American Pastoral*, the publishing world seems to have finally let go tagging his work with descriptors related to Jewish themes. "Of all his books," writes Hadley Freeman in *The Guardian*, "*American Pastoral* probably lays the strongest claim that Roth [is] the great novelist of modern America" (Freeman). In the New York Times, Michiko Kakutani terms the novel both "Emersonian" and "Jamesian," and celebrates it as a "resonant parable of American innocence and disillusion" (Kakutani).

When I came to Roth's archives, I came with the ethos of a well-read fan who had a vague *feeling* about some kind of symmetry between the historical figures of Otto and Anne Frank, and the characters of Seymour Levov and his daughter, Merry. I came, already aware that there *was* a 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*, and that at the top of one of the pages in the manuscript, Roth had scribbled other possible titles for the book it would eventually become: "The Diary of Anne Frank's Contemporary," "A Businessman's Sorrow (Anne Frank in America)," and "Ordinary Dreams" (Shostak 224). I came to the archives hoping to discover a line or detail from the draft that I could read persuasively to help make sense of my hunch about the centrality of Anne Frank's alternate history in Roth's work. I came to read a Jamesian 'figure

in the carpet.' But instead of a ghost or a haunting, I found a bold, clearly delineated presence. Not in my wildest dreams did I expect that Roth had written this alternate Anne Frank into the tapestry so explicitly, and so early on.

So what does it all mean? Why does it matter that an alternate history of Anne Frank shows up so clearly in the early drafts of *American Pastoral*? One of the things that fascinates Roth in his early readings of *The Diary of a Young Girl* has to do with the way that it breaks off, unfinished, in the face of the family's arrest and deportation. For Roth, the force that cuts off the diary becomes the force of history that is unknowable as it unfolds. In *The Plot Against America*, his paradigmatic alternate history, Roth names this force of history "the terror of the unforeseen." I argue that *American Pastoral* is structured counterfactually as well, which is to say that Roth roots Zuckerman's narration of Levov's life in a traumatic anxiety about belated apprehension, about being caught off-guard by the forces of history, by this "terror of the unforeseen." Entwined with this traumatic anxiety about unknowability is an obsessive anticipation of retrospection, a looking forward to looking back, a desire for that future vantage point from which we'll have narrative certainty. That proleptic grammar that anticipates retrospect reinscribes the traumatic anxiety even as it relieves it.

The days unfold, and like the Frank family, we have no sense of what's coming. The present, unknowable as we live it, becomes history in the future, in retrospect, when someone writes a narrative, giving shape and order, makes meaning. Roth was famously obsessed with the way his own work and his own life would be narrated and remembered after his death. His anxieties about how he'd be fixed by historical memory are inscribed in his work. In 1988, he published his own pseudo-autobiography, *The Facts*, which is—among other things—also a "defensive fortification"…a "moat dug to keep the biographers at bay" (Remnick). Roth worried

about the way his own relationships with women would be represented after his death. He was anxious for his biographer "to rebut what he knew would be the deepest objection to the way he had lived his life: 'This whole mad fucking misogynistic bullshit!'" (Remnick). In a twist worthy of one of his novels, Blake Baily, the biographer to whom Roth ultimately entrusted his posthumous reputation and his literary legacy, was accused of sexual misconduct and assault in the weeks after the biography was published. Rightly, the accusations against Baily have "have intensified a parallel conversation about Roth's treatment of women, adding fuel to the questions of whether Bailey's account of Roth's sexual and romantic relationships was overly sympathetic and oversimplified" (Alter and Schuessler). In *Exit Ghost,* the last of the Zuckerman books, published a decade before Roth's death, an aging Zuckerman excoriates E.I. Lonoff's would-be biographer, a young man who seeks to expose to the world his discovery that Lonoff had an incestuous affair with an older half-sister. "So you're going to redeem Lonoff's reputation as a writer by ruining it as a man" Zuckerman shouts. "Replace the genius of the genius with the secret of the genius" (Roth, *Exit Ghost*). It's as if, here, the alternate has conjured the actual.

But setting Roth's actual biography aside, we cannot separate his interest in how history acts upon a text (or an oeuvre) from his obsession with how history acts upon a person, with how historical narratives shape our experiences of ourselves as ordinary subjects living out what will *become* history. Who are we in relation to our historical narratives, national and personal? And how does the national shape the personal? And how do our historical narratives become historical narratives in the first place? Who decides? And when? And what happens when a new experience or a traumatic one interferes with the stability of our narratives and changes them, or changes how we understand them? How do we survive such ground shifting? How do we prepare for it? History becomes history only in retrospect. Any given present moment only

gathers meaning in a future from which we interpret it and assign it a narrative significance (or not). How do we contend with the unforeseen?

Roth's work burns with all of these questions. They are at the heart of his decades-long rebuttal of the criticism lodged against him early on by the Jewish community. They are rooted in the traumatic relation to the Holocaust that undergirds and haunts so many of his novels. They are central, of course, to *The Plot Against America*, his paradigmatic alternate history, which posits an alternate "Roth" family, living in a 1940's America that becomes dangerously similar to a 1940's Europe. But these questions are also central to the way he structures the Zuckerman books, where Nathan Zuckerman is an alternate version of Philip Roth, but more importantly, where the narratives of each of their central characters (Anne Frank/Amy Bellette in *The Ghost Writer*, Nathan's brother, Henry, in *The Counterlife*, Seymour and Merry Levov in *American Pastoral*, Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain*, etc.) are all merely Nathan's imaginings about what their narratives *might have been*. Roth's early interest in Anne Frank and the proleptic power of her published diary ground the counterfactual machinations of the Zuckerman books. By tracking the diary's latent, spectral presence in *American Pastoral*, I argue that we might read it, too, as a variant of the alternate history.

A Brief History of Roth's Alternate History of Anne Frank

In Philip Roth's 1983 novel, *The Anatomy Lesson*, Nathan Zuckerman's mother, having been diagnosed with a brain tumor, is asked by her neurologist to write her name on a piece of paper. She writes the word "Holocaust." Zuckerman tells us that, before she wrote it for the neurologist, his mother had "never even spoken the word aloud. Her responsibility," he says,

"wasn't brooding on horrors but sitting at night getting the knitting done and planning the next day's chores. But [the] tumor in her head…seemed to have forced out everything except the one word. That it couldn't dislodge. It must have been there all the time without their even knowing" (Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson* 41–42). While it is the tumor that is powerless to dislodge the Holocaust from Sophie Zuckerman's psyche, the deliberately ambiguous "it" that "must have been there all the time" is both the cancer *and* the Holocaust.

In 1984, in an interview with the *London Sunday Times* upon the publication of *Zuckerman Bound* (the collected publication of the first three books in the trilogy and their epilogue), Roth says that "without this word [Holocaust], there would be no Nathan Zuckerman, not in Zuckerman's fix…And Zuckerman wouldn't be in his cage. If you take away that word—and with it the fact—none of these Zuckerman books would exist."[14] For American Jews, Roth said, the Holocaust (not unlike a cancer) "is simply there, hidden, submerged, emerging, disappearing, unforgotten. You don't make use of it—it makes use of you. It certainly makes use of Zuckerman." In that sense, he says, the Holocaust isn't "nakedly [the] subject" of the Zuckerman trilogy; but rather, it provides "a certain thematic architecture" to the novels that he hopes will make itself known when they're published together as one volume.

Part of Zuckerman's "fix," as Roth understands it in this 1984 interview, has to do with the traumatic relationship between the Holocaust and the Jewish American community, and with the particular, albeit shifting modes of Holocaust memory that have made it so central to Jewish American identity over the course of the last seventy years. The dominant throughline of the Zuckerman Trilogy has to do with anguish and rage that Nathan feels about the criticism lodged

[14] Roth, Philip. Interview with Ian Hamilton. *The London Sunday Times*. 19 Feb. 1984. Rpt. in Roth, Philip. *Reading Myself and Others*. New York: Vintage International, 2001. 111-118.

against him by a variety of his Jewish patriarchs, both his biological father as well as various literary critics and elder statesmen in the community. The fictive works that rattle and rally Zuckerman's critics in the trilogy – a short story called "Higher Education" In *The Ghost Writer* and the novel, *Carnovsky*, in *The Anatomy Lesson* – respectively mirror Roth's own *Goodbye Columbus* and the notorious *Portnoy's Complaint*, which earned Roth much scorn (and much fame).[15] Where Zuckerman feels that, with his fiction, he's "administering a bear hug" to his family and to the predominantly Jewish community in Newark where he grew up, his father and other critics read his work as a betrayal where "all of Jewry [is] gratuitously disgraced and jeopardized" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 94, 96).

In *The Ghost Writer*, Nathan speaks tenderly – and with such a fierce sense of belonging – about his childhood: the family assembled at the table, the "Sunday evening rights" of delicatessen and "sacramental soda pop" and Jack Benny (84). He speaks about the tremendous emotional power of his childhood street: "Here I had practiced my sidearm curve, here on my sled I'd broken a tooth, here I had copped my first feel, here for teasing a friend I had been slapped by my mother, here I had learned my grandfather was dead" (88). He bestows such nostalgia not upon any Sabbath meal or particularly Jewish scene, but about these very secular rites, which in his mind are inextricable from the very American fiber of his neighborhood roots. But his father, reading "Higher Education," a story about a family feud to do with an inheritance (of money, certainly, but also of trauma, and of very American ideals about the pursuit of

[15] Perhaps the most famous of the critiques leveled at Roth was Irving Howe's "Philip Roth Reconsidered," published in Commentary in 1972 (Howe). See also Marie Syrkin's "The Fun of Self Abuse" in Midstream in 1969 (Syrkin), and "Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals" (Abelson and Raziel) which speaks to the symposium held at Yeshiva University, where Roth was asked those very questions he later reinscribed fictionally as Judge Wapter's "10 Questions for Nathan Zuckerman."

happiness) sees only that Nathan has "made everybody seem awfully greedy," (86), and worries what "ordinary people will think when they read" the story (91). Those "ordinary people," of course, are "the gentiles," and Zuckerman senior worries about what he feels Nathan doesn't know, and can't know: "You have been sheltered from it all your life," he tells Nathan. "I wonder if you fully understand just how very little love there is in this world for Jewish people" (92). Nathan flexes his very American freedom in writing about his community in all its naked humanity in "Higher Education." But his father and his father's "moral mentor, a certain Judge Leopold Wapter" misconstrue Nathan's fiction as self-loathing, and they fear (as Roth's mid-century Jewish critics vehemently feared) that it will spur anti-Semitic sentiment. In his "Ten Questions for Nathan Zuckerman," Judge Wapter asks: "why in a story with a Jewish background, must there be (a) adultery; (b) incessant fighting within a family over money; (c) warped human behavior in general" (103). He goes on to ask Nathan: "Can you honestly say that there is anything in your short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbles?" (103-4).

What Nathan rails against throughout the Zuckerman trilogy, yet what he cannot help but ultimately understand, is that for American Jews (and he is one of them) the Holocaust, and an associated, ingrained fear of anti-Semitism, are two defining narrative and historical forces that shape lived experience. An older Nathan is unable to bring himself to throw away the scrap of paper upon which his mother has written "Holocaust." He puts it in his wallet and carries it around with him, thus transforming it into his own identifying paper. The word "Holocaust" becomes an inheritance, a kind of handed down ID. By the time his father has passed away, in *The Anatomy Lesson*, a grieving Nathan worries that it was the fame of his defiant fiction that "precipitated [his] father's fatal coronary" (Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson* 40). Suffering from

relentless back pain which runs from his neck down to his shoulders like "a menorah held bottom side up," (Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson* 4), Nathan describes his "fix" in this way: "A first generation American father possessed by the Jewish demons, a second generation American son possessed by their exorcism: that was [my] whole story" (Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson* 40). In some form, Roth's novels all grapple with the tension between an individual's capacity for self-invention and transformation on the one hand, and the defining forces of history on the other. But it is the history of the Holocaust that "puts the most pressure on how" American Jews can conceive of themselves, writes critic Deborah Shostak. "As a Jewish American writer," she says, Roth feels compelled to a reality-shift in order to inquire into the meanings of a counterlife *to* the Holocaust" (Shostak 123).

In *The Ghost Writer*, this reality-shift takes shape as an alternate history for Anne Frank, who stands in (almost metonymically) for the Holocaust. Given her iconic status in American Holocaust consciousness, it is fitting that the figure of Anne Frank haunts much of The Zuckerman Trilogy, appearing and disappearing, submerged and emerging, hidden, unforgotten. "It is fair to say that more Americans are familiar with Anne Frank's story than with any other single narrative of the war years," writes critic Alvin Rosenfeld in "The Americanization of the Holocaust" (A. H. Rosenfeld 37). First published in the United States in 1952, the diary was adapted into a Pulitzer Prize winning play in 1955 and later into a commercially successful film. Critics and cultural historians have written at length about the canonization of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, about the sacralization of Anne as the paragon of Holocaust victimization, and about the "uses and abuses" of her story by Broadway and Hollywood as well as any number of cultural producers and consumers.

In the 1950's – and *The Ghost Writer* is set in 1956 – what captured audiences was Anne's perceived "universalism, both in character and in outlook, together with her luminous optimism," writes Peter Novick in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Novick). Given the political climate in the country at the time, given the residual fears of anti-Semitism and the very recent inclusion of Jews into all arenas of an upwardly mobile mainstream culture (in large part *because* of the devastation of the European genocide), as well as what he describes as the "integrationist ethos" of 1950's America, Novick explains that the Jewish American sensibility of those years had to do with not wanting to be "perceived as out of step with other Americans" (Novick 91). The leaders of American Jewry "sought to demonstrate that Jews were just like everybody else, except more so" (Novick 7). Not an easy balance to affect: to be, on the one hand "just like everybody else," and on the other to be exceptionally "more so." Thus the overwhelming appeal of Anne Frank as a public face for the Jews: an assimilated, articulate, optimistic young woman (just like everybody else) and a tragic victim of the Holocaust (thereby exceptional).[16]

From the outset, then, the diary's various adaptations—by Morton Wishengrad, Francis Goodrich and Albert Hacket, and Meyer Levin—tended, indeed, to highlight the Franks' universality as a highly assimilated family. "The stage and film translations of her diary," writes Rosenfeld, "do not make [Anne] appear 'too Jewish,' nor do they make her status as a victim too unbearably harsh" (Rosenfeld 38). Quite the contrary. Critics of the Broadway show regaled its

[16] Several critics have written at length about the Americanization of Anne Frank. See: Shandler, Jeffrey. While American Watches: Televising the Holocaust. New York: Oxford UP, 1999); Novick, Peter. *The Holocaust in American Life*. New York: Mariner Books, 2000); Rosenfeld, Alan. "The Americanization of the Holocaust." *Commentary* June 1995: 35-40); Langer, Lawrence, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indian UP, 2006.) See also Cynthia Ozick's piece on Anne Frank in the *New Yorker* where she argues that "in the fifty years since 'The Diary of a Young Girl' was first published, it has been bowdlerized, distorted, transmuted, traduced, reduced; it has been infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, sentimentalized; falsified, kitschified, and, in fact, blatantly and arrogantly denied" (Ozick 78).

uplifting tenor and its emphasis on the triumph of the human spirit; they famously celebrated the line which has "universally become [Anne's] message"—"I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart" (Frank et al.).[17]

In part, it is this very appropriation of the diary by the Jewish community that drives the anguished satire in *The Ghost Writer*. In the novel, Nathan Zuckerman makes a pilgrimage to the home of his literary idol, E.I. Lonoff—an aging Jewish writer usually taken to be a kind of fictional composite of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Bernard Malamud—in order to seek reprieve and shelter from the harsh criticism leveled at him by his father and Judge Wapter. Wapter adds a post-script to the end of his "ten questions" to Zuckerman: "If you have not yet seen the Broadway production of "The Diary of Anne Frank," I strongly advise that you do so. Mrs. Wapter and I were in the audience on opening night; we wish that Nathan Zuckerman could have been with us to benefit from that unforgettable experience" (102). As critic Aimee Pozorski points out, Wapter believes the Broadway melodrama might "serve as some kind of corrective to Nathan's crime against the Jews," might inspire Nathan to write a different kind of Jewish story (Pozorski).

