Displacing
the Anxieties
of Our World

Displacing the Anxieties of Our World:

Spaces of the Imagination

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

ANXIOR, ERGO SUM:
I WORRY, THEREFORE I AM

ILDIKÓ LIMPÁR

Descartes's famous philosophical proposition in the form of "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am)[1] at first sight appears to be a reassuring, positive idea about existence, but we should not forget that it roots in deep existential fear. It is the doubt of existence that allows Descartes to conclude that he *is*: "dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum" (I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am) as Antoine Léonard Thomas elaborates the French philosopher's declaration.[2] *Ergo*, even our knowledge about our existence is thus intertwined with our anxieties concerning the relationship between reality and illusion—spaces of the pragmatically experienceable world and spaces of the imagination. Descartes's definitive conclusion concerning the fact of existence does not exclude the possibility that all else experienced is a deception, this being an important philosophical problem not only in the western cultural tradition, but also in the Orient, as Zhuagzi's[3] famous butterfly dream teaching dating back to the third century B.C. testifies.

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[1] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. John Veitch (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1850), 74.
[2] Antoine Léonard Thomas, *Éloge de René Descartes*, 1765, *Google books*, accessed 29 September 2016,
https://books.google.hu/books/reader?id=mvQ5AAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PA1.
[3] In Chinese: 莊子 ; transcribed usually as Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang) or Chuang-tzu. "Zhuagzi," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, December 17, 2014, accessed 29 September 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/.

> Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. Between Chuang Chou and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.[4]

With computerized virtual reality having entered our life, the dream argument is more relevant than ever, as the popularity and abundance of cinematic works based on the theme of virtual reality[5] and the flourishing video gaming industry warn us. Ironically, however, the threat that manifests behind these products of business and art generates a two-way reaction: it reinforces the anxiety connected to the inseparability of reality and imagination; yet, at the same time, it creates a space (or at least an illusion that there is a space) that may clearly be called imaginary as opposed to the world we know as real and is capable of this "dreaming."

This collection of essays focuses on such dreamed-up spaces of great variety and offers studies that focus on how anxieties—of different ages and geographical locations—are in relation to the world that produces them and hence to the person existing in that world. Art serves "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure,"[6] as Shakespeare explains with Hamlet's words. But how variedly may a work of art reflect reality? And what do we learn about ourselves and our world from projections of anxieties that we wish to displace into realms where they may safely be studied and coped with? The space of imagination that conjures up versions of the world's frustrations also offers a virtual battleground—and the possibility of triumph coming from a valuable gain of cognizance, once we do perceive the correspondence between spaces of the fantastic and those of the mundane. As this volume demonstrates, art may become a powerful tool to fight anxiety even without transmitting a

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[4] Chuang Tzu, "Discussion on Making All Things Equal," in *The Complete Works Of Chuang Tzu,* trans. Burton Watson, *Terebess Asia Online*, accessed 29 September 2016, http://terebess.hu/english/chuangtzu.html#2.

[5] See items listed in "The Best Virtual reality Movies," *Ranker*, accessed 29 September 2016, http://www.ranker.com/list/best-virtual-reality-movies-list/all-genre-movies-lists?utm_expid=16418821-253.1pST8hHXRlGe0nguOTQEHQ.0&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.hu%2F.

[6] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (Arden Shakespeare, London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.2.21-24.

straightforward message concerning resolutions; what is more, often exactly because it lacks such didacticism is art capable of encouraging the reader/spectator/player/researcher to make sense of what s/he is exposed to.

Monster studies and dystopian literature and film studies have become central to research on the now proliferating works that give voice to culture-specific anxieties. This development in scholarship reinforces the notion that the genres of fantasy and science fiction call for interpretations that see their spaces of imagination as reflections of reality, not as spaces invented merely to escape the real world. In this vein, the present volume discusses fictive spaces of literature, film, and video gaming, producing a dialogue among disciplinary fields that bridges the imagined space between sixteenth-century utopia and twenty-first century dystopia with studies penetrating fictitious spaces beyond utopian and dystopian spheres.

Part I of the present volume, "Imagined Journeys through History, Gaming and Travel," encompasses essays that highlight the imaginative mind's need of coping with real world challenges *elsewhere* than within the confines of reality. This section starts with Donald E. Morse's overview of genres relating to counterfactual history and providing dissimilar spaces of fantasy to rethink historical issues, turns and conflicts. Providing ample examples to demonstrate the tangible difference among counterfactual history, the historical novel, fantasy history, Alternative History and the embedded historical novel, Morse emphasizes not only the permeability of genres, but also the significance of the thoughtfully selected divergence point in order to produce fiction that is capable of productively engaging with dilemmas of the past—and, consequently, of the present. Displacing the anxieties of history that still haunt or puzzle us into the imagined spaces these genres ensure thus has a practical use: the analysis may contribute to the study of history, and assist the readers in rethinking the complexity of past and present situations and in learning from this assessment.

The chapter on fictional journeys through time is accompanied by Péter Kristóf Makai's exploration of virtual tourism present in video gaming. Looking at the evolution of the simulated spaces that one plays in, Makai reviews the space concepts of video games from the *Super Mario Bros*. through a number of games that utilize theming in constructing gaming space to the playful dystopia of *Fallout 3*. One of the ways these virtual spaces address the issue of present day anxieties is by providing an escape from the harshness of reality through entertainment: gaming ensures fun (coming from the act of playing) and a sense of satisfaction (coming from rewarded achievement). The type of virtual space, however,

proves essential in coping with the worries of the world, as it frames not only the environment, but also the kind of activity the game—or rather the consciously choosing user—demands, as these fantastic spaces often correspond to the gamer's wishful thinking. However, not only wishes, but also various phobias may be reflected in the great varieties of virtual spaces, as the analysis of dystopian gaming spaces underline. In effect, this paper "plays" with similar ideas that the essay on counterfactual genres does, as entertainment video games are also based on revisitation in a displaced space of fantasy. As such, the discussed video games provide space not exclusively for entertainment, but, instead, for edutainment.

Part I ends with the case study of an Elizabethan travel literature writer, Thomas Nicholls, whose utopias are less known to the general public. Using the genre of the utopia as explained by Milton as a starting point, Maczelka looks at Nicholls' works as imaginary spaces that reflect the author's ideas; but while this generic characteristic usually directs analysis to how the main text reflects social and political concerns, Maczelka posits authorial self-representation in the center of his analysis, directing attention to the paratexts, which inform the reader of an author who consciously hides his real identity and variously shapes his image until he invents his fictional alter ego of the poor, suffering pilgrim. As Maczelka argues, this authorial position is strongly connected to the anxieties Nicholls had to face: the pilgrim refers not only to the genre of travel literature, but also reveals the writer's attempt at creating a world that is utopian in nature and thus erasing his affliction (connected to the contemporary political system).

Part II, entitled "Political Anxieties and Fear of Dominance" centers around the complexity of how power relations may be conceptualized in worlds inhabited or characterized by monsters and the monstrous. Inviting the readers to engage creatively with Jerome Cohen's observation that "A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,'"[7] this section of the book unveils a surprising variety in the ways monsters infiltrate the fields of political games. Bill Clemente's study of Alejandro Brugués' zombie comedy *Juan of the Dead* (2011) gives a detailed account of how this award-winning film deals with the anxieties generated by the Cuban regime, and thus calls attention to the significance of zombie texts—literal and visual alike—in providing effective criticism of present day political and social issues. Highlighting the role of cinematic zombies

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[7] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture. (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

standing for the consuming and conforming society, Clemente provides an analysis of the film that demonstrates the Cuban socio-political crisis: turning into a zombie, accordingly, corresponds to the process of dehumanizing society by taking away people's freedom and autonomy. The focused sources of frustration and fear include the tensional political relationship with the USA, Raúl Castro's unsatisfactory programs to enhance the Cuban economy, as well as the role of media, contrasting official proclamations and revolutionary blogging. Clemente's reading of this cinematic text thus convincingly demonstrates that monster texts, not excluding zomcoms, may indeed serve as an invented space where present-day anxieties can be observed and criticized in a fruitful manner.