To expose and satirize the paradoxes at the core of the Jewish community's critique, Roth has Zuckerman resurrect Anne Frank in the guise of Amy Bellette, the young creative writing student living with the Lonoffs and having an affair with the elder writer. Zuckerman's counterfactual Anne Frank herself can't stomach the sentimental glaze of the Broadway

[17]Ozick asks "why should this sentence be taken as emblematic, and not, for example, another? 'There's a destructive urge in people, the urge to rage, murder, and kill,' Anne wrote on May 3, 1944, pondering the spread of guilt. These are words that do not soften, ameliorate, or give the lie to the pervasive horror of her time. Nor do they pull the wool over the eyes of history" (Ozick, "Who Owns Anne Frank?" 8). But such a message wasn't what the Jewish community needed in the mid-century.

production of her diary, or the strange juxtaposition of "carloads of women" in fur coats crying at the theater with those other "carloads" of women en route to the camps, of which she was one (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 123). Zuckerman imagines Anne Frank, passing as Amy Bellette, coming across her own published diary, reading it through with exhilaration at its brilliance, and deciding not to reveal herself to her father or to the world. In Zuckerman's mind, Anne/Amy recognizes that the power of her diary rests on the fact of her death, her martyrdom: "dead she had written, without meaning to or trying to, a book with the force of a masterpiece to make people finally see" (145-46). Her diary, she feels, makes clear that Otto Frank's family was exterminated even though they were not "religious or observant Jews" (142). "That was what gave her diary the power to make the nightmare real." If she had been the daughter of "a pious, bearded father living under the sway of the rabbis and the rituals," then "ordinary people" (gentiles!) could argue that they had "invited disaster by stubbornly repudiating everything modern and European." But, that they were assimilated Jews, that they were modern and European and largely secular, that "it took nothing—that was the horror. And that was the truth. And that was the power of her book" (144).

It seems, then, that Zuckerman's imagined Anne here in fact supports the "whitewashing" of her diary in an effort to educate "ordinary people." But her point is precisely that the Holocaust would not have been averted even if all the Jews of Eastern Europe were somehow less "Jewish," that even exemplary and assimilated people (people who don't squabble over money like Zuckerman's characters in "Higher Education") were exterminated because their ordinariness or exemplariness simply didn't outweigh the fact of their Jewishness. That Zuckerman's imagined Anne Frank understands this point, this point that would seem to go without saying, is crucial to his argument with his father and Wapter, because it is a point their

criticism of his story seems entirely to miss. Moreover, it is a point that speaks to the paradox at the heart of the Jewish community's complex, ambiguous response to the Holocaust in the 50's. Zuckerman's Anne here reiterates, in a sense, the complex dilemma about assimilation that Roth's early stories grappled with in *Goodbye, Columbus*. Roth's "Eli the Fanatic," for instance, offers a devastating critique of the upwardly mobile Jewish community of "Woodenton," New Jersey for their prickly fear about being lumped in with the Hasidically-garbed Holocaust survivors (most of them orphaned children) who arrive as refugees to their suburban town.

Beginning in the mid-century with the publication of her (sanitized and edited) diary, Anne Frank, who had been a living girl, became an object of history.[18] With the opening of the Broadway show and the adaptation of the feature film, she became a sentimental and sentimentalized icon bearing the impossible burden of representing not only all of the victims of the Holocaust, but also American Jewery writ large. Judge Wapter's basking in the afterglow of the Broadway show (and his admonition of Nathan to JOIN in the basking) speaks directly to the mid-century Jewish community's desire for acceptance, assimilation, access, legitimacy, etc. But latent there in Wapter's fearful grandstanding is a kind of pride of ownership: by proselytizing and participating in the spectacle of "Anne Frank," the Judge and Mrs. Wapter have possession of the object of their desire. The satirical work of *The Ghost Writer* exposes the icky exploitation inherent in the foisting of such potent desire onto the image of a young woman.

[18] In 1947, two years after her death, Anne's father, Otto Frank, originally edited her diary for publication. He famously "left out some sections" that he deemed personal or inappropriate. He also "moved other" sections "and made some corrections" (*The Authenticity of the Diary of Anne Frank*). It wasn't until 2003 that Doubleday published the revised critical edition of the diary, which made visible all three versions back-to-back: the preserved original diary entries, the version rewritten by Anne Frank herself, and the edition compiled by Otto Frank and published by Contact publishers in 1947.

But, true to form, Roth ups the ante: if Anne Frank is an object of sentimental desire for the Wapters, she is immediately an object of sexual desire for Nathan. The instant that the "striking girl-woman" appears in Lonoff's study, Nathan is immediately fantasizing about her "severe dark beauty," calling her "*infanta*," and imagining himself "hanging around outside her high school in [his] car" (17). The focus on her youth here as part of her sexual allure ("she *must* be more than twelve," he muses) further skewers the vulgarity of her exploitation by the likes of Wapter. Nathan ultimately wants Anne for his wife, and fantasizes about introducing her to his family: "*This is my wife, everyone. She is all I have ever wanted…. Remember the dark hair clipped back with the barrette? Well, this is she…Anne, says my father–the Anne? Oh, how I have misunderstood my son. How mistaken we have been!*" (159, italics in the original text). Inscribing her very physical attributes into her function as a "shield," and as an "unassailable advocate" and "invulnerable ally" (170), Nathan's desire for possession of Anne Frank points back to Wapter's desire for acceptance, and exposes the slippage between sexual and sentimental exploitation. Zuckerman's Jewish patriarchs *want* Anne Frank in much the same way that he does.

But Zuckerman's counterfactual Anne Frank is no longer the young girl who wrote in her diary: "'I still believe that people are really good at heart.' Her youthful ideals had suffered no less than she had in the windowless freight car from Westerbork and in the barracks at Auschwitz and on the Belsen heath" (146). Zuckerman's counterfactual imaginings resuscitate Anne Frank's subjectivity in the sense that they recast her as a living, breathing, ordinary subject in history, rather than its iconic object. She becomes, in *The Ghost Writer*, a traumatized survivor, her life cleaved into a simultaneous before and after the Holocaust. She feels herself a "half-flayed thing," and whatever side people look at (whether they "stare in horror" at the flayed

side or smile at the whole side, at the sunny, lively little girl"), she will "always be screaming, 'Look at the other! Why don't you look at the other!'" (152).[19] In part, Roth's counterfactual impersonation of Anne Frank here pointedly reminds us that, as an iconic representative of *all* Holocaust victims, "Anne Frank" has actually silenced the voices of other survivors: the slippage between the iconic Anne Frank and the anonymous Amy Bellette calls attention to the millions of victims whose voices were never heard and whose stories were never told—especially seeing as Amy Bellette's own narrative as an "ordinary" survivor goes unwritten so as to enable Zuckerman's imaginings of a counterhistory for Anne Frank.[20]

Importantly, though, in unflattening her, Roth constructs a subjectivity for Anne Frank that is at once hers *and* Zuckerman's, or, to put it another way, Anne Frank becomes an instrument of Zuckerman's imagination, and, as such, her restored subjectivity is filtered through Zuckerman's own. Crucially, the voice that Zuckerman imagines for her shines a light on Anne Frank as a writer. Anne/Amy is a student of Lonoff's, and Zuckerman imagines her imagining Lonoff's response to her work, reading the diary through, "making a small marginal notation—and a small grimace—whenever she came upon anything she was sure he would consider 'decorative' or 'imprecise' or 'unclear'" (136). Zuckerman imagines her "self-intoxication" as she imagines her readers: "she saw each of them closing her book and thinking, Who realized

[19] These lines resonate with the actual quote from the last page of Anne's diary, where Anne writes about "turning my heart inside out, the bad part on the outside and the good part on the inside" (Frank et al.)

[20] In *Exit Ghost*, published nearly thirty years after *The Ghost Writer*, Roth makes this point again, less ambiguously. In *Exit Ghost* Amy Bellette returns not as Anne Frank, but simply as an aging survivor. Nathan Zuckerman, himself now an old man, confesses to having transformed "Amy [in his mind] into the martyred Anne" (Roth, *Exit Ghost* 171) back when they were both young people.

she was so gifted? Who realized we had such a writer in our midst?" (135). Roth weaves quotes from the diary directly into the narrative, thus restoring Anne's words to her, while at the same time exposing the ease with which her very words might be mobilized (used and abused) in the service of anyone's imagination (whether his own narrative or History's, for that matter).

Zuckerman's own exploitation of Anne Frank's words has to do with deploying them in the service of his imagining for her a subjectivity which is so clearly a young man's fantasy of a young woman's adolescence. Anne (the historical Anne), at 14, becomes romantically interested in Peter Van Daan, the seventeen-year-old son of the Van Daans, with whom the Franks were sharing the achterhuis, and she begins having private visits with him on the upper most floor of the attic. Imagining Anne, Zuckerman writes: "She was no longer a girl. Tears would roll down her cheeks at the thought of a naked woman. Her unpleasant menstrual periods became the source of the strangest pleasure. At night in bed she was excited by her breasts" (139). When Otto Frank objects to the impropriety of her private visits with Peter, Anne writes her father a letter, asserting her independence: "I don't feel in the least bit responsible to any of you…I don't have to give an account of my deeds to anyone but myself…" (Frank et al. 109). Nathan imagines Anne's heartache and shame after having written the letter. He imagines her feeling – and he quotes a snippet directly from the diary here – "*too low for words*" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 140). He imagines her shame leads to her "growing disenchanted with Peter," despite the fact that he'd awoken in her "the miracle: desire" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 140). And, it is this very desire, he imagines her telling Lonoff, years later, which is responsible for "half the literature of the Western world" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 140).

We can debate ad infinitum whether Roth's cringe worthy depictions of a young woman's burgeoning sexuality here (ashamed of her own desire, taking masochistic sexual

pleasure in her menstrual cramps) are satirizing such patriarchal delusions or participating in them (or both), but regardless, all these layers of imagining reveal the deliberate fluidity between Anne and Zuckerman. In shining a light on Anne Frank as a writer – he quotes from her diary: "*my greatest wish is to become a journalist someday and later on a famous writer*" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 138) — Zuckerman emphasizes in Anne certain particularities of his own. Is he not also a "self intoxicated" writer? Is he not also trying to write a letter to his father that would assert his own independence? Is not he the young writer in whom sexual desire and the creative drive are symbiotic? Further, as Debra Shostak points out, the narrative Zuckerman composes for her responds not only to Anne Frank's "predicament, as he knows it from her diary and from its history among readers," but also simultaneously "to his own predicament as a 'bad boy' Jewish writer" (Shostak 125). Shostak goes on to say that "Nathan's impersonation of Amy in his fantasy about her provides a means of working through his artistic relationship, as a young Jewish American writer in 1950s America, to the voice representing the devastations of diasporic history. The context within which Nathan struggles is at once personal and world history" (Shostak 126). Indeed, what Nathan ruefully acknowledges in *The Ghost Writer*, what arguably motivates his visit to Lonoff in the first place, is that the shadow of the Holocaust falls "not just upon modern Jewish identity but upon all representations of it" as well. Nathan fantasizes about marrying Anne because "she puts a stamp of Jewish approval upon his construction of and resistance to his own Jewish identity" (Shostak 126). But foregrounding Anne Frank's literary proclivities by casting her in the role of the *writer* legitimizes Nathan's work even more so than casting her in the role of his wife.

The figure of Anne Frank returns in *Zuckerman Unbound* as well as in *The Prague Orgy*, both times embodied not by writers, but by artists nonetheless, specifically actresses, even more

specifically, by non-Jewish actresses who have played Anne Frank on stage. A subversive nod to Judge Wapter's plea that Nathan see Anne Frank on Broadway, in *Zuckerman Unbound* Nathan becomes romantically involved with Caesara O'Shea, a movie star who got her start playing Anne Frank at The Gate Theatre in Dublin. "I was nineteen years old," she says, "I had half of Dublin in tears" (Roth, *Zuckerman Unbound* 90). That the "Anne Frank" whom Nathan finally seduces isn't Jewish seems a pointed commentary about the extent of the diary's remove from its origins.[21] Despite Zuckerman's belief in artistic license, despite (or perhaps, in part, because of) the erotic charge he feels when imagining "Caesara at nineteen as the enchanting Anne Frank," Zuckerman registers a sense of unease about this particular actress (or, perhaps, any actress) playing Anne. He imagines not only "Caesara at nineteen as the enchanting Anne Frank," but also "the photographs of film stars like the enchanting Caesara which Anne Frank pinned up beside that attic bed" (Roth, *Zuckerman Unbound* 90). Zuckerman registers distaste here (a much milder version of Amy's distaste in *The Ghost Writer*) about the utter incongruity between the historical figure of Anne and the glamorous Caesara whom he meets at his agent's house where she's wearing "a dress of veils and beads and cockatoo feathers" (Roth, *Zuckerman Unbound* 90).

The actress who portrays Anne Frank in The Prague Orgy most closely resembles the anonymous "forty-three-year-old woman with a reputation" that Roth imagined in the 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*. Eva Kalinova — the non-Jewish Czech actress who plays Anne on stage in Czechoslovakia – crosses paths with Nathan when he travels to Prague to recover the lost manuscripts of a Jewish writer (a fictional version of Bruno Shultz) who was killed by the Nazis.

[21] It's worth noting that while Susan Strasburg, the actress who debuted as Anne Frank on Broadway was in fact Jewish, Millie Perkins, the actress who portrayed her in the popular Hollywood film, was not.

In the 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*, it is "Milton Levov" who travels to Prague and with whom Anne Frank falls in love.[22] But in *The Prague Orgy*, "All of Prague [fell] in love" with Eva Kalinova when she debuted (at nineteen) as Anne Frank. When she begins having an affair with a Jewish writer (*not* Nathan), however, the public turns on her. They "write 'the Jew's whore' on the wall outside the theatre and…write letters to the Minister of Culture denouncing her and demanding that she be removed from the stage" (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 711). Eva is called in to a meeting with the Vice Minister of Culture who informs her that half her countrymen believe she "really [is] a Jewess by blood" (712), and as such, she is "dismissed from the National Theater. The vice-minister is so pleased with himself that he goes around boasting how he handled [the Jew's] whore and made that arrogant Jew bastard know just who is running the country" (714). Eva Kalinova's story thus ironically redoubles both the victimization and exploitation of the Jewish Anne Frank in its depiction of the sheer force of anti-Semitism, even after the war, that is directed, by proxy of Anne Frank's non-Jewish impersonator, at Jews themselves.

The irony and the critique are sharply extended when it becomes clear that, in fact, the vice-minister of culture actually adored Eva's portrayal of Anne: "his heart happens to have been greatly moved in 1956 when he saw Eva playing little Anne Frank. He wept at her

[22] In the draft, Roth presents Levov's business trip to Prague as a dossier, an FBI report which documents his every move, implying, of course, that – given the political turmoil in Prague at the time, and given the fact of Levov's Jewishness – he was being surveilled. Much as Anne Frank does, the Prague trip shows up as a ghostly presence in the published novel: Seymour Levov has had "preliminary discussions" with the Czech mission in New York, and the Czechs are "working up plans for him to visit" glove manufacturers, as he's considering pulling the family factory out of Newark, as "there was no longer any question that in Czechoslovakia leather apparel could be made more cheaply…and probably better made, too" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 217).

performance—he has never forgotten it" (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 713). Of course, 1956 is the very same year that Judge Wapter encourages the young Nathan Zuckerman to go see Anne Frank on Broadway so that he may "benefit from that unforgettable experience" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 102). Roth here exposes what Cynthia Ozick later calls attention to in a seething critique for the New Yorker, that a decade after the end of the war, the "Anne Frank whom thousands saw" throughout Europe, the "spirited and sanitized young girl," became a vehicle for "communal identification—with the victim, not the perpetrators" (Ozick, "Who Owns Anne Frank?" 86). The greatest irony of all, it seems, is that the de-Judeized, humanitarian, uplifting, dramatization of Anne Frank's story, it turns out, can "move the heart of" an anti-Semitic Czech official without prompting him to reevaluate his anti-Semitism no less than Nathan's stories might "warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbles" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 104). In the face of ingrained, extreme anti-Semitism, even the universally beloved Anne Frank—simply by virtue of being Jewish—is bad for the Jews.

In Prague, Nathan angers the woman who is the guardian of the lost manuscripts he is trying to rescue, in part because he can't seem adequately to explain to her why it is that he seeks to bring them to America. She accuses him of having selfish motives: "So that's what you get out of it!...The marvelous Zuckerman brings from behind the Iron Curtain two hundred unpublished Yiddish stories written by the victim of a Nazi bullet. You will be a hero to the Jews and to literature and to all of the Free World" (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 770). Of course, the accusation resonates with Nathan's motives for fantasizing about marrying Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer*. He abhors the Jewish community's exploitation of Anne Frank, and yet he constructs his own exploitive fantasy about her in order to simultaneously satirize the community and attempt to win back its favor.

Nathan ultimately gets the manuscripts from their guardian only to be forced to cede them to the anti-Semitic, fascistic Czech Minister of Culture before he is allowed to fly home to Manhattan. The kulturminister proudly, if bitterly, reminds Nathan—as Roth repeatedly reminds his readers—that Eastern Europe "is not the United States of America where every freakish thought is a fit subject for writing" (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 779). In *The Ghost Writer*, defending his artistic freedom to express the thoughts his parents find "freakish" in light of "what happened to the Jews," Nathan cries: "In Europe—not in Newark! We are not the wretched of Belsen! We were not the victims of that crime!" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 106). Nonetheless, while consistently pointing to the difference between Europe and America in regard to the safety and security of Jews, the trilogy implies, via *The Diary of a Young Girl*, that a text might be misappropriated in any country. If Anne Frank is used as "a whip to drive [Eva Kalinova] from the stage" in Czechoslovakia (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 759), in America, Anne Frank is "eviscerated by fame, by shame…by uplift and transcendence. By usurpation" (Ozick, "Who Owns Anne Frank?" 87). Towards the end of *The Prague Orgy*, Zuckerman writes: "Anne Frank as a curse and a stigma! No, there's nothing that can't be done to a book, no cause even in which the most innocent of all books cannot be enlisted, not only by them, but by you and me" (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 759). Ultimately, then, one might argue that in failing to retrieve the lost Yiddish manuscripts from Prague, Nathan, in a sense, redeems them from the fate that Anne's diary has suffered. Cynthia Ozick, at the end of her essay, in fact envisions a shockingly "salvational outcome" for Anne Frank's diary: "burned, vanished, lost—saved from a world that made of it all things" (Ozick 87).

Debra Shostak writes that part of *The Ghost Writer*'s satiric intent is to expose how *The Diary of A Young Girl* has become "an artifact of revisionary memory" (Shostak 126). The point, she argues, is not to diminish the sense of its authenticity, but rather to call attention to modes of historical memory and to acknowledge the various ways that history acts upon any given text and conditions the possibilities of its production. Nathan's narration in *The Prague Orgy* takes the form of a diary, unmistakably and urgently linking this work with Anne Frank's, and pointing to the ways that Zuckerman's (and Roth's) very American freedom — the fact that it is American rather than European history that conditions Zuckerman's (and Roth's) work – is an accident of fate. In *The Prague Orgy*, there's a minor character, a Jewish Czech writer named Zdenek Sisovsky, who has written only one book, a satire that caused a scandal when it was published in 1967. The government banned the book, and marked Sisovsky: "I could not write, speak in public, I could not even see my friends without being taken in for interrogation" he tells Zuckerman (Roth, *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue* 707). Of course, Sisovsky's satirical novel that caused a scandal is meant to invoke Zuckerman's own "Carnovsky" (and Roth's own *Portnoy's Complaint*). And, of course, we're meant to think about the freedoms afforded to Zuckerman (and Roth) in America, versus the persecution of Sisovsky in Prague.

When Zuckerman presses Sisovsky about why he never wrote again, despite the surveillance and the fear and the ban, Sisovsky says: "Why should I pay everything to try to publish another book with a satirical smile? What am I proving by fighting against them and endangering myself and everyone I know?" (707). Of course, the writers who *do* continue to fight, to rail against their critics in their fiction – precisely because they are subjects of American history, rather than European history – are Nathan Zuckerman and Philip Roth. In *The Plot Against America*, Roth imagines an alternate American history, governed by same kind of anti-

Semitic, totalitarian regime that presided over daily life in Europe. He brings that fear to America. In *The Prague Orgy*, he sends Zuckerman to Europe and introduces him to the silenced counter-version of himself, instructing him about what his life might have been if he'd been born there and not here. But this kind of counterfactual imagining, for Roth, did not begin with *The Prague Orgy* (in 1984) or even with *The Ghost Writer* (in 1979). At the top of the first page of Roth's draft of *American Pastoral* (in 1972), is a kind of governing framework, a counterfactual "thematic architecture," if you will, cleaved to the thematic architecture of the Holocaust that Roth tells us is a kind of scaffolding for the Zuckerman books. Handwritten in chicken scratch as a kind of tagline at the top of the page of the draft that first imagines the story of Seymore Levov and his daughter Merry: "this other Roth that I am not but might have been."

The Terror of the Unforeseen

In a 1977 letter to his editor, pitching (or, more accurately, thinking through and explaining what he hopes to accomplish with) *The Ghost Writer*, Roth tries to describe what he feels to be the power of Anne Frank's published diary. He talks about Anne as "everybody's ideal daughter," as "not a genius, but with a mind of her own, clear, logical, and decisive; not perfect…but not flawed in any serious way."[23] That fact, he says, "works to expose the nature of the horror, somehow. That she is recognizable, and a little bit more—she is not a great personality, but she is a personality, and that is what was annihilated. It is the kind of personality that represents 'life'—she was, in the simplest and most attractive sense of the word, alive. And that is what is so crushing, and so representative, about her death" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). He

[23] From: Roth, Philip. Letter to Jack. 1977. TS. Library of Congress, D.C.

lingers on the tragedy of the annihilation of life a bit longer, but he also circles an issue that feels central to him, that he can't quite articulate:

> There is something so strong about the way that it [the diary] breaks off–I suppose it says something about writing itself, or about how this girl seems to us to live most passionately through writing. The silence, the blankness, that follows the last page stands for the undescribable horror. I'm not saying quite what I mean, I can't quite grasp it—but do you see what I'm getting at? I suppose I mean that anything broken, or broken off, suggests the rest of the story as well.

That Roth grasps at something here that he doesn't fully know and cannot fully articulate with his characteristic precision is stunning, and it warrants exploration. On one level, of course, he does express it: the "silence," the "blankness" at the end of the diary, the way it "breaks off," does "stand for the indescribable horror" that followed, and that *does* give the work its power. And yet it seems that Roth isn't totally satisfied by this explanation. The weight of the history that frames the diary doesn't wholly explain the strength of the way that it "breaks off" or how that relates to "writing itself."

I'd like to posit that *we* can begin to grasp at what *Roth* is grasping at by thinking about the narrative power of prolepsis, and its relation to trauma, both in terms of reading or experiencing a text and in terms of the writing itself. Theorizing prolepsis as a literary structure, and thinking through its connection to trauma fiction, feels crucial to thinking about the way that Roth ultimately imagines an alternate history for Anne Frank, and the way he structures not only *The Ghost Writer*, but the whole of the Zuckerman series. He structures all these texts proleptically, and through the filter of Zuckerman's narration. In other words, Zuckerman, writing through the lens of his own traumas (and the particular obsessions, anxieties, hang-ups

they produce), constructs elaborate histories for the characters he presents to us. And he arranges the narration proleptically: he retroprojects, foregrounding his characters' belated apprehension of the circumstances that comprise their own traumas. He stresses the idea that "History" becomes history in the future, when the present, in retrospect, reveals itself as having had meaning. This estranged, atemporal perspective—which seems to me to describe the project of alternate histories writ large—produces an affective experience that Mark Currie calls a depresentification. Currie describes it as a "process that takes the present and divests it of its presence," thus conjuring for us an uncanny (traumatic) encounter with its very unknowability (Currie, "The Novel and the Moving Now" 322). *This* is the issue that Roth circles but "can't quite grasp," and it feels so central to the genre of the alternate history, and to Roth's career-long commitment to doubles, alternate histories, counterfactuals, and counterlives.

Part of the power of *The Diary of a Young Girl* lies in the fact that we read it proleptically: we know how it ends (how *she* ends) before we even begin. That knowledge anchors us as we read. The constant, lurking juxtaposition of the horror-to-come with Anne's very relatable and prolonged adolescent musings lends the weight of historical trauma to a diary (that might otherwise have been less weighty). Roth recognizes this fact, in the letter to his editor, saying of the diary: "had she survived the war…I wonder how many readers it would have had, if any—that is, I wonder if it would ever have become a book and been published." But the weight and terror of what's to come, that sickening dread, is there with us as we read, at every entry, with every anecdote.

We might think of historicity here, in the way that Jameson defines it, as the proleptic force that invests the diary with such traumatic power. Historicity for Jameson, like prolepsis for Currie, is a process of depresentification that reifies historical narrative, allowing us to step

outside of it momentarily, to perceive it *as* narrative, "to grasp it, as a kind of thing" (Jameson 284). In that sense, there's something traumatic (horrific? sublime?) about Anne Frank's diary: it's a thing that seems to gesture at something beyond itself—even and especially as we realize that it is our knowledge of (its) history that is doing the gesturing. But also, paradoxically, that proleptic knowledge of what's to come (in the silence after the last entry), the historical fixity of what happened to Anne Frank, allows us, as readers, a respite from the terror of *not knowing* how it will all end. We *do* know. And heart wrenching and incomprehensible as that knowledge is, in that it's *known*, in that it's *past*, it allows us a degree of remove, a sense of safety as readers that we do not have as humans alive in the world.

We often think of narrative prolepsis merely as a flashforward, an intrusion or an appearance of a future event within the timeline of an unfolding narrative. Prolepsis reveals or inscribes a definitive *diegetic* future. Most cold opens of television detective shows, for instance, will begin proleptically: we are given a snippet of a crime, and then we "flash back" (analepsis) to a time before the crime occurred, in order to gather clues as we get to know the players and the circumstances that led up to it, before catching back up to that future event towards the end of the episode. Proleptic narrative interventions, in this way, tell us precisely what's going to happen, or, more correctly—seeing as the narrative has already been written, its future already an event of the past—proleptic interventions expose what *will have happened already*.

As an atemporalizing narratological structure, prolepsis becomes a traumatic form, inscribing the way that trauma manifests in the psyche. Prolepsis flattens the present into the past and future all at once, making of the present a past that will be interpreted and understood in the future. In this way, in its collapse of narrative time and its deferral of knowability (from a present moment to a future moment), prolepsis can function as representative of traumatic experience in

literary form. Attending to the unknowability of the primal event of a trauma (or of a catastrophic historical event), attending to a subject's continued and repeated attempts to apprehend the primal event in the first place (or to History's continued and repeated attempts to narrate it "accurately"), traumatic expression inheres in repetitions and retroprojections. Prolepsis, as a kind of temporal loop that anticipates retrospection, responds to that very need for recursive return.

But at the heart of this need (this repetition compulsion) is an extreme anxiety about belated apprehension in the first place. Trauma, as Cathy Caruth has taught us, is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather, in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). Bound up in the recursive traumatic relation between the subject and the primal event is a relentless anxiety about having *missed* something, having not seen it coming, having *not known* in the first place. In a sense, a traumatic experience becomes an epistemological crisis, a run-in with the limits of our capacity to know, to name, to master, and a contending with the powerlessness that crisis engenders. Prolepsis, then, prescriptive and anticipatory, even as it expresses/performs a traumatic temporal loop, also offers a fixity as we read that can protect against the anxiety of not knowing what's to come. In other words, in that prolepsis offers us a glimpse of the future, it relieves the burden of belated apprehension. Or, perhaps more accurately, it rehearses it in attempting to relieve it.

By the time he publishes his most straightforward alternate history, *The Plot Against America,* in 2004, Roth had long been rehearsing and explicating what he meant in that 1977 letter to his editor. The proleptic power of all that history in the silence at the end of the "broken off" diary is what he calls, in *The Plot Against America,* "the terror of the unforeseen." The novel

imagines Charles Lindbergh defeating Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1940, and ushering in an era of institutionalized anti-Semitism in mid-century America, where even very assimilated, secular Jews, like the Franks in Europe – like the alternate "Roth" family in the novel – are persecuted on various levels. Early on in the novel, the narrator "Philip Roth," describes the "new life" that began for him under Lindbergh's reign, watching his parents fall apart: the mother who'd been at home now gone from him; the proud, patriotic father who'd defiantly stood up to various incidents of anti-Semitism now "crying aloud with his mouth wide open–crying like both a baby abandoned and a man being tortured–because he was powerless to stop the unforeseen" (Roth, *The Plot Against America* 113). The "unfolding of the unforeseen," he says, "was everything," meaning, perhaps, that life as we live it *is* the unfolding of the unforeseen, given that we simply can't know what lies ahead. He goes on to say – in an oft quoted passage from the novel – that "turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we school children 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 disaster into an epic" (Roth, *The Plot Against America* 114, emphasis mine).

Roth structures the novel proleptically, which is to say, with a kind of traumatic retrospection. "Fear presides over these memories," he tells us in the opening lines, "a perpetual fear" (Roth, *The Plot Against America* 1). "Philip Roth" looks back and narrates from a place of knowing what has happened, having come through the "terror of the unforeseen," but still gripped by it. Of course, the terror that he's gripped by is the terror of an *alternate* history: Lindbergh presidency, Holocaust overseas, institutionalized persecution of Jews in America. It is not our *actual* history: Roosevelt presidency, Holocaust overseas, semi-institutionalized anti-

Semitism in America (quotas for universities, restrictions on real estate, etc.), and rampant *fear* of anti-Semitism in the Jewish community. But part of the point here, part of what alternate histories do so exquisitely, is use the alternate to comment on the actual. Roth deploys the point of divergence from real history as the metaleptic force that refracts the diegetic terror (living through the war years as a Jew under Lindbergh) with a real-world historical terror (living through the war years as a Jew under Roosevelt), with a more nebulous real-world terror (living through a contemporary, post 9/11 moment where the president seemed intent on mobilizing military and political forces under the banner of patriotism).

The effects of this kind of traumatic refraction are twofold. First, there's an exposure of what "the science of history" hides, namely that any given "history" is not an inevitable, unequivocal sequence of events, but merely a narrative, a story composed retrospectively, presented as matter of fact as it was unfolding, a series of inclusions and exclusions by a historian with a keen eye towards determining causality and offering up conditions that bring about certain inevitable outcomes, etc. We are reminded that historical narratives—as various postwar theories of history have proposed—do not (cannot) represent the actual world, but only the bits and pieces that historians, archivists, and other narrators have sought to uncover, interpret, and hold together cohesively. Second, the metonymic forging together of the alternate with the actual (the imagined then with the actual then with the – imagined? actual? – now), begins to force a confrontation with the very tensions inherent between lived experience and narrative. In their attention to the spillover of catastrophic historical events into the everyday, mundane experiences of ordinary subjects in history, counterfactual novels foreground the power of narrative not only in constructing our sense of history (be it personal or collective), but also in constructing our sense of ourselves as subjects in history.

So, the actual Philip Roth writes about an alternate "Philip Roth" who, much like the actual Anne Frank, confronts the "disaster" of living life as it unfolds, powerless in the face of everything "unexpected in its own time," powerless in the face of what only later, only in retrospect, becomes "History." The power that radiates traumatically from the unwritten, "broken off" pages of Anne Frank's diary, that power that Philip Roth grasps at but cannot quite apprehend in 1977, is "the terror of the unforeseen" that he finally names in *The Plot Against America* in 2004. It is Anne Frank's terror certainly–it conditions the diary, the "writing itself," how she "most passionately" narrates her own experience, becoming her own subject, and simultaneously becoming the object "Anne Frank" that the forces of history have made of her. It is also Roth's terror, and *ours*, as her readers, who read her diary with the knowledge of all that was, for her, unforeseen. But where the actual Anne Frank could not write her diary proleptically, Philip Roth's alternate Anne Frank can *read* it proleptically, as we do, and be stunned and haunted by its power, as we are. And Philip Roth can use prolepsis to structure the narrative of his alternate "Philip Roth" precisely because the "history" it narrates, though marked by a "perpetual fear," is nonetheless the mid-century history of a Jewish boy in America, rather than that of a Jewish boy in Eastern Europe.

For Roth, "the terror of the unforeseen," as a metonym for the trauma of belated apprehension, grows out of a traumatic relation to the Holocaust. It is the terror of extraordinary trauma, certainly, but what he gets at in the Zuckerman series – and what we can see so clearly when we track the presence of Anne Frank (also a metonym for the Holocaust) in *American Pastoral* – is how extraordinary trauma spills over into ordinary life, even at a distance, even decades and continents away. In Holocaust studies, Marianne Hirsch calls it "post-memory:" an intergenerational transmission and inheritance of trauma via deeply etched narratives, images,

and cultural markers (Hirsch). Because the origin of trauma is so slippery, visible only in our recursive responses to it, Cathay Caruth describes trauma in similar terms, as a "locus of referentiality" (Caruth 5).

In Roth, while the "terror of the unforeseen" is most explicitly visible in *The Plot Against America*, it doesn't originate there. It is, indeed, a "locus of referentiality." It's there in 1977, in the letter to his editor, where Roth circles, but cannot name the "indescribable horror" of the broken off diary. We can identify it in his 1984 interview with the *London Sunday Times*, where he names the Holocaust as the "thematic architecture" of *Zuckerman Bound*, where he describes the fact of the Holocaust as "simply there, hidden, submerged, emerging, disappearing, unforgotten," and "making use" of American Jews (Roth, *Reading Myself and Others*). It is there in *The Ghost Writer*, where an anguished Zuckerman acknowledges his affiliation, his very *filial* relationship to the Holocaust. Even as he lambasts all of "literary history's" philistine fathers who critique their sons' work, Zuckerman is gripped by the strong arm of this history: "it wasn't Flaubert's father or Joyce's father who had impugned me for my recklessness–it was my own. Nor was it the Irish he claimed I had maligned and misrepresented, but the Jews. Of which I was one. Of which, only some five thousand days past there had been millions more" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 110–11). Zuckerman wants so badly to shake off "the terror of the unforeseen:" "We are not the wretched of Belsen!" he shouts at his mother, "We were not the victims of that crime!" And she responds with what will become a submerged thematic refrain in Roth: "But we *could* be–in their place we *would* be" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 106).