Julianna Borbély's examination of the power game that is central in the TV-series *Hannibal* extends our general understanding of what monsters are. The anxiety that this paper explains in detail is twofold: on the one hand, it underscores the fear that evil is inexplicable, for evil is irrational; while on the other, the analysis makes the reader aware that humans are subject to the possible process of monsterization even in the real world. Existing outside the human law and ignoring the moral and social principles of humanity makes the title character, Hannibal, not simply a deviant member of society, but a freak whose anthropomorphic appearance is not in harmony with his beastly behavior—a monster, who is "harbinger of category crisis," as Cohen explains.[8] Minutely displaying the way Will Graham, the FBI agent, gradually turns into a monster similar to the criminal he tries to catch, Borbély elaborates on the power game between Hannibal and his hunter in terms of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Lordship and Bondage dialectics. The presented thinning, and consequent disappearing borderline between the human and the monstrous provides a serious warning concerning human nature in a world where evil and good have ceased to maintain a reliable content.

Part II continues with Sándor Czeglédi's discussion of the possible influences on the origin of the fictional character Count Dracula, one of the best-known monsters in western literature. This chapter allows the reader to perceive that the correspondence between the monster and the anxieties of the contemporary world that calls it to existence may assist even in contributing to scholarly debates that otherwise would come to a halt. Czeglédi joins the scholarly dispute on Vambery's possible role in shaping the historical background of Stoker's vampire, and offers new perspectives in judging the extent of the influence that remains a cardinal question in Dracula studies. Drawing on Jimmie E. Cain's reading the

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[8] Ibid., 6.

novel as an example of how the contemporary British Russophobia penetrates the author's space of imagination, Czeglédi highlights the Hungarian Vambery's affiliation with the British Foreign Office as a spy and agent, as well as his popularity that also manifests itself in Vambery's public appearances and speeches. Czeglédi consequently argues that recent trends in Dracula criticism that aim at eroding the link between Vambery and Stoker should be subjected to reconsideration.

The two chapters in Part III explore "The Space of Fantastic Science and Scholarship." Anikó Sohár's essay compares the presentation of academic life in the fantasy works by Connie Willis and Sheri Tepper. Focusing on the critical and parodical approaches these authors take, Sohár demonstrates that the examined SF novels display an overall modern world anxiety embedded in the importance of applicable education as well as the hindrances to access it due to the isolated circle of scholars who should assure high quality erudition but have lost touch with the practical side of life, cementing themselves in a rigid system that kills creativity, thus limiting the possibility to make advancements. The slightly differing attitude to the academia the novelists' writing reflects may be traced back to their personal history of education: Willis's ironical, insider treatment of the topic contrasts sharply with Tepper's more satyrical, outsider approach; the texts consequently disclose both social and personal frustrations.

Sohár's chapter that highlights the comical aspect of scholarly life is paired with Anna Petneházi's study on Christopher Priest's *The Prestige,* in which the tragic existential questions emerge as focal. In her analysis, Petneházi relies on Jacques Derrida's term "the dangerous supplement" to show how clones challenge our binary concepts of signifier and signified, of original and copy, of singularity and similarity, and how they posit humans in the realm of a symbolic death. This apprehension has become a favored topic in dystopian novels, but this time cloning becomes an integrated part of a rivalry between two magicians in the Victorian era. However, treating the uncanny fear of doubles in the imagined safe space of the past does not reduce the effect on the reader; in fact, the choice of setting amplifies the anxiety, suggesting that what we fear is not a possible, dangerous future, but something that is independent of time. In addition, cloning and textual doubling become inseparable in Priest's concept. The novel thus also communicates the horror connected to the act of creation demanding the (symbolic) death of author; and the disquietude linked to the act of reading when the signification one expects and usually relies on becomes unstable—an angst that people in our rapidly changing world experience on an everyday basis.