We can trace Roth's rehearsing of this refrain, and track its evolution into allo-historical thinking, in the 1972 draft of *American Pastoral*, which, traumatically, both precedes and follows *The Ghost Writer* (published in 1979), as so much of the original draft plays out in the

published novel in 1997. In the draft, Roth writes page after page in Anne Frank's voice, attempting to capture the cadence of her original diary as he imagines her a middle-aged survivor, justifying to "Kitty" her decision to flee to America and remain anonymous: "Whoever it was in the warehouses who turned us in…if I ever saw him, I would have to kill him. Because it was he who killed Mother, Daddy and Margot. But of course I could never kill him, and if I couldn't I would have to live in the same city with him. What is worse, one day, five, ten, fifteen years later, I would see him on a trolley and I would probably forgive him: I would probably smile and say good day as though nothing had happened" (Roth, *Draft of American Pastoral* 9). Roth's early versions of Anne here, ever the champion of the 'good at heart,' seems to manage her own terror by writing proleptically, in a kind of speculative flashforward to a future encounter with the informant who "killed" her family. Later, in *The Ghost Writer*, Anne is no longer forgiving; instead, she feels "a murderous rage." If her "diary's purpose" is "to restore in print [her family's] "status as flesh and blood," then "an ax was what she really wanted, not print" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 147). The terror – and its attendant fear and murderous rage – returns again twenty years later, in the published version of *American Pastoral*. Here it is recast not as Anne Frank's trauma, but as Seymour and Merry Levov's. When Seymour Levov's daughter, Merry, in 1968, in protest over the war in Vietnam, blows up a post office and kills a civilian, she goes into hiding. And Zuckerman writes of the Swede, "the strong arm of the unforeseen comes crashing down on [his] head" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 36).

"The Diary of Anne Frank's Contemporary"

The published version of *American Pastoral* also has a history – an alternate history, really – in the 1972 draft, which imagines an alternate Anne Frank at its center. In one of Cynthia Ozick's letters to Philip Roth – the two had a substantial correspondence, she often writes to him with great reverence – she writes to thank him for a copy of *Deception* that he has sent her, and tells him that it was "electrifying to come on" an event in the book "exactly as [he]'d told it to [her] on the telephone." She then goes on in a parenthetical: "(I remember, some time ago, standing in the kitchen, while you explained on the telephone that you were thinking of bringing Anne Frank to America!)" (Ozick, *Letter from Cynthia Ozick*). She'd written the letter in 1990, and *American Pastoral* was published in 1997, but, in fact, Roth had been thinking of bringing Anne Frank to America since 1972.

In the 1972 draft, Anne Frank's American dream hinges upon making Levov fall in love with her and take her with him to New Jersey. She tells him she thinks that if he's going to make love to anyone in Czechoslovakia, she really thinks it ought to be her. She then writes to Kitty: It was the wine speaking, and not me. I never would have had the courage, Kitty. But now I'm glad I said it because otherwise he is such a gentleman he might not have thought me a candidate" (Roth, *Draft of American Pastoral* 3–4). Marrying her off to Levov would certainly be one way of "bringing Anne Frank to America," but one of the possible titles for this 1972 draft suggests another more ethereal mode of transport. Across the top of one of his manuscript pages, Roth scrawled, as a possible title, "The Diary of Anne Frank's Contemporary."

This idea betrays a brewing, allo-historical line of thinking: what if Anne Frank, with all her particularities (Roth, in his letter, writes about her "grasp of the dramatic (in her personal life, in the collective life of the Secret Annex, and in the world at war"), what if she were not a

product of a European history, but an American one? What if her adolescent yearnings to become independent, to make a mark on the world, hadn't been extinguished by the darkness of the totalitarian Nazi regime in Germany in 1945? What if, instead, they'd been nourished by a militant, activist late 60s counterculture hellbent on blowing up the self-involved vanity of bourgeois suburban capitalism? In light of such questions, we might read Merry Levov as an alternate version of Anne Frank.

But the analogy isn't so simple and thin. *American Pastoral* vibrates with the terror of the unforeseen, with anxiety about belated apprehension, and with the persistent specters of Holocaust trauma that leave their residue on the very language of the text. The Holocaust is there, like a prism, metonymically and anachronistically refracting Zuckerman's traumatic relation to it in the way that he imagines his protagonists. When we look closely, we can see the latent undercurrent of Anne Frank in both Merry and the Swede; in the way that he has Zuckerman write them both, and the relationship between them, Roth clearly draws on character work he'd done on Anne in the 1970s.

From the retrospective vantage point of his 45th high school reunion, Nathan Zuckerman introduces us to Seymour "the Swede" Levov as the "magical," "fair-complexioned," athletic wunderkind through whom his predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Weequahic, New Jersey could "enter into a fantasy about itself and about the world" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 3). In that he was one of theirs, writes Zuckerman, "our families" could make of the Swede "a repository of all their hopes." In the mid-1940's, with the Holocaust unfolding overseas, they could "forget the way things actually work…Primarily, they could forget the war" (4). In Nathan's introduction, The Swede, with a "Jewishness that he wore so lightly" (20), is a model of mid-century Jewish American assimilation, exemplary of the integrationist ethos which helps explain Anne Frank's

appeal as an icon for the Jews. Harkening back to the way that Roth describes her in the 1977 letter to his editor as "special without being too special," Zuckerman describes the "conflicting Jewish desires" that the Swede "awakened" and "simultaneously becalmed." As if describing Anne Frank, he writes that the Swede assuages "the contradiction in Jews who want to fit in and want to stand out, who insist they are different and insist they are no different" (20). A product of American history, however, and *not* European history, the Swede joins the Marines the day after his high school graduation in 1945, "eager to be in on the fighting that ended the war" (14). But America drops the bomb on Hiroshima just as he's finishing up boot camp, and he ultimately serves out his tour of duty as a "recreation specialist" in South Carolina, and returns home to take over his father's business (a ladies' glove manufacturing company called Newark Maid), and to marry Dawn Dwyer, "a shiksa" from Elizabeth who was also 1949's Miss New Jersey.

The Levovs settle in a restored farmhouse in Old Rimrock. Dawn raises cattle, Seymour runs the company, and they have Merry. Zuckerman imagines Merry to have been a golden girl with "a logical mind and a high IQ and an adultlike sense of humor even about herself" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 35). In the letter to his editor, pitching *The Ghost Writer* in 1977, Roth describes Anne Frank as "not a genius, but with a mind of her own, clear, logical, and decisive" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). Zuckerman imagines Merry was "a sweet girl who wanted to please people and to please her daddy most of all" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 94). In his letter to his editor, Roth posits a "Jewish Family Romance," as he considers the relationship between Anne and Otto Frank. He imagines "an erotic bond between them which was powerful right from the beginning. More about Anne and her Father later," he says in the letter (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). Yes. More about that later, indeed, and more later about the "erotic bond" that Zuckerman imagines between Merry and the Swede.

Zuckerman tells us that Merry is obsessed with Audrey Hepburn, collecting clippings and photographs of "the film star" from "every newspaper and magazine she could get ahold of" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 94), and pasting the clippings in her scrapbook. He imagines that she plays the soundtrack from "Breakfast at Tiffany's" in her room for hours, "singing 'Moon River' in the charming way that Audrey Hepburn did" (95). In his early work on Anne Frank, Roth is struck by her "well-developed taste and appetite for the things of the world," and writes about her diary in confinement as a mode of contending with the "deprivations" of the "things of the world: boys, laughter, movie stars, the romantic affairs of the English royal princesses" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). In the 1977 letter to his editor, Roth muses that "A.'s diary does not begin in confinement, though that may be why she kept at it; out in the world it might have petered out after a time, as any number of journals and diaries do" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). In *The Ghost Writer*, Amy/Anne indeed speculates about the possibility that she'd never have written the diary (nor become a writer) if not for the Frank family's imprisonment in the attic. "Without the terror and the claustrophobia of the achterhuis," thinks Amy/Anne, "as a chatterbox surrounded by friends and rollicking with laughter, free to come and go…would she ever have written sentences so elegant and so deft and so witty?" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 137). In *American Pastoral*, Nathan imagines the Swede, grieving for Merry after she has gone into hiding, remembering an instance when, as a snooping parent, he'd come across her diary: "could anything have been more heartbreaking for him," writes Nathan, "than reading that notebook on the Friday evening she rushed off to the movies with her friends and happened to leave it open on the table?" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 98). Here the Swede becomes an alternate version of Otto Frank, surviving his sensitive, precocious daughter, possessed of nothing but her diary.

Anne cannot play records in her room, nor sing aloud. But Merry can. Roth writes to his editor about how Anne "lives most passionately through writing" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). Zuckerman writes that Merry "lived passionately," but her "passions" would become "suddenly spent and everything, including the passion, got thrown into a box and she moved on" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 94). Roth imagines "A. [as] a hunger artist out of necessity, rather than choice" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). But Merry, in 1968, gets to make a choice. Having played out her passion for Audrey Hepburn, besieged by an extreme adolescent anger and swept up by the revolutionary ethos of the counterculture, Merry passionately plants a bomb in the Old Rimrock post office, in protest over the Vietnam War. The bomb explodes, killing an innocent bystander, a doctor out to mail a letter at 5am. With her bomb, she intends to bring "the war home to Lyndon Johnson," (Roth, *American Pastoral* 68), but instead Merry "transports" the Swede "out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral – into the indigenous American berserk" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 86).

Merry's bomb protests not only the war in Vietnam, but seeks to explode the conventions of the upper-middle class Americana she's grown up to inhabit and inherit. The Swede's "unconscious oneness with America" had a "munificent" power over Zuckerman's Jewish neighborhood in 1945. His "manly generosity, the princely graciousness, the athlete's self-pleasure so abundant that a portion of it can be freely given to the crowd" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 19), it all had an anesthetizing power to keep the terror of the Holocaust ("the terror of the unforeseen") at bay. In belonging to the Jews, the Swede allowed them to belong to America. And paved the way for their children's belonging: Seymour "whose forebears had been Solomons and Sauls and who would…beget Stephens who would in turn beget Shawns" (20).

For a kid like Nathan, who "was a Jewish kid aspiring to be an all-American kid," the Swede opened a door to true assimilation. But Merry, Zuckerman tells us, for whom belonging was a birthright, "vehemently renounced the appearance and the allegiances of the good little girl who had tried so hard to be adorable and loveable like all the other good little Rimrock girls—renounced her meaningless manners, her petty social concerns, her family's 'bourgeois' values" (101). Zuckerman imagines Merry (who has a stutter) shouting at Seymour about his political passivity, wanting him to feel "responsible when America b-blows up Vietnamese villages," when America blows up "little b-babies to b-b-b-bits" (107). "You don't care enough to let it upset a single day of yours," she shouts, "You don't stay up at night worrying about it" (107).

Merry's fervor about anonymous Vietnamese babies getting blown to bits while American citizens go about their daily lives attacks the political principals of American isolationism that kept us out of the very war that the Swede's "unconscious oneness with America" had helped Nathan's Jewish neighborhood forget. If the father allowed them to forget, to keep it submerged, the daughter unearths it, and brings it to the center. But of course, *it* isn't merely Merry's bomb, or the Vietnam war, or World War II. *It* is a relation to trauma. That relation is what "transports" us (like those "transports" of Jews in cattle cars) right back to Roth's 1972 draft, where it is Anne Frank herself, having been spared the fate of so many anonymous millions, who writes to Kitty of her anger at her own family's own assimilation:

> What had destroyed my family was its bourgeois origins: our passion for our possessions, our narrow domestic interests, our crazy desire to keep to the 'civilized' habits and rituals of our class. Including the habit of habit. To return to Holland [after surviving the war] was to return to the way of life and the social order which had betrayed our trust in it. I had been betrayed. I began to dislike my father and (about age 17) alone in my bed would

> launch into angry diatribes in response to which he could only hang his head in humiliation…. (Roth, *Draft of American Pastoral* 8).

So clearly entwined with Roth's alternate Anne Frank, Merry, too (about age16), launches into "angry diatribes" at her father: "Daddy, shut up. I don't like you either. I never d-d-did" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 109). Merry's trauma precedes the bomb she plants at the post office, and exceeds the political fervor that consumes her. The alternate Anne here conflates Holland's betrayal of her trust with her father somehow having betrayed her. There is no connective tissue between "I had been betrayed" and "I began to dislike my father." The two things are stacked together, structured as if there's a causal connection, as if it were Anne's father himself, and not the bourgeois social order or Holland, who had done the betraying. Angry, she feels her father's humiliation is justified for such betrayal. Merry, too, before she bombs the post office in protest of "a way of life and social order which had betrayed" her trust in it, directs her anger at her father: "Mr. C-cool, Calm, and Collected. What is it that you're so afraid of?" (109). Roth, in his letter to his editor, and later, in *The Ghost Writer* itself, seems insistent on asserting an "erotic bond" between Otto and Anne Frank. And that "bond" transcends the bounds of his earlier works and resurfaces in the way that Zuckerman imagines a primal traumatic scene for Merry and the Swede.

In his letter to his editor, Roth, performing a close reading of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, proposes an erotic or romantic attachment between Otto and Anne Frank. He imagines a triangulated situation: Anne, "to test the strength of her…moral beliefs against the authority of her father" develops a crush on Peter Van Daan, and Otto Frank "is crushed rather like a jilted lover" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). "Were you not struck by the number of times Anne gets into her father's bed when she is overcome by fear of the air-raids?" Roth asks his editor. "Why

shouldn't she, of course—but surely it must have strengthened an erotic bond between them which was powerful right from the beginning" (Roth, *Letter to Jack*). In *The Ghost Writer,* the historical relationship between Otto and Anne Frank hovers in the background of the affair between Anne/Amy and the elder writer, E.I. Lonoff. Lonoff, for what it's worth, is the kind of authoritative but warmhearted patriarch – not unlike accounts of Otto Frank – from whom Zuckerman himself seeks comfort, after testing his own father's authority. Anne/Amy calls Lonoff "Dad-da." She tells him she loves him, and he calls her "a good girl." Upset one night (harkening back to Anne's fear of the air-raids), Anne/Amy says to Lonoff, "Let me sit on your lap. Just hold me a little and I'll be fine." Later she begs him to kiss her breasts. She strips and offers him her "corpse." He says, "You cover yourself now," and she begs "Dad-da, *please*" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 120).

In *American Pastoral*, in the moment that Zuckerman's narration slips into the history he imagines for the Swede, he "finds him" at a "seaside cottage, the summer his daughter [Merry] was eleven, back when she couldn't stay out of his lap" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 89). Zuckerman describes a drive back from the beach one day, the two of them alone, with Merry "dopily sun drunk, lolling against his bare shoulder," turning her face up to her father and, with her stutter, asking him to "k-k-kiss" her the way he kisses her mother. The Swede, "sun-drunk himself" after "rolling around with her all morning in the heavy surf," notices "that one of the straps of her bathing suit had dropped over her arm," and "there was the hard red bee bite that was her nipple" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 90). "Feebly," he says "N-n-no." And then adds "Fix your suit." His ridicule of her stutter "stun[s] them both," and as Merry begins to stammer an apology, even as the Swede understands that the "intimacy" they'd "been nibbling at" all summer "required some adjusting all around," he "lost his vaunted sense of proportion, drew her

to him with one arm, and kissed her stammering mouth with the passion that she had been asking him for" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 91).

Roth's fixation on eroticizing a father/daughter relationship and sexualizing a young girl is subject for a different dissertation. What is crucial here is the uncanny symmetry between the "erotic bond" that Roth imagines between the historical Anne and Otto Frank, the sexual affair that Zuckerman imagines counterfactually (in 1979) between Anne/Amy and Lonoff, and the incestuous transgression that he imagines (in 1997) between Merry and the Swede. Amy asks to sit on Lonoff's lap, and Merry can't stay off of the Swede's lap all summer. Amy bears her breasts and asks her "dad-da" to kiss them; Merry's nipple is exposed before she, too, asks her father for a "k-k-kiss." The fathers both feebly reprimand: "you cover yourself now," and "fix your suit." And there are those hard, stuttering, consonants: "dad-da" and "k-k-kiss."