Part IV takes the reader to "Spaces Natural and Spaces Artificial" with the help of three essays that specifically concern themselves with how the fictional spaces present in various fantasy novels relate to our contemporary world of reality. At the core of Vera Benczik's analysis of urban fantasy novels lies the city—more exactly, the displaced London—as the site of the fantastic, co-existing with the mundane London in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and China Miéville's *King Rat* and *Kraken*. Benczik connects these novels through the common component of the reluctant questing hero, and the palimpsestual nature of the space in which the heroes go through a transformation. Her analysis reveals that as settings for a rite of passage, the same topography becomes the site of repression—the city of experiential reality; and the site of emotional projection and reflection—the fantastic realm. The heroes experience displacement, and both individual and collective anxieties are projected upon the estranged fantastic urban space.

The chaotic and confusing nature of the fantastic city in examples belonging to the New Weird is also detectable in The Hunger Games trilogy; but while the city—that is, the Capitol—is expected to appear as the site of artificiality as opposed to the technologically less developed districts in Suzanne Collins's Panem, the arena, signaling the ultimate chaos in the form of destructive wilderness, is the product of technology, and thus stands for an artificially created wild. This artificiality, as Ildikó Limpár argues in her essay, establishes a connection between the arena and the Capitol. As Limpár demonstrates, on the one hand the complexity of this relationship may fruitfully be explored with Michel Foucault's theory on heterotopia. The connection between Panem's world and the contemporary world that it mirrors in a dystopian setting may most successfully be examined, on the other hand, with Joanne Thompson's approach of using heterotopology for theater studies specifically. This method allows the interpretation of the arena as a space of nightmarish imagination that through screening becomes a space of performance—a theater space that due to its heterotopic nature is able to offer moments of hope amidst the anxieties with which this horrific space confronts the audience.

The final chapter, written by Zsuzsanna Tóth, examines how present-day anxieties may propel fantasy writing towards presenting imagined spaces which may enhance positive thinking about resolving key worries of our contemporary world. This ecocritical reading of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy points out how the core ideology of environmentalism—namely the desirable restoration and respectful preservation of the meaningful entirety of the natural environment—appears in the novels. Tóth argues that Pullman's fantastic creations,

particularly Dust, an evanescent deity, and the Mulefa people, reveal that the author recomposed representative items from Judeo-Christianity and English literary traditions so as to create his fictional manifestations of humankind's connectedness with Nature, and, in a larger-scale context, with the whole Universe.

As this collection of essays demonstrate, the fictive spaces which we used for centuries for displacing real-world fears are multi-functional. For one, dissociating ourselves from reality may offer temporary escape from worries that we may not have the stamina to ceaselessly cope with; second, displacement allows for the necessary distancing to experiment with understanding and managing the anxieties in a safe space, not endangering the integrity of the world or the problem-solver; and finally, perceiving the connection between art and contemporary anxieties may further scholarship by bringing new perspectives and consequently, new results in academic research.

The study of the "Transformation of Things" that Zhuangzi points to in his dream lesson thus may be used to generate transformation in our contemporary world—a notion that the contributors to this volume believe in. We propose that the study of anxieties in the realm of imagination opens up space for positive changes in the real world. Anxior, ergo sum: I worry, therefore I am—because I thrive to understand how the anxieties I suffer from influence my understanding of the world, that, is my existence.