What is crucial here is the connection between "Anne's" anger and Merry's, between "Anne's" trauma and Merry's. I put "Anne" in quotation marks because I am specifically *not* dealing with the historical Anne Frank and the historical horror she endured in Holland and in the concentration camps in Poland and Germany in the 1940s. In looking at how Philip Roth brings "Anne Frank" to America, I'm not looking at the history and trauma of the Holocaust in Europe, but rather at Roth's very American relation *to* that trauma, at how he explores it, over the course of 25 years, in a complex web of counterfactual imaginings. I'm looking at trauma performing itself as a literary form. I'm looking at the ways in which counterfactual recastings and substitutions so capaciously accommodate traumatic memory, which, as Michael Rothberg so precisely points out, is "primarily an associative process that works through displacement and substitution," and "is fundamentally and structurally multidirectional" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* 12). As such, an erotic bond becomes transfigured as an illicit affair,

and then as a father's transgression. It is a violation so shattering that it is also a country's betrayal. And it begets a bomb. Anne/Amy, in *The Ghost Writer*, imagines herself "an avenging ghost" (148) come to blow the cover off the Jewish desire for assimilation, to explode the fiction of its efficacy in protecting them from history, from "the terror of the unforeseen." In *American Pastoral*, Merry's bomb, born out of that very same terror, explodes it again and begets it anew.

Merry's bomb "transports" the Swede out of his pastoral stupor and into an utterly 'violent' and 'desperate' psychic landscape, where he becomes a kind of survivor. Nathan writes that, after Merry's disappearance, the Swede "ruthlessly goes on pretending to be…A lifetime experiment in endurance. A performance over a ruin. Swede Levov lives a double life" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 81). His doubleness here, and his ruthless endurance, echo that which Roth imagines for the alternate Anne Frank in the 1972 draft. Before he refigures her as "Amy Bellette" in *The Ghost Writer*, in the 1972 draft Roth has Anne resurrect herself as a young woman named Zora. Explaining to Kitty why she abandoned "Anne Frank" and chose a new name and a new life for herself, she writes: "I had minute-by-minute, second-by-second, night after insomniac night – here, not there, now not then – to work to make where I was living." (Roth, *Draft of American Pastoral* 6). She seeks "a way of life that would complete [her] transformation from Anne to Zora, a means by which the past would no longer plague" her (Roth, *Draft of American Pastoral* 6). Merry, after the bomb, lives out an excruciating survival that Zuckerman narrates in a language eerily reminiscent of the draft. Cut away from her home and her family, Merry feels loneliness "as a current coursing through her. There wasn't a day, not an hour, when she did not set out to phone Old Rimrock." As "remembering her childhood home could completely undo her," she seeks a form of ascetic self-annihilation so that she

"would never again come close to succumbing to the yearning for a family and a home" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 258).

Reading *American Pastoral* through the (traumatic?) filter of its alternate, original draft, we see that superimposed with Anne, are Merry and Seymour both. It is Merry herself who goes into hiding "in an anteroom" at a friend's home (257) after the bomb. But the "loss of a daughter" (85), writes Nathan, "flush[es]" the Swede "out of hiding" and initiates him "into the displacement of another America entirely" (86). Merry stands in for Anne; the Swede is both Anne and Otto. Both are fugitives, and both displaced persons (which was the term used to designate refugees from the concentration camps up through the early 1970s, before the term "survivor" came into parlance to replace it). So crucial to this prism is the fact that it is Nathan Zuckerman who weaves together this particular history of Merry and the Swede. Merry's bomb explodes, traumatically, in excess of itself, in reference to Nathan's own traumatic relation to the Holocaust. It is *his* traumatic relation to the Holocaust that haunts and scaffolds his narrative. Before he launches into the story of the Swede, Nathan reveals to us that he's recently recovered from prostate surgery. He's had cancer. This cancer, also unforeseen, is another point of traumatic refraction: it is Nathan's mother, Sophie, whose tumor "which must have been there all the time," was both the cancer and the Holocaust. But we learn, too, in the preamble to Nathan's narration of the Swede's "history," that the Swede himself has had prostate cancer. And that he'd just died. Nathan hears about the Swede's death casually, almost cavalierly, from the Swede's brother, at their high school reunion. The news shocks Nathan, catches him off-guard. It activates the traumatic wiring.

And so, in the same way that Vietnam becomes conflated with World War II, Nathan's cancer becomes conflated with the Swede's cancer, and they both become conflated with that

other cancer, with the Holocaust which Sophie Zuckerman never spoke of, but which ultimately named and defined her. The Holocaust, for Sophie Zuckerman, as for American Jews, had been "submerged, disappearing, unforgotten," until it ultimately surfaced as a cancer. Merry's bomb, standing in for so many other bombs that haunt this nation, is "mercifully half submerged, two-thirds submerged, even at times nine-tenths submerged," writes Nathan. But it "comes back distilled…in the final months of the cancer" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 82). By the time Nathan imagines this story, "it's back worse than ever; *she's* back worse than ever" (82). She, of course, is Merry. She, of course, is Anne.

Chapter Three

"Was There Ever Such A Time?": Alternate History and the Unknowable Present in *Kindred*

In Octavia Butler's, *Kindred,* a newly married interracial couple living in Los Angeles in 1976 find themselves transported across space and time to a cotton plantation in antebellum Maryland. Dana, who is black, is sorting books in the living room of their new apartment (separating the fiction from the non-fiction) when she starts to get dizzy. She collapses to her knees, the apartment vanishes, and suddenly she's on a muddy riverbank, where she sees a young white child drowning in the water. She's disoriented, but, instinctively, she saves the boy, only to be met by the barrel of his father's shotgun. Fearing for her life, she feels the nauseating dizziness again, and finds herself back in her living room, wet and shivering. Over the course of the novel, we learn that the boy, Rufus Weylin, son of the plantation owner, is one of Dana's ancestors. Whenever Rufus's life is in danger (which is often, as he's accident prone and reckless), he somehow summons Dana back in time to save him. Once on the plantation, whenever she genuinely fears for own her life, Dana is somehow transported back to LA. She is powerless against these transports, in either direction. During one particular episode, Dana's husband, Kevin, who happens to be touching her when the dizziness sets in and the transport begins, is transported along with her, and they end up on the plantation together. Because he's not near Dana when she's transported back, Kevin is left behind in the South for about five years, leaving the plantation and returning again, to try and find her there. At one point, one of

the slaves tells Kevin she used to see him around sometimes, "Back when things made sense." Kevin responds, "Was there ever such a time?" (Butler 184).[24]

Within the realist frame of the novel, his response speaks both to time travel and to slavery as things that don't "make sense." For Kevin, a bicentennial Angelino married to a black woman, the institution of slavery is incomprehensible even before (and long after) he and Dana arrive on the Weylin plantation as alien time travelers from the future. An amalgam of genres, *Kindred* plays exquisitely on the Sci-Fi trope of denaturalization, where an alien point of view ultimately serves to de-naturalize our own. In science fiction, the alien encounter is often less about the weirdness of little green men and more about alienating ourselves from our own habits of mind. In this case it's about estranging the way we've metabolized the history of American chattel slavery. "I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept" it, says Dana (101). Kevin and Dana are both writers, their apartment full of books (that Dana so carefully sorts into piles of fiction and non), and the novel is replete with references to works of history about slavery. But despite their knowledge of history, the device of time travel propels them into a visceral, sensuous encounter with the past that shatters any illusion of historical narrative as the truth of lived experience. Here, slavery becomes the alien thing, as unhinging an experience as time travel. It undoes Kevin and Dana's orientation about what "makes sense."

Published in 1979, *Kindred* is situated by critics as part of the proliferation of neo-slave narratives by black writers, since the late 1960s. Gaining momentum in this post civil rights period, neo-slave narratives contend with and seek to disrupt the ways that Americans maybe *have* "made sense" of slavery. According to critical consensus, these novels seem to be

[24] As *Kindred* is the only primary text I'll be addressing in this chapter, for the sake of clarity and flow, I will hereafter provide only page numbers throughout.

responding both to the "absences and omissions" (Goyal 20) of slave narratives of the 19th century, and also to redemptive accounts of US racial history in which "the civil rights movement was widely seen to mark the completion of the long history of political struggle against state-sanctioned racial inequality that dated back to the antebellum period"(Dubey, "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement" 345).[25] While *Kindred* certainly registers the long distance that's been travelled from slavery to its post-civil rights present – its protagonist, after all, is a fiercely independent black woman writer who is married to a white man – it is also simultaneously impelled by the conviction that the racial legacy of slavery has not yet "passed into the register of history" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 780). The device of time travel reverses the trajectory from slavery to freedom so fundamental to the plot structure of the slave narrative, and foreshortens the distance between the present and the past, so that it "thwarts not only the forward looking drive of 1960s black radical politics but also the progressive

[25] In large part, as Yogita Goyal succinctly explains, in the 19th century, slave narratives "functioned at a charged intersection" of "voyeurism and advocacy," and were deployed, in part, in the service of abolitionist political interests. As such, they were structured by "a realist or even documentary imperative" that would convince "antebellum audiences, editors, and publishers" of their "veracity"(Goyal 16). As Toni Morrison points out, in bending by necessity to the conventions of sentimentality, which dictated the conditions of their production, slave narratives would often demur from presenting unsettling details and challenging ambiguities, opting instead to "drop a veil over…proceedings too terrible to relate"(Morrison 51). No longer tethered to an abolitionist imperative that demanded historical accuracy, free to defy the limits of the sentimental tradition, neo-slave narratives are often "animated by a desire to turn to unspeakable figures," as in Morrison's foundational *Beloved*, where we encounter the "fugitive mother who would rather kill her children than have them returned to slavery" (Goyal 19). …In 1977, a couple of years before *Kindred*'s publication, our national perception of slavery was perhaps most powerfully shaped by the television broadcast of *Roots*. "Drawing an estimated 130 million viewers, *Roots* not only established slavery as marketable material for mass entertainment, but also played an important role in the post-1960s process of national reconciliation. Haley's genealogical saga fed black nationalist pride through its recovery of African origins for contemporary African American identity, while his 'up from slavery' narrative endorsed the promise of the American Dream, impressing upon viewers the long distance traveled from slavery to the post-civil rights present" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 781).

national narratives about race relations that began to circulate during the 1970s" (Dubey, "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement" 348).

In a series of compelling articles, drawing perhaps on the centrality of science fiction to Butler's oeuvre, Madhu Dubey writes about *Kindred* and other neo-slave narratives as part of a category she calls "Speculative Fictions of Slavery," arguing that genres such as fantasy and science fiction "allow history to be rewritten or ignored," opening up a unique set of imaginative possibilities for a literary tradition that has long been burdened by the demands of realist social protest. "Speculative fictions overtly situate themselves against history," she writes, suggesting that we can best comprehend the truth of slavery by abandoning historical modes of knowing." I'd like here to extend and complicate her account – and hers is but one example that speaks for many in the current critical conversation – by attending to *Kindred* more specifically as a variant of the alternate history, with all the particular ways that the genre interrogates not only our ideas about history and historical narrative or historical representation, but also how we think about and relate to the narratives that govern our own present moment. When Kevin rhetorically asks the slave woman "Was there ever such a time," he's affirming his position about the moral incomprehensibility of slavery. But his question also reverberates metatextually, pointing to larger questions about how we come to know history, especially catastrophic and traumatic history that is structurally unknowable as it is unfolding. "Was there ever such a time?" asks about the possibilities or impossibilities of historical representation, and about the tensions between historical narratives and the lived experiences of ordinary subjects in history that such narratives often obscure. It asks if we can ever really know history. As such, it also asks, as alternate histories often do, if we can ever really know our own time. And if so, *how*? And *when*? Perhaps we might only know the present in the future, when it has become the past, when it's

been given shape and meaning by historians and other narrators who will make decisions about which events and whose stories mattered enough to frame our understanding of our era…and which didn't.

When I first read *Kindred* sometime in the late aughts, I was dazzled by time travel as a narrative representation of traumatic temporality, as a device which brings about the revelation of the past as co-extensive with the present. But I didn't give much thought to the present of the novel, to the complex dynamics at work between Kevin and Dana. Rereading the novel in 2020 was an entirely new experience, as if Butler had written a different book than the one I'd read a decade earlier. After George Floyd's murder, in the wake of #Me Too, while I was revisiting, relearning, revising my own experiences surrounding race and gender, *Kindred* was no longer a novel about slavery in 1815; it was now a novel about how the systems of patriarchy and oppression are adaptive, about how they travel through time and space to figure into the most loving and intimate and seemingly progressive of domestic spheres.

The history of slavery, of course, is central to the novel and to the way it figures the relation between Kevin and Dana. The systems and dynamics of race and gender in 1976 Los Angeles are haunted, if not fundamentally shaped, by the systems and dynamics of race and gender on an antebellum plantation. Butler sends Dana back in time to confront her own alternate history (as a slave) within the actual history (of slavery). But as is the case with most works of alternate history, the point of that "what if" scenario isn't so much a reimagining of the past as it is an interrogation of the present: what if a black woman in Los Angeles in the late 70s, who is married to a white man, carries the weight of slavery in her senses, feels it viscerally, knows it in her body? How does it affect the way she relates to her husband? How does it affect the way she relates to herself?

At the beginning of the novel, Kevin and Dana tiptoe around the issue of race. As Mark Foster points out, "the silence" they exhibit around race "mirrors the silence around this subject that was characteristic of the entire nation" in the post civil rights era, as the 1970s was "the decade in which colorblindness first emerged as the dominant US philosophy around 'race'" (144). But race and gender are entirely intersectional, and we cannot discuss Dana's subjectivity in relation to one without the other. Foster feels that by the end of the novel – after confronting issues pertaining to race and racism head on in their travels to the antebellum – Kevin and Dana are able to "begin the work of resolving the anxieties that are slowly undermining their marriage" (144). It's true that the novel ends with Kevin and Dana, subdued, transformed, and together contending with the reality of history's erasures and omissions. It's also true that the novel takes great pains to portray Kevin as one of the good guys: he opposes any form of racist ideology, he does abolitionist work while he's stuck in the antebellum, and he is steadfast in his partnership with Dana throughout. But rereading the novel now, in this Trumpian, #metoo era, I suddenly see a fracture in the dynamic between them that is more subtle, more intimately invasive than any explicit ideology that the novel overtly puts forth about the perils of racism. Kevin operates from a position of white, hegemonic male privilege that gives him an authority within the text that the novel seems to take for granted. It's a position of privilege that does not see outside of itself, and – in keeping with the cultural values at the time in which *Kindred* was published – it's a position of authority that insists on colorblindness, on gender blindness, on a presumed equality that erases experiential differences that condition subjectivity. Dana bumps up against this authority, but blindly. She acquiesces to Kevin's "master narrative" point of view over and over again.

Kindred helps us to see the traumatic continuum of the history of slavery; it foregrounds the ways in which traumatic histories don't end. But what I missed in the early aughts, because of my fixation on Butler's representations of the lingering trauma of the past, was how the novel gestures at Dana's gendered subjectivity and subjugation even within her very progressive marriage to Kevin. What I missed was the "crisis ordinariness" of the novel's present. I borrow the term from Lauren Berlant, of course, who writes that such "crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming"(Berlant 10). The durational quality of Kevin and Dana's interracial marriage, especially in the aftermath of their direct experiences of slavery as time travelers, shifts our understanding of crisis from the events of history (both alternate and actual) to an understanding of "the impasse" induced by crisis, different from but in direct and constant relation to it, for which there is no definitive horizon or end date.

The end of the novel figures a moment that teeters on the brink of coming-into-knowledge of the ways that this impasse continues to condition Dana's affective realities in her marriage to Kevin. She seems to know it in her body, perhaps has always known it in her body, but even as the direct experience of slavery ultimately renders her limbless (she becomes an amputee), she is not yet able to name or know fully, the forces that shape her subjectivity. I am a reader from the future, reading in 2022, what Butler published in 1979. I recognize those forces now that the novel gestures at but can't quite name, because of the conditioning social realities that shaped its own inscription. What conditions me? What can I not yet articulate or know? I am a reader from the future, reading into this novel the anxieties about race and gender that still plague my own moment: how hegemonic white privilege is blind to its own positionality, how that privilege constructs a shared version of ontology, how that's been a central tension in

historiography, how it remains a central tension in our own political reality. I am a reader from what feels like a dystopian future, gripped by the terror of the unforeseen, hoping against hope that we might learn something from history, whether it's alternate or actual.

An Alternate History?