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PART I

IMAGINED JOURNEYS THROUGH HISTORY, GAMING AND TRAVEL

THE RISE OF COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY AND THE PERMEABILITY OF DISCIPLINES[1]

DONALD E. MORSE

"Each significant historical action collapses a wave function of potentialities, and alters the temporal vector."[2]

Introduction: Red Herrings and Parlor Games

Since the end of World War II there has been a noticeable increase both in popular and scholarly history of counterfactual versions of important historical events, such as the conclusion of WWII, the outcome of the United States Civil War and so forth as a way of displacing anxieties into new spaces of the imagination. The noted British historian, diplomat, and journalist E. H. "Edward" Carr (1892-1982) among others appeared very unhappy about this development. In his George Macauley Trevelyan Lectures for 1961 Carr spoke briefly, derisively, but memorably on counterfactual history's lack of value when he admonished his fellow historians to "get rid of this red herring once and for all."[3] Carr's negative view may well have been provoked by the increasing popularity of books, such as John Collings Squire, *If, It Had Happened Otherwise* (1931). Among the contributors to Squire's *If* were—most famously—Winston S. Churchill (*If* Lee had not won at Gettysburg), Hilaire Belloc, Andre Maurois and G. K. Chesterton. Squire himself contributed a most forgettable essay on *If* Francis Bacon had really written Shakespeare's plays. Carr scathingly dismissed that compendium and such similar books

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[1] This essay is highly indebted to Gary Wolfe's insightful reviews for *Locus* magazine which he kindly supplied to me and his important scholarly study, *Evaporating Genres*.

[2] Kim Stanley Robinson, *Galileo's Dream* (New York: Ballantine, 2009), 381.

[3] Quoted in Roland Paulsen, "The Counterfactual Imagination," in *Theorizing in Social Science: The Context of Discovery*, ed. Richard Swenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 164.

as "a parlor game."[4] A few months after Carr published those same Trevelyan Lectures as *What Is History?*—a book that in its Penguin edition would become required reading for most university history majors in England and the United States—the popular slick magazine *Look*, ignoring Carr's advice on disposing of suspicious fish, commissioned long essays from MacKinlay Kantor on "If the South Had Won the Civil War" and from William L. Shirer on "If Hitler Had Won World War II"—topics by then well explored in science fiction. "The contrast between the relatively mechanistic projections [of historians Kantor and Shirer] and the imaginative leaps of their science-fiction counterparts is rather telling," dryly observes Gary Wolfe in *Evaporating Genres*.[5] A few minutes contemplation of Phillip K. Dick's now classic rewriting of the aftermath of World War II, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), where the Axis Powers having won that war divide the United States between them, or of Robert Harris's lesser known *Fatherland* (1992) with its detailed view from inside Germany's third Reich ruled by a victorious Hitler, is enough to confirm Wolfe's understated criticism. Unlike in these two novels, there are no "real toads" in Kantor's and Shirer's mechanistic "imaginary gardens."[6]

But Carr's magenta fish proved notoriously hard to banish even within his own discipline of history as seen in the marks of professional acceptance accorded counterfactual history, such as academic history conferences and journals. The first such conference was held at Ohio State University in November 1997, some 36 years after Carr's book was published. The following year the *Quarterly Journal of Military History* dedicated that respected scholarly journal's tenth anniversary issue entirely to the subject (1998).[7] And as a final straw, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science* (2012) the noted philosopher Julian Reiss had a thirty page entry on "counterfactuals," where he—defending these new spaces of the imagination—contends that "counterfactuals have stood the test of time with more success than positivism, and a world without at

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[4] Quoted in Robert S. Boynton, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Profile of Niall Ferguson," The *New Yorker*, 12 April 1999, accessed 26 July 2016,
http://www.robertboynton.com/articleDisplay.php?article_id=50.
[5] Gary K. Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 221n11.
[6] Marianne Moore in "Poetry" (1919) identifies true poetry with the ideal of "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Marianne Moore, "Poetry," in *Anthology of American Literature* 2, ed. George McMichael et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 1388-1389.
[7] See Wolfe, *Genres,* 64.