The narrative punch of an alternate history depends on an acknowledged distinction between the imagined (fiction) and the real (history). There's always a moment in an alternate history novel that breaks with history and posits an alternative – a point of divergence or a nexus moment – that emphasizes the narrative's fictionality by referring back to our actual historical record. *Kindred*, of course, is not a straightforward alternate history. It does not imagine an American history without slavery, for instance. Such an account would fall into the category of alternate history that Gavin Rosenfeld calls "fantasy scenario," a minor strain of works within the genre that imagine "an alternate past as superior to the real historical record" (Rosenfeld 90). For the most part, alternate histories imagine the opposite, a "nightmare scenario," where the Nazis win World War II or the South wins the Civil War or the American Revolution fails to occur. But the concerns of the genre are inherently presentist, relating anachronistically to their own time, using the (alternate) past in order to comment on the (actual, lived) present. As such, they focus on the aftermath of particularly traumatic historical events, on the conditions and textures of daily life (emotional, cultural, technological, social) resulting from the imagined break with history-as-we-know-it. By imagining an alternate but analogous history, with a clear sense of both difference and correspondence, these novels establish a kind of surreal diegetic present that metaleptically refracts the alternate and the actual, at once blurring and maintaining

their distinction. *Kindred* imagines a nightmare alternate scenario as well, only the point of divergence between the real and the surreal in the text is inscribed into the fabric of the fiction itself, via time travel. Butler sends her protagonist back in time to confront her own alternate history within the actual (while still fictional) history of slavery.

Butler conceives of the machinations of time travel in a way that compresses past, present, and future, eliding the passage of time, calling our sense of history into question. Time in the present of the novel moves monumentally more slowly than time in the past. An hour for Dana in 1815 registers as mere seconds for Kevin at home in Los Angeles. The five years he spends in the antebellum span the course of eight single days for Dana in Los Angeles in 1976. When she's in the diegetic present (which, from the perspective of the diegetic past, is also the diegetic future), there isn't a distance of 160 years between herself and slavery, but merely minutes or days. The first time she's sent to the past to rescue Rufus, for instance, as she's administering CPR on the riverbank, Rufus's mother, fearing/hating the strange black woman who is pushing on her son's chest and putting her mouth on his mouth, starts beating Dana, trying to pry her off of Rufus. Moments/decades later, when she's back in her own living room, Dana notices "an ache in [her] back and shoulders where Rufus's mother had pounded with her fists." In this way the novel collapses the past into the present; Dana literally feels the historical blows of slavery in her body, in her present time. They "hit harder than I'd realized" she says, absorbing the emotional as well as the physical impact of those fists. The conflation of the past of slavery with Dana's visceral pain in the present forces a rethinking of how we understand "history." It produces a sense of history's durational immediacy, a shocking force that conditions us over time. It begs the question: *is* history a thing of the past? Or might we reconceive of it

somehow, arriving at a language to describe the past that takes into account the perpetual during of its unfolding.

After she gets back from her first "visit" to the past, Dana feels a sense of "panic." The past stays with her, "shadowy and threatening," holding her in "a limbo" (18). She moves around "uncomfortably," suddenly. "I feel like it could happen again," she says, "like it could happen anytime…I don't have a name for the thing that happened to me, but I don't feel safe anymore" (17). Time travel, and its attendant confusing temporality, has fractured the trajectory and cohesion of Dana's narrative, her sense of history. Her wounded skin is at once a metaphor and a visible marker of a new traumatic wound in her mind, the thing she cannot know, "the thing she cannot name." But the trauma isn't merely about the past of slavery, it's more about Dana's present relation *to* that traumatic past. It's tempting to conclude, as Mahdu Dubey does, that "speculative novels…cross temporal boundaries" to "immerse readers in the world of slavery" in order to allow "the truth of this past [to be] more fully grasped" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 785). But I suggest that what *Kindred* does is quite the opposite: it alerts us to the ways in which "the truth of this past" can *never* be fully grasped, can never be fully named. Dana's experiences of slavery in the past radiate painfully in excess of themselves. What's altered is not only her sense of history, but also her relation to the present, where she's suddenly uncomfortable. "It could happen again," speaks to her grasp not on the truths of the past, but on the precariousness of history's unfolding. Her fractured narrative, which is another way of talking about her trauma, exposes what cohesive historical narratives conceal: the limits of our capacity to know.

History, of course, is written analeptically, in retrospect. But Dana doesn't flashback to the past; she intrudes on it proleptically, bringing the future to the antebellum. Prolepsis reminds

us that events of the past are given form, logic, order, structure from a future vantage point. A narrative device that mimics time travel, prolepsis flattens the present into the past and future all at once, making of the present a past that will be interpreted and understood in the future. As Mark Currie reminds us, prolepsis anticipates retrospection (Currie 324). In this way, in its collapse of narrative time and its deferral of knowability (from a present moment to a future moment), prolepsis can function as representative of traumatic experience in literary form. In *Kindred* the proleptic future is meant to rescue Dana from the ravages of history, both in the sense that she's transported back to the relative safety of 1976 as soon as she feels her life is in danger, but also, more figuratively, in the sense that the novel's realism isn't rooted in the past (Dana's alternate history on the plantation), but in the future (Dana at home in LA with Kevin). Prolepsis means to offer safety, a refuge from trauma, a respite from the terrors of the past, and from the terror of what is unknowable and unforeseen. But it's a literary device, a narrative sleight of hand. And while Butler offers Dana (and us as readers!) a proleptic grammar with one hand, she snatches it away with the other: prolepsis might save Dana's life in the antebellum, but in the present it can only anticipate retrospect. Performing the temporal loop that she's living out by time traveling, prolepsis can only rehearse trauma in its attempts to relieve it. Once she's absorbed it, history comes hurdling into the future with her, written in and on her body, unfolding anew, exposed *not* as the past, but as an unfolding of days, their meaning yet undetermined, unforeseen.

Inversely, when Dana travels back in time, from 1976 to 1815, she effectively installs the future into the past. Her proleptic intrusions mark a distinctive feature of the alternate history, which stresses the idea that "history" becomes history in the future, when the present, in retrospect, reveals itself as having unfolded in a particular way, and is given some sort of

narrative logic or structure. Dana's travels back and forth in time mark the "limits of existing historical knowledge" in any given era. She makes a point, for instance, during one of her trips to the past, to bring with her "a compact paperback history of slavery in America" because she thinks it "might be useful" (114). When Rufus gets ahold of it, he says it's "the biggest lot of abolitionist trash [he] ever saw" (114).

The book, like Dana, intrudes proleptically into Rufus's conceptualization of the workings of the world, and he's confounded when Dana explains that the book is a work of history, written "a century after slavery was abolished" (114). But this scene also marks the precariousness of history's unfolding, as Butler brings actual historical figures to bear on the fiction, forcing a recognition of the very realist stakes within this antirealist fiction. Dana realizes that, in her history book, are accounts of the past that Rufus must not read, as "too much of it hadn't happened yet. Sojourner Truth, for instance, was still a slave. If someone bought her from her New York owners and brought her South before the Northern laws could free her, she might spend her life picking cotton. And there were two important slave children right [t]here in Maryland. The older one, living [t]here in Talbot County, would be called Fredrick Douglas after a name change or two. The second, growing up a few miles south in Dorchester County was Harriet Ross, eventually to be Harriet Tubman" (140). Ultimately, Dana burns the history book in Rufus's fireplace in order to protect herself from whatever punishment she would have to endure if she were found in possession of such "abolitionist trash." She aims to protect not only herself, but also the futures and legacies of Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglas, and Harriet Tubman. She burns their history, erases it, in order to preserve it. The proleptic grammar that enables this irony also serves to remind us that 'history' both illuminates and obscures. These three particular names (Truth, Douglas, Tubman), even as they stand for the historical lives of

countless other nameless slaves, also elide and silence all those other countless narratives that went unwritten, unrecorded. The novel makes this point again, more explicitly, in its dystopic epilogue, when Kevin and Dana go to the Baltimore Historical Society to find out what happened to the slaves on the Weylin plantation, and find "no records" at all.

As Dana lives out her own alternate history (as a black woman on a plantation in 1815), she must also — by the Wellsian logic of time travel — work within the confines of actual history to prevent an alternate future from taking shape: her mandate to keep Rufus alive serves to ensure the continuity of her own genealogical lineage. But it's a two-part mandate. Dana must also ensure that Rufus fathers the baby from whom she is descended. To that end, Dana must collude with Rufus in his sexual coercion of Alice, a free black woman who becomes his slave, and who is also one of Dana's ancestors. (Alice eventually gives birth to the girl who will become Hagar, Dana's great grandmother.) The diegetic machinations of time travel which embroil Dana in this wrenching (alternate) history perform traumatic temporality (in that Dana lives past, present, and future simultaneously), and construct a symmetry between the two black women (Dana and Alice), and the two white men (Kevin and Rufus).

The doubling of the couples, which I'll address more fully in the next section, functions both in the (alternate) past and in the present of the novel, as one era reveals its sameness to and difference from the other. While Alice and Rufus are fixed in the (alternate) past, Dana and Kevin exist in two eras at once. The race and gender norms that govern the dynamics between Dana and Kevin in the present of the novel become startlingly opaque (impossible, dangerous) when juxtaposed against the norms pertaining to race and gender in the antebellum past. That Kevin and Dana are married, for instance, stuns young Rufus Weylin: "Niggers can't marry white people!" he shouts, upon realizing that Kevin is Dana's husband rather than her master

(60). At the same time, if the race and gender norms that govern the world that Kevin and Dana inhabit in 1976 are meant to be figured as progressive and ideal, when we perceive those dynamics in relation to the norms that governed race and gender during slavery, some underlying correspondences are equally arresting. When (in the present of the novel) Kevin asks Dana to marry him, for instance, she's surprised by his proposal. She says, "you don't have any relatives or anything who'll give you a hard time about me, do you?" And she realizes, as she's speaking, that though they "hadn't been aware of" it, they'd "been avoiding the subject" of race, that "somehow [they]'d never gotten around to it" (109). It turns out that Kevin and Dana *both* have family members that 'give them a hard time' about their interracial couplehood, and the very urgent tensions about race in the present of the novel resonate loudly in Kevin and Dana's silence with each other about "the subject." In other words, our actual racist, sexist antebellum history (of slavery, of miscegenation laws, etc.), though already known, is nonetheless *revealed* to Kevin and Dana when they experience it allo-historically (through time travel). And the metaleptic volley between the historical worlds of the text (between 1815 and 1976), reveals to *us* as readers how durationally intertwined is the present with the past, and we are left to consider our own perceptions of our own time.

We are left to consider, too, whether and how history and historical representation offer us a clear sense of the past. If the "historical novel 'corresponded' to…a sense of history in its strong modern post-eighteenth century sense," the twentieth century postwar proliferation of alternate history novels "corresponds to the waning or the blockage" of that strong sense of history, "to its crisis and paralysis" (Jameson 284). Dana's arc throughout the novel mirrors this trajectory, as it methodically undoes her faith in historical master narratives. By sending Dana back in time to experience the antebellum directly, Butler exposes a variety of lacunae in those

historical master narratives that obfuscate the truths of lived experience (specifically those of subordinate or minority figures), and that galvanize both blacks and whites in the post civil rights era to various political ideologies. Dana goes from unquestioningly accepting history's authority and the reach and knowledge of historians, to rethinking the cultural ideas and stereotypes she's absorbed and internalized.

Early on, suspicious of Dana's explanation that she and Kevin are from the future, Rufus suggests that they "must know…things that are going to happen" (63). "Some things," she answers. "Not very much. We're not historians" (63). At first, Dana takes her cues about the past from history books and other historical narratives. When she first arrives on the Weylin plantation, for instance, she "look[s] around for a white overseer and [is] surprised not to see one" (67), as if the lack of an overseer were somehow historically inaccurate. The Weylin house surprises her "too when [she sees] it in the daylight. It wasn't white," she says. "It had no columns, no porch to speak of. I was almost disappointed" (67). A bit later, in the kitchen at the Weylin house, above the fireplace that serves as an oven, Dana sees a "plank from which hung a few utensils." She "stare[s] at them and realize[s] that [she doesn't know the proper names for any of them. Even things as common place as that" (72). She knows from history (and perhaps from popular fictions like *Gone with the Wind,* which comes up in the novel) about overseers and white plantation houses, but not about the tools used by the slave cook in the kitchen. Not about her tools and not about the emotional reality she embodies.

That slave cook on the Weylin plantation is named Sarah, and she becomes another double for Dana. Three of Sarah's children have been sold, and by way of clinging to her last remaining daughter, Sarah's adopted an affect both stoic (about any kind of suffering) and accommodating (of whatever the white status-quo dictates). Sarah is irate to learn that Dana has

been teaching her daughter to read and write; her anger born of her ferocious fear for her remaining daughter's safety. Sarah is "the kind of woman," Dana tells us, "who might have been called 'mammy' in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom – the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose" (145). Dana is transported to the antebellum from a future where a black radical politics has condemned figures like Sarah. But once in the past, she finds herself not only in Sarah's kitchen, but also in her proverbial shoes. Dana's obligation to her own survival (and to the future life of her distant grandmother) complicates her own responses to a variety of intolerable situations and moves her ultimately to become complicit with Rufus in coercing Alice to submit to sex with him. "Go to her," Rufus commands Dana. "Send her to me. I'll have her whether you help or not. All I want you to do is fix it so I don't have to beat her" (164). Dana's "matured relationship to the realities of survival moves her from condemnation" of Sarah, to sympathy with her (Parham 1320), as she refigures her own sense of autonomy and resistance.

Leveling a critique at the post civil rights "black nationalist binaries of the house or field slave," (Goyal 21), Dana lashes out at one of the field hands who condemns her for her intimacy with Rufus. The field slaves "let" the overseer drive them into the fields every day and work them like mules" she says. He takes offense: "Let him…?" Dana comes back: "Let him! They do it to keep the skin on their backs and the breath in their bodies. Well, they're not the only ones who have to do things they don't like to stay alive and whole" (237). As Yogita Goyal points out, "Butler sends her modern, independent protagonist back in time to slavery in Maryland only to have her assumptions about seemingly subservient figures of the Uncle Tom or the mammy unravel" (Goyal 21). At the same time, Dana's literacy, and her intimacy with white culture (you

talk “more like white folks than white folks” she’s told), and with white men (Kevin and Rufus), draw the ire of most of the slaves on the plantation. They see her language and her assuredness not as heroic or dignified, but as a kind of betrayal of their collective plight. While Dana is becoming empathetic to the traumatic emotional architecture that governs Sarah’s posture on the plantation, Alice calls Dana a “white nigger,” and accuses her of “turning against [her] own people” (165).

Alice’s condemnation of Dana for her marriage to a white man echoes and anticipates the kind of critique that she absorbs about Kevin from her own family in 1976. Dana’s uncle, who has been like a surrogate father to her, feels “hurt” and “rejected” by her marriage to Kevin, and tells her he’d rather leave his “couple of apartment houses in Pasadena” to his church than leave anything to her “and have it fall into white hands” (112). The proprietary quality of Dana’s uncle’s hurt elides the fact of the family’s partially white ancestry: Dana had assumed the familial relation between herself and Rufus because she recognized the name Weylin from a list of ancestors inscribed on the inside cover of a bible that was her family heirloom, but she was taken aback by his color. “Why hadn’t someone in my family mentioned that Rufus Weylin was white? If they knew. Probably they didn’t” (28). Dana’s uncle represents a hurt in line with the black radical politics of the novel’s present, but it’s turtles all the way down. The diegetic critique of Dana’s ‘kinship’ with white folks, both in 1815 and 1976, gets at the heart of not only the infinite regress, but also the infinite progress, of “hurts” that slavery hath wrought. *Kindred*’s conjoining of the past with the present forces a reckoning “with the complex inheritance of black and white kinship forged by the peculiar institution” of slavery (Goyal 21), as well as with the sense, for contemporary readers, that we’ve not yet reckoned at all.

The uneasy intermingling of Dana's alternate past with her actual present in the novel foregrounds the ways that we understand ourselves in relation to history and historical representation. Her visceral allo-historical confrontation with the actual traumatic history of slavery alerts her (and us) to the ways in which that history scaffolds her subjectivity in the present, producing a taut, traumatic relation between past, present, and future. As a novel that "mediate[s] between realist and antirealist positions," *Kindred* marks "the necessity of considering how the ordinary and the extraordinary aspects of [trauma] interact and coexist" (Rothberg 9). Butler's antirealist devices of time travel and alternate history produce precisely this kind of consideration, entangling Dana's extraordinary traumas of slavery in the (alternate) past with the ordinary traumas relating to race relations that condition her life in the present of the novel. In the same way that Dana suddenly feels the physical pain in her back in 1976 that Rufus's mother inflicted on her in 1815, I was suddenly made conscious of the intersectional dynamics of race and gender that condition Dana's relationship to Kevin in the present, when I came across them in the novel's representation of the past.