least some speculation about what would, could, or might have been would be utterly impoverished."[8]

Counterfactual Abraham Lincolns

Recently, there has been a spate of counterfactual histories focusing on President Abraham Lincoln, such as Stephen Carter's *The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln* (2012) that examines those forces arrayed against the president had he survived Booth's assassination attempt. Carter envisions letters of impeachment voted because of Lincoln's failed attempt at the postwar reconstruction of the South. An interesting scenario, perhaps, but I somehow doubt that Lincoln's enemies—and he had many—would have been able to succeed in such an effort. In assassinating Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth killed the best friend the South could have had—one who demonstrated again and again that he had no interest in punishing or humiliating those he had defeated unlike the ones who would come into power after his death. Lincoln insisted that Southern soldiers who surrendered should be permitted to keep their horses and side arms and allowed to return to their homes. The surrender of Lee to Grant at Appomattox was a model of tact, respect, and courtesy—exactly what Lincoln had called for. While we will never know if Lincoln's methods would have succeeded, we do know that the ones employed after his assassination failed miserably.

In *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2006) historian Doris Kearns Goodwin outlines Lincoln's methods making a strong—perhaps irrefutable—case for his extraordinary ability to win over opponents and where that proved impossible to co-opt them, and if that did not succeed then at least to keep them close by where he could watch their every move. Salmon Chase, whom Lincoln defeated in the Republican presidential primary, presents a vivid example of Lincoln's employing all three strategies: In 1860 Chase assumed he would be nominated for President on the Republican ticket. But Lincoln decisively defeated him on the third ballot and then went on to be elected president. After winning the election, Lincoln shocked his followers and those who considered themselves his advisors, by including Chase in his cabinet and then motivating him to work for his [Lincoln's] goals. The president kept him in the cabinet even when three years later Chase once again went campaigning for the Republican nomination, assuming erroneously and

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[8] Julian Reiss, "Counterfactuals," *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156.

without consulting Lincoln that the president would not seek re-nomination. Only when Chase openly campaigned against him did Lincoln force his resignation; that is, fire him. Such extraordinary forbearance in the interest of mastering and, even, co-opting your enemies served Lincoln well during his first term and I see little reason to assume it would not have also served him in his second term had he been allowed to finish it. While *The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln* illuminates what Lincoln quite probably would have had to face had he survived, this counterfactual history nevertheless tends to underestimate his consummate political skills together with his carefully honed ability to judge people, especially potential or current enemies.

The Historical Novel and Fantasy History

Historical novels often appear closely aligned with counterfactual history and many are, yet others prove to be fundamentally distinct, such as Jerome Charyn *I am Abraham: A Novel of Lincoln and the Civil War* (2014) which adopts Lincoln's voice and uses it to dwell on his bouts of depression. That depression was originally discussed at length in Joshua W. Shenk's *Lincoln's Melancholy* (2005), where Shenk advances the hypothesis that "when Lincoln felt despair closing in, he found an escape route through politics."[9] Quite likely, but Lincoln also had other escape routes to hand. For instance, he escaped frequently to the theater which he loved, Shakespeare especially. He often quoted Shakespeare at length and from memory.[10]

Andrew Delbanco in a fair, even-handed review points to Charyn's very real accomplishments that illustrate some of the potential of this type of novelization of history and historical characters along with its less attractive aspect:

> [Charyn] gives us a human Lincoln besieged by vividly drawn enemies and allies. . . . The book is daringly imagined, written with exuberance, and with a remarkable command of historical detail. . . . But there is also something trivializing here. This Lincoln talks too much. He is too self-

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[9] Quoted in Andrew Delbanco, "The New Adventures of Abe," review of *I Am Abraham: A Novel of Lincoln and the Civil War,* by Jerome Charyn, *The New York Review of Books,* March 6, 2014, 34.

[10] Michael Anderegg after examining all available evidence for Lincoln's knowledge of Shakespeare concludes that "Lincoln was throughout his life fascinated by and engaged with Shakespeare's plays." "Preface," *Lincoln and Shakespeare* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2015), xii.

exposing—as if Hannibal were to come back complaining of sore buttocks from too much riding upon elephants.[11]

Such "trivializing" remains the great pitfall of this kind of non-historical history writing and appears all the more stark in contrast to Goodwin's warmly human portrait that dwells on Lincoln's incredible memory and ubiquitous story telling without diminishing either the man or the office.

Max Weber wisely insisted that "plausible counterfactuals should make as few historical changes as possible on the grounds that the more we disturb the values, goals, and contexts in which actors operate, the less predictable their behavior becomes."[12] Judged by such standards, Seth Grahamé-Smith's novel *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2010) would decisively fail. But Grahamé-Smith's novel never pretends to be plausible nor should it be judged by the same standards as counterfactuals or even those used to judge historical novels but rather as a novel set in an alternate fantastic universe. In *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* all "the values, goals, and contexts in which actors operate" are disturbed—many greatly disturbed.[13] For example, each of Lincoln's terrible personal tragedies from the death of his mother (35-36) and later, his first love, Ann Rutledge (150-55) to that of his beloved son Willie (279-83) become in this novel and unlike in the historical Lincoln's experience all-too predictable since the cause of each remains exactly the same as one or more vampires prove responsible for each tragedy. Rather than increasing the unpredictability of Lincoln's actions—the danger facing many counterfactual histories—this single cause of virtually all actions both for and against Lincoln increases the predictability of Lincoln's emotional response as well as his subsequent actions, thus creating a cardboard character out of one of history's most complicated human beings. Similarly, all the major decisions Lincoln makes whether in politics or in war are motivated not by a desire to serve the country or to preserve the union but almost solely by his determination to fight and possibly rid the American continent of vampires. Perhaps the most blatant example is Grahamé-Smith's rewriting of the horrors of slavery where the focus falls not on the human exploitation and denigration of other humans, but on the vampires who buy slaves mostly at bargain prices in order to drink their

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[11] Delbanco, "The New Adventures of Abe," 35.

[12] Quoted in R. N. Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 55.

[13] Seth Grahamé-Smith, *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* (New York: Grand Central, 2010). All further references to this novel will be given in the text in parentheses.

blood, thus equating slavery with vampire food. While this equation might have proven a powerful metaphor for slavery as some reviewers suggest,[14] the novel itself emphasizes a much more literal level in showing slaves being bled by vampires and postulating a cartel of vampires supporting the South in order to maintain their food supply—all of which distracts readers from the human responsibility for the very real terrors of that ghastly institution.

The pinnacle of Grahamé-Smith's trivializing occurs, however, when he presents John Wilkes Booth as a person who becomes a vampire in order to achieve immortality (319). When Booth as a vampire does kill Lincoln, he is then, in his turn, killed by a turncoat vampire who is aiding Lincoln in his prosecution of the war (329), thus shifting the reader's focus away from the tragic death of the president to a desire for revenge on the vampire assassin. But the trivializing does not end with Lincoln's death, for in an anti-climax Lincoln is brought back to life by that same turncoat vampire to become in his turn one of the "good" vampires guarding the republic from the bad vampires. Lincoln now will live forever or at least until he is able to sleep in his old office at the White House during John F. Kennedy's presidency and then witness Martin Luther King's great oration at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington (336), where the novel mercifully ends. Almost as an after-thought, readers then learn that vampires were also the cause of World War II and that that war should really be called "the second vampire uprising" (336).

The cumulative result of all these vampire additions does not create in any sense a "plausible" plot nor plausible characters—nor does the novel pretend