The Same and Not the Same

Critics who attend to the present of the novel and to Kevin and Dana's marriage tend to want to read it optimistically. Mark Foster, for instance, writes that while their silence about race early on might be indicative of some kind of fracture, their travels to the past, where "race is an inescapable fact of plantation life," function to help Kevin and Dana "deal with the silence around race that circumscribes their entire relationship in 1976 (Foster 160). Indeed, there are instances on the plantation where Kevin and Dana tackle things head on. On one important

occasion, they walk by a group of slave children playing pretend, making an improvised scene of an auction block. Dana is horrified and anguished, despairing about the future for these children for whom, if and when "freedom comes to them, it will be too late" (100). Kevin tells her she's "reading too much into a kids' game" (100). Later, he tells her he's surprised that the work gets done on the plantation though "Weylin doesn't pay much attention to what his people do" (100). Dana informs Kevin that Weylin *does* pay attention, that he (Kevin) has just been unaware because "no one calls [him] out to see the whippings" (100). The scene goes on in a conversation between Kevin and Dana:

> "How many whippings?"
>
> "One that I've seen. One too goddamn many!"
>
> "One is too many, yes, but still, this place isn't what I would have imagined. No overseer. No more work than the people can manage…"
>
> "…no decent housing," I cut in. "Dirt floors to sleep on, food so inadequate they'd all be sick if they didn't keep gardens in what's supposed to be their leisure time and steal from the cookhouse when Sarah lets them. And no rights and the possibility of being mistreated or sold away from their families for any reason—or no reason. Kevin you don't have to beat people to treat them brutally."
>
> "Wait a minute," he said. "I'm not minimizing the wrong that's being done here. I just…"
>
> "Yes you are. You don't mean to be, but you are."

Here Dana points to Kevin's blinders. She instructs him about the way his white male positionality shelters him from discomfiting knowledge (no one calls him out to see the whippings), and how it thus orients his (mis)understanding of the lived experiences of the slaves. He assumes that his reality is a shared reality, that what he sees and senses is what others see and

sense. But there's an alternate reality playing out in plain view – *alternate,* to Kevin, only because his own point of view elides all others, thus rendering *his* view of the world as the *actual* world.

In defending himself against Dana's corrective, Kevin marshals his positionality to double down on his refusal to really recognize "the wrong that's being done." He insists that he isn't "minimizing" anything, which is to say that he sees things as they truly are, or, inversely, and more dangerously – as it's descriptive of how the white male point of view is the arbiter of ontology – that things are as he sees them. Dana won't have it. In this instance, she tells us, "It suddenly became very important that he understand…" (98). Perhaps her urgency here has to do with her own recent shift: she too, upon first arriving in the past, assumed it to be milder than she'd feared, precisely because (at the time) there wasn't an overseer on the plantation. Her own positionality, though, as a black woman, quickly dispelled any sense of safety or sanctuary, for lack of an overseer, that she may have picked up in the history books in Kevin's office. But Kevin is a white man in 1976 and a white man in 1815, and that positionality shelters him equally in the past as it does in the present. It becomes imperative, if Butler's going to end the novel the way she does, with Kevin and Dana still together, still married, that Dana set Kevin straight here, and alert him to the limits of his own perspective.

I can see, then, how such a scene might seem to indicate that, later, when they're home together in 1976, their relationship is bolstered by a new shared understanding about race. To an extent it is: where they hadn't really "gotten around to" the subject of race before, they certainly couldn't "avoid it" in the antebellum, and, alongside Dana's attempt to explain to him about "brutality" from the perspective of a slave, Kevin had also experienced first-hand the worry about Dana's safety, about her wholeness. He is very concerned that Rufus will rape her. And

yet. There is so much else that intersects with race (and with rape) that threatens Dana's wholeness in the present (as well as in the past) that Kevin and Dana don't talk about. The past hasn't marked Kevin in the same way, neither the actual realist past nor the alternate anti-realist past that he inhabits as a time traveler. Kevin is as colorblind at the end of the novel as he was at the beginning. What I mean is that he's still reproducing a racist/sexist world view at the novel's end by not fully recognizing its thoroughly overwhelming effects. Throughout, he consistently operates from a position of authority that consistently dictates and conditions Dana's responses, desires, and fears. 'He doesn't mean to, but he does.' If we listen with what Sara Ahmed calls "a feminist ear," if we attune ourselves to what such "speculative fictions of slavery" were only beginning to teach us – that race and gender fundamentally shape the way we each walk differently through the world – we realize that, at the end of the novel, neither Kevin nor Dana seem really to grasp that the master narrative is still intact.[26]

Time travel compresses the past into the present for Dana, so that she's suddenly cognizant of the durational emotional impact of the history of slavery. ("I don't have to feel the scabs on my back to know that they're there," she says.) But the juxtaposition of past and present also brings into view the symmetry, between the two eras, of ingrained systems of patriarchal oppression that are mutually constitutive with racial oppression. Dana's less overtly aware of some of these intersections, as the sex/gender dynamics of the late 70s are invisible to her — they're a part of the realist fabric of the present of the novel.

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[26] Sarah Ahmed first talks about the "feminist ear" in 2017, in her book, *Living A Feminist Life*, and she returns to the concept in 2021 in *Complaint*: "To hear with a feminist ear" she writes, "is to hear who is not heard, how we are not heard" (Ahmed 20). For Ahmed, hearing with a feminist ear is necessarily intergenerational. It's a "method," an "institutional tactic," and a mode of being "attuned to those who are tuned out," and, as such, becoming "attuned to ourselves." Such attunement, for Ahmed, is an "achievement."

Let's look, for instance, at how race/gender dynamics govern Dana's first encounter with Kevin. Dana, an aspiring writer, is poor. She writes during the nights, "becom[ing] fully awake, fully alive" as she's working on her novel. During the day, she "carrie[s] a little box of No Doz," to keep awake while she's at work. She's been assigned to an auto-parts warehouse by the dispatcher at a temp agency. She tells us that the "regulars" of this "casual labor agency" call it a "slave market," but she disagrees: "actually, it was just the opposite of slavery," she says. Nonetheless, she describes these "regulars," and she is one of them, as "nonpeople rented for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks" (53). Dana's protestation about the distinction between temp work and slavery sets us up to recognize both the differences and the correspondences. On the one hand, temp work is paid and voluntary. On the other, whether they're owned or "rented," those laborers at the mercy of the dispatcher are all still "nonpeople" (the other option is "to sell some blood at one of those storefronts down the street," which Dana has only done one time, she tells us). Kevin approaches Dana at the temp job – he's working there himself – and "the first thing" he does is call her a "zombie." He's referring to her No Doz daze, but the language about slavery is still hanging in the air. She then sizes him up as "just a stock helper or some such bottom-of-the ladder type," and decides that "he has no authority over [her]" and that she doesn't "owe him any explanations." She "quietly" assures him that she "does her work." Thus, her initial affective response to Kevin, whom she describes as "an unusual looking white man…with eyes so pale as to be almost colorless," is a kind of clenching, a resistant, suspicious, defensiveness. Butler doesn't call attention to Dana's process of sizing Kevin up; the assessment itself is indicative of her need to assess who does or doesn't have authority over her, to whom she does or doesn't owe explanation. This process of assessing is seamless, practiced, necessary, born of fear. It's an affective response born of habit.

Kevin goes on to harangue Dana playfully: he heard "from Buz" that she's a writer, he wants to know if it's true, he urges her to "take a break," and she feels compelled to tell him that "unfortunately," she "need[s] this job" (53). She looks "directly into the strange eyes," and then looks "away, startled, wondering whether [she] had really seen anger there. Maybe he [is] more important in the warehouse than [she] had thought. Maybe he had some authority…" (54). Thus, after suspicion and defensiveness comes fear. A second guessing of herself: maybe she'd misread the ques, maybe he *does* have authority, maybe she misstepped…she really needs this job. She looks into his eyes to try and make a human connection (to get him to leave her alone?), and, startled, looks away from the anger she perceives there. What had she possibly done to anger him? She's on alert, startled. The status of his whiteness, her sense of his authority…it sets the tone for their dynamic.

She relaxes when he tells her that he's a writer too, that he's just sold a book, and that this is his last week on the job. She's relieved (no longer worried for her job), but she then feels "a terrible mixture of envy and frustration." Kevin asks her to lunch, or, more accurately, he tells her to "eat with [him]," and it's clear that she will. After Kevin walks away, Buz, the "agency clown" who "never bathed," the one who had told Kevin about her in the first place, emerges and "whispers" in her ear, "leering," and "laughing." He says "Hey, you two gonna get together and write some books?...you gonna write some poor-nography together!" (54). (Buz calls it "chocolate and vanilla porn" a few pages later.) To envy and frustration, Dana can now add shame, humiliation, more fear. She "breath[es] as shallowly as possible," no outlet for any of what's whirling within her. And this is how their romance begins. Dana's besieged by this deluge of fear, suspicion, resistance, frustration, anxiety, envy, and shame…and somehow those feelings are sublimated by the fact of Kevin's approach. Somehow all those feelings, even the

fact of her endurance of Buz's lecherousness, are all channeled, marshalled into the social, historical, cultural structures of what binds her to Kevin. And Kevin gets to be oblivious to all of it.

Once they're an established couple, Kevin asks Dana to type some manuscript pages for him. She agrees, though it's a thing she hates doing (she writes her own pages, all but the final drafts, in longhand). The second time her asks her, she refuses, and Kevin is "annoyed." When he asks again, and she again refuses, he gets "angry" (109). They argue, and he tells her, she "can leave," so she does. When she goes back to his apartment the next day, he is surprised to see her, expecting that she's returned because she's now willing to type up his pages. He's quick to anger when he realizes that she's resolute in her refusal. Nonetheless he accepts her, takes her back, and a few months later he proposes. What does Butler mean to suggest about Kevin by offering this detail about his anger in response to Dana's refusal to type for him? Dana's refusal signals the second wave feminism of the 70s, and we're meant to understand her as a liberated, independent woman. Are we meant to admire Kevin for swallowing his anger and tolerating her feminism? Are we meant to understand him as somehow liberal himself because he accepts (even desires) a liberated woman? A liberated black woman? What do we make of his anger? What happens to it? There's no mention of it again…but there's also no mention of any shift, no mention of any opening up, any recognition of the validity, of the for-grantedness of Dana's self-sovereignty. And what does Dana make of his anger? What does she make of his "tolerance?" The anecdote about the typing comes up for Dana as she's recounting Kevin's proposal of marriage. She describes the incidents of her refusal, and the moment she went back to his apartment the day after he told her she could leave: "I stood waiting for him to either shut the door or let me in. He let me in. And now he wanted to marry me" (109). Are we supposed to

understand that Dana feels a kind of gratitude to Kevin? For letting her in? For his tolerance? For his love?

Rufus, too, on the plantation, desires a liberated woman. Alice, his childhood playmate, had been born free. As they grow up, Rufus's affection becomes romantic. When Alice doesn't respond to his advances, he rapes and enslaves her. Immediately after the rape, Rufus is anguished. "If I lived in your time," he tells Dana, "I would have married her, or tried to" (124). Dana realizes that, to the extent that he is capable, Rufus does love Alice, and she thinks to herself: "there's no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one" (124). Rufus says: "I didn't want to drag her off into the bushes…I never wanted it to be like that. But she kept saying no" (124). I bring up Rufus' "love" for Alice here not to expose some kind of symmetry between Rufus's rape of Alice after she refuses him and Kevin's anger at Dana's refusal to type his pages. This is one of those moments in the novel where, as Madhu Dubey argues, we really see the distinction between the present and the past, and between these two men. Nonetheless, I juxtapose the scenes, because despite the scenarios being absolutely incomparable, what jumps out at me is the way that both men feel entitled to what they each desire from these women. The spectrum of the damage here is huge, but both men feel righteous indignation at their desires being thwarted. Both are confounded when these women refuse them. There isn't an easy similitude between Kevin and Rufus. "Various moments of identification between them…dissolve under closer inspection," (Dubey, "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement" 349), but there *is* nonetheless an underlying orientation towards patriarchy that spans both eras and that shapes the world view of both the men and the women in this novel. Dana imagines Rufus's shame at loving a black woman. Does she imagine Kevin feels a similar

shame in loving her? Even in their own time? Does her own shame inform her gratitude to Kevin?

Dana's gratitude comes up on the plantation too, and I found myself chaffing against it. In a moment of levity, Dana mentions to Kevin that of all the historical time periods they could've travelled back to, "this one" is the "most dangerous" for her. "Not while I'm with you," says Kevin, and Dana "glance[s] at him gratefully" (77). Kevin casts himself as Dana's protector here, but this rhetoric of chivalry makes quick and easy work of conflating "husband" with "master." Butler wants to make it clear that Kevin is one and not the other, that *because* he is the former (because he loves her), he is merely masquerading as the latter. It's by virtue of this masquerade (as her master) that he's able to protect her from Weylin's whip, and as such, that she's grateful for his protection makes sense. But that she *needs* protecting summons a rage that clashes with gratitude. Further, by virtue of this masquerade as Kevin's slave, Dana must endure all kinds of humiliation on the plantation. It becomes her duty to keep "Kevin's room clean." She brings "him hot water to wash and shave with," and she "washe[s] in his room." "Differences be damned," she says, "I did know how to sweep and dust no matter what century it was" (81). She suffers the abuse of Mrs. Weylin, who flirts with Kevin and has nothing but disdain for his slave woman that she assumes he's sleeping with. On one occasion, she slaps Dana. And Dana must maintain a constant vigilance (the same kind that conditions her involuntary assessment of Kevin at the warehouse when the first meet), as she's unsure how to navigate around Mrs. Weylin's whims. When the cruel and lecherous Weylin Senior catches Dana sneaking out of Kevin's room one morning, he "almost smile[s]…and he wink[s]." Reminiscent of the "leering" at Buz at the auto-parts warehouse, Weylin makes her feel, she says "as though I really was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for my supposed owner. I went away feeling uncomfortable,

vaguely ashamed" (97). What happens, uncannily, when we listen in this way to the humiliations Dana suffers on the plantation, is that we hear echoes of the present in the past, rather than the other way around. Dana carries this new "uncomfortable, vaguely ashamed" feeling with her into the present, but it turns out it's been there the whole time. When she tells Kevin, after her first trip back, that she fears "it could happen again," what I hear, in the silences between them, are all the quiet ways that it's *still happening* for Dana, all the ways it's *been* happening.

The final time that Dana is transported to the past, Rufus tries to rape her, and in a vicious, visceral battle, she stabs him and his body goes "limp and leaden across" her. With his "hand still on [her] arm" (260), she is returned to Los Angeles to find her arm fused to the wall of her living room, embedded in the wall at the "exact spot" that Rufus's dead "fingers had grasped" (261). The dead weight of history, reified in concrete, crushes Dana at the end of the novel, asserting its durational force. Indeed, this final scene figures the traumatic ways that slavery has *not* "passed into the register of history" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 780): "I was back in my own house, in my own time," Dana says, "but I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as if my arm were growing out of it—or growing into it" (261). Having felt the experience of slavery in her body throughout the novel, Dana finally becomes a corporeal part of this wall of history, or rather, it has become a part of her, as she is now inextricable from the history of slavery. The passage of time has neither freed her nor set her apart. Of course, this final scene figures the insurmountability of trauma, in that the traumatic wound is unknowable (as impenetrable as a concrete wall), multi-directional (a growing into and a growing out of), and atemporal. It is both before and after, maybe it is neither before nor after – much in the way that time travel flattens past, present, and future, trauma compresses history into a never-ending present, a continual during.

This final chapter is entitled "The Rope," a reference to Alice's hanging death by suicide. Alice kills herself after Rufus, in attempt to break her spirit, makes her believe he's sold her son and daughter (who are also his own biological children). In order to free herself from her anguish, she hangs herself in the barn, and Dana has to cut her down. The image of Alice's rope lingers, a few pages later, when Dana, in order to free *herself*, must sever her own arm from the living room wall. The rope becomes traumatically metamorphosed as a kind of umbilical cord, as Butler figures this auto-amputation as a kind of still birth. Dana "pull[s] hard," and "something cold and nonliving" gives way to "an avalanche of pain, red impossible agony! And [she] scream[s] and scream[s]" (261). What is born in the aftermath of slavery isn't freedom, it is trauma. It is a perpetual relation to a traumatic history that is still unfolding.

Dana's screaming punctuates the end of the novel, but in the short epilogue that follows, Kevin and Dana fly to Maryland to visit Baltimore's "Historical Society." They skim "newspapers, legal records, anything [they] could find" to "try to understand," and to find "solid evidence" of Dana's ancestors. The project of history, after all, is to record, to make sense and make order of the fragmentary nature of discreet events in the past. It's an attempt to narrativize and thus finally to *know* the unknowable, to make fragments cohere. But history fails. Kevin and Dana find "no records" of what happened (264). The master narrative, in its attempt to create illusory cohesion, has erased the lives of the slaves; the absence of Dana's arm, her empty sleeve, the only "solid evidence" of what's transpired.

On the steps of the brick building, in the last lines of the novel, Dana tells Kevin she feels that if they tried to explain their story to anyone, people might think that she and Kevin "were not so sane." But Kevin insists that "[they] *are*. And now that [Rufus] is dead," he says, "we have some chance of staying that way" (264). And this is the overwhelming "crisis ordinariness"

at the core the novel: not the primal events of trauma (be they the various experiences of slavery throughout or the amputation of Dana's arm at the end), but one beat later, a few months later, 160 years later….the duration, the endless contending with the unknowability of a traumatic history that's still unfolding, of an altered relation to the present, and the way that it perpetually marks Dana's day to day relationship with her white husband. I don't mean to read Kevin as racist or sexist against the grain of the text here. Butler goes out of her way to ensure we understand him as progressive and liberal and very much a partner to Dana. But the systems of patriarchy and oppression that explicitly dictate the way that Rufus relates to Dana and Alice in the past, metamorphosed as they are to the standards of the late 20th century, also inform the dynamics between Kevin and Dana in their day to day. Kevin has the last word in the novel, and he *does* suggest that slavery has passed into the register of history. His optimism about "staying sane," "now that Rufus is dead," now that it's all behind them, registers this as a narrative of resolution or recovery that seeks to restore linearity (a beginning and an end), that desires an ordered temporality (a before and after), and that mandates cohesion in the wake of trauma.

Throughout, Kevin insists on regulating Dana's experiences into this kind of hegemonic narrative that he'd prefer she adopt, in order to keep what is traumatic and disruptive at bay. In response to her "panic" after she gets back from her first "visit" to the past, for instance, much as he does at the end of the novel, Kevin tries to smooth things over. He tells her to "take it easy," (17) suggesting – despite the fact that he watched her vanish and return – that perhaps it was a "dream," (18), encouraging her to "let go of it" (17). But she can't take it easy. The experience of slavery does not just "settle back and become the 'dream' Kevin wanted [it]to be" (18), she tells us.

At one point, after a whipping she feared would kill her transports her home to LA, as she sits in her bathtub, crying "into the dirty pink water," Dana thinks of "old photographs" she has seen "of the backs of people who had been slaves" (113). She remembers the scars, "thick and ugly," and thinks to herself, "Kevin had always told me how smooth my skin was…" (113). Now that her skin is broken, like those countless other black women whose skin was scarred by the whip (those whippings that Kevin didn't get called out to see), there's a sense of inevitability about it, the sense that she'd gotten away with something for a while, that only the passage of time had set Dana apart, that the brokenness was always coming for her. Now her back is just one of those backs, like in the photos. She mourns the loss of that smooth skin that figured her as an independent, contemporary woman, that had set her apart from history. When they're both home in 1976, after he's survived five years in the past but before her arm is severed, Kevin tells Dana that he's got what he wants: "You're still you," he says. And she tells us: "I went to him with a relief that surprised me. I hadn't realized how much I'd worried, even now, that I might not be 'still me' as far as he was concerned" (192). The fear, the shame, the gratitude to Kevin that Dana feels, her relief that he wants her (still), it all bespeaks the intensity of the forces of history that condition her subjectivity, her relation to the past, her relation to Kevin in the present. In the past, the forces of oppression are explicit and overt, impossible to be silent about. In the present, they've gone quiet, they've become internalized.

It isn't just skin that's been broken, of course, it's also the trajectory and cohesion of Dana's narrative. Toni Morrison writes that the slave narrative, "while freeing the narrator in many ways, did not destroy the master narrative" (Morrison 50–51). The "master narrative," it seems to me, is the one that insists on the illusory quality of its own cohesion. Dana's broken skin, her severed arm, her shame, her fear, her gratitude – her body, her affect – they give the lie

to the master narrative, defy its authority. At the same time, Dana "makes sense" of slavery, of history, of her marriage to Kevin, by cleaving to the sense that as time had passed, the times had changed. Kevin could love her *because* the times had changed, because her skin was smooth, because she was set apart from history. He consistently seeks to smooth things over when history breaks in and disrupts the status-quo, and so, in order to keep him, she does too.

In the antebellum, in the face of the slave children who weren't yet aware they were slaves, it "suddenly became very important" to Dana "that [Kevin] understand…" (98). That sentence trails off in the novel; Butler doesn't articulate precisely what it is that Dana wants Kevin to know. In the present, in order to hold onto him, to 'still be her' in his eyes, Dana adopts a kind of silence, even within herself, it seems. Ultimately, Kevin's curiosity about her experiences boils down to one urgent question: he insistently wants to know whether Rufus has raped her. She tells him what is "enough like truth." She tells him she has not been raped by Rufus. She says: "it felt enough like truth for me not to mind that [Kevin] only half understood me" (246). The convoluted grammar of that sentence, it seems to me, performs the emotional contortionism that Dana must continuously enact in order to survive in the "crisis ordinariness" of the status quo, of living within a master narrative that demands cohesion despite her brokenness. She cannot tell Kevin, maybe she cannot even know herself, how hard she's worked to keep things smooth – her skin, the narrative. She cannot speak to all the ways that keeping herself whole has broken her, continues to break her. I hear Dana, mute, at the end of the novel, in the face of Kevin's cruel optimism. I point to the fragmentation of her narrative not "to create the illusion of some unbroken thing, but so that we can learn from the sharpness of each piece, how they fit together" (Ahmed 41).

Conclusion

When I first began thinking about alternate histories, Donald Trump hadn't yet been elected president, and Kellyanne Conway hadn't yet inaugurated the American public, on *Meet the Press*, into an era of "alternative facts" as potent players in our national discourse. I remember watching her speak on television: she was explaining that Sean Spicer, Trump's then Press Secretary, hadn't lied when he told the White House press corps that the crowd at the swearing-in ceremony was the "largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe." He was merely relating "alternative facts," she said (Gajanan). I was standing in the bedroom, rocking my infant son to sleep, shifting my weight from one foot to another. I remember an uneasy dread, a slightly queasy feeling taking hold (not unlike Dana's nausea before she gets shuttled through time). I was rocking my son, conscious of my own shifting feet, but somehow only half cognizant that the ground was also shifting beneath them. Motherhood had already shellacked me, but I wasn't yet aware that I'd been overcome. That slow coming-into-knowledge would start to seep in later, years later. ("For two years, there's no me here" wrote the poet, Alice Notley, about the self-erasure of motherhood.) I hadn't known to anticipate the enormity of my own response to my son's presence, to this new relation to him that would now condition my reality. I hadn't prepared to be all consumed, at least not after those first few months of his infancy, at which point I thought I'd get back to teaching, to writing, to thinking about alternate histories. And there was Kellyanne Conway on TV, speaking as if she were an autocrat from some Orwellian fiction, conjuring an alternate reality within our actual one, not unlike Dick's characters in *The Man in the High Castle* (except that they weren't in power within the diegesis, and she was speaking for and from the White House). I remember

thinking: what am I to do about alternate histories now, if there's no longer one official, consensual version of the present?

We use the word trauma to name both a primal event and our continued relation to it, but we don't have a proper term for those shattering events and non-events that aren't necessarily sudden or catastrophic, but that also aren't *as* diffuse as Berlant's "crisis ordinariness" or Cvetkovich's "life under capitalism." How do we talk about those durational, conditioning, shattering occurrences or circumstances that are evolving but thematically or situationally bound, that traumatize us over time? A change in the tenor of the news, for instance, or motherhood. These are repetitive coalescences of affective response to the days as they unfold: being dumbstruck by the reach and the absurdity of QAnon, for instance (and watching the shaman in his furs and Viking helmet with the insurrectionist crowd at the capitol); being arrested at the baby's crib, listening in the dark for the way his thighs relax, counting 75 of his breaths before daring to hope for an hour of sleep. A perpetual confounding, a not-knowing how to respond, a relentless hum in the back of the mind that things aren't supposed to be this way, that something's *gone wrong*. American democracy. Civil Rights. A working mom. How do we orient ourselves when our anchoring narratives falter or simply rupture? How do we contend with the impasse that such ruptures engender?

Alternate histories attend to the fictional narratives that govern our lives and our sense of who we are (as Americans, as individuals). They are attuned to our need for the cohesion of these narratives, to our fears about their disruption, to the feelings of powerlessness in confronting unknowability and stasis. When Dana explains to Rufus that the "abolitionist trash" in the history book she'd brought with her from the future was written "a century after slavery was abolished," Rufus is confounded. "Then why the hell are they still complaining about it?" he

asks. His question makes clear the privilege of his positionality. He speaks the master narrative, the narrative of linearity and progress, the narrative that rejects recursion. Kevin's axiomatic insistence on 'staying sane' at the end of the novel speaks from the same positionality, from the same narrative point of view. Kevin is not in a position to understand Dana's traumatic relation to history. And even in the face of her amputated arm and her attempt to claim that their story is "not so sane," he nonetheless desires that she cooperate, participate in a narrative of optimistic resolution. I can't help but hear the current uproar about Critical Race Theory as a reiteration of Rufus's noxious, self-righteous question about "complaint" in the aftermath of abolition, and of Kevin's need for a narrative of recovery. What is at stake for those vehement white parents at school board meetings who don't want their children to be taught their country's history of slavery and oppression? The master narrative, unable or unwilling to contend with the durational, conditioning, recursive, fracturing qualities of its own violence, simply seeks to write over them. We are not oppressors. We never were. And even if we were, it's over. Let's move on. Let's stay sane.

Narrating the Swede's trauma in *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman writes that "history, American history, the stuff you read about in books and study in school… with all its predictable unforeseenness, broke helter skelter into the orderly household of the Seymor Levovs and left the place in a shambles. People think of history in the long term," he says, "but history, in fact, is a very sudden thing" (Roth, *American Pastoral* 87). History here speaks specifically to the suddenness of Merry's bomb, to an explosive, unforeseen event that leaves a shambles in its wake. But it speaks also to that which is in excess of a bomb, in excess of a singular event. It is "everything unexpected in its own time" that later *becomes* history (Roth, *The Plot Against America* 114). For Levov, the "shambles" are his continued relation to the "the fury, the

violence, and the desperation" of surviving the rupture of his narrative trajectory. The "very sudden" history that 'breaks in' and ruptures it isn't sudden at all. It isn't even history; it is merely the days as they unfold, terrifying in their unforeseenness.

American Pastoral (like *Kindred,* like *The Man in the High Castle*) is written in past tense, which is to say that it's written retrospectively, from a point of view that looks back and narrates the (alternate) past from its future perspective. But the grammar of *American Pastoral* (like *Kindred,* like *The Man in the High Castle,* like alternate histories writ large) is proleptic, which is to say that it's future oriented: driven by the anticipation of retrospect. It seems a paradox to suggest that a novel written in past tense inscribes a proleptic sensibility. But prolepsis relieves the terror of the unforeseen. In offering a glimpse of the future, or rather, in narrating an unknowable past from a future vantage point, prolepsis relieves the burden of belated apprehension, which *American Pastoral* obsessively thematizes. Zuckerman doesn't actually know what transpired between Seymour Levov and his daughter, Merry. He'd known Levov when they were boys, when Levov, as "the Swede," was that paragon of assimilation "through [whom] the neighborhood entered into a fantasy about itself and about the world" (3). And then years later, when they're both in their 70s, Levov asks Zuckerman to dinner. Over plates of ziti, Zuckerman "keeps waiting for [Levov] to lay bare something more" than what seems a "pointed unobjectionableness," but he is ultimately left marveling at the "blandness" and "blankness" of Levov's smile. Less than a year later, at his high school reunion, Zuckerman is caught off guard to learn that Merry was the "Rimrock Bomber." He's caught off guard to learn that Levov, not long after their dinner, died of prostate cancer. He comes into knowledge too late, and the belated apprehension shakes him:

> I missed it—I whose vanity is that he is never naïve…Sitting there [at dinner] getting the shallowest bead I could on the Swede when the story he had to tell me…was the revelation of an interior life that was unknown and unknowable, the story that is tragic and awful and impossible to ignore…and I missed it entirely. (80)

Zuckerman, like a historian, then begins "to work from traces" (76) to write the story of Levov's life before and after Merry's bomb, giving it shape and meaning and structure. From the future, he affixes narrative, fixes the past in place, makes it knowable. In rehearsing his belated apprehension, as he spends "months" thinking "about the Swede for six, eight, sometimes ten hours at a stretch" (74), he relieves the terror of the unforeseen (both Levov's and his own). Such is the paradox of prolepsis: in reliving, it relieves. It is a form that testifies to trauma. At their dinner, confounded by the "blankness" of Levov's smile, Zuckerman wonders if it could "perhaps be an indication of derangement." But once he learns about the bombing, Zuckerman writes of Levov as "a lifetime experiment in endurance. A performance over a ruin" (81). He theorizes the "blankness" of that smile as "a brazen refusal," a "stun gun," an attempt to "subjugate" everything "that didn't suit him—not only deceit, violence, mockery, and ruthlessness, but anything remotely coarse grained, any threat of contingency, that dreadful harbinger of helplessness" (36). The smile is an attempt to "hold it all together when the strong arm of the unforeseen comes crashing down on your head" (36). That smile performs the fiction of a narrative still intact. If we apply to Levov's smile the traumatic, counterfactual logic of metonymy and substitution, the smile resonates with Kevin's mandated optimism at the end of *Kindred*. It is the force of the master narrative that erases the Weylin plantation slaves from the records of the Baltimore Historical Society. It is the rejection of CRT, the banning of Toni

Morrison from high school libraries and curriculums. It is the "largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe."

If only we could experience ourselves proleptically, alleviate our anxieties and terrors in the moment with some glimpse of future fixity. In between her transports to the antebellum, during one of her layovers at home in 1976, Dana tells us that she sits "down at [her] typewriter and trie[s] to write about what had happened" on the plantation. She makes "about six attempts before" she gives up and "throws them all away." She says: "Someday, when this was over, if it was ever over, maybe I would be able to write about it" (116). Dana here describes the problem and project of every writer: to find the words and the forms that describe the truths of the world, of experience. In Dana's case, to find the words to make "the truth" of slavery be "more fully grasped" by a reader (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 785). But how can she describe what she, herself, cannot yet fully grasp? When she, herself, is still *being* "fully grasped" by the thing she seeks to name and to know? When that *thing* is a history that's still unfolding? *We* know, while Dana cannot yet know, that traumatic histories don't end. We also know that Kevin will later insist that they do end, and that they should. From what positionality can Dana write? What future perspective will allow her to? It is important that the protagonists of all three of the novels I've included in this project are writers: Abendsen, Zuckerman, Dana. It is important, too, that of these three, the white men are able to inscribe new worlds within the boundaries of their respective texts, while Dana's own narrative is amputated, while she feels she can't write it until 'it's over, if it's ever over.'

Octavia Butler, of course, *does* write, and her oeuvre inscribes the fractured narratives of traumatic unknowability as hallmarks of speculative and dystopian fiction. Philip K. Dick (whose middle initial, incredibly, stands for "Kindred"), writes obsessively about the ways that

our epistemologies falter, about the impossibility of one single objective reality. And Philip Roth's body of work, while never oriented towards science fiction, nonetheless takes up the same questions about the ways that our lived experiences are always already mediated by narrative, and about the crises engendered in confronting the entanglement between the facts of our lives and the way we represent them. All three of these very disparate writers, amongst their other fictions, write alternate histories. The genre, it seems to me, coheres at the traumatic (dis)junction of narrative history and lived experience. Walter Benjamin, in delineating a particular power or force in a work of art, describes that thing which he calls the expressionless (*das Ausdruckslose*), that thing in a work of art that ruptures semblance, that interrupts the "spell-like enchantment" of similitude:

> The expressionless is the critical violence which, while unable to separate semblance from essence in art, prevents them from mingling…In the expressionless, the sublime violence of the true appears…Only the expressionless completes the work, by shattering it into a thing of shards, into a fragment of the true world, into the torso of a symbol. (Benjamin 340)

Alternate histories take up the slippage between the real and the constructed, the experienced and the not, between knowing and not knowing. They conflate the alternate with the actual but also prevent them from mingling. In so doing, they shatter our anchoring narratives, and ask us to sit with uncertainty. It isn't easy, neither as a reader nor as a critic, nor as a person alive in the world. But there's a sense of strength in the acceptance of unknowability, and an imperative to listen better, more fully, more openly. From this place, perhaps, this place that's cognizant of how easily they're dismantled, we can *all* keep constructing our worlds.

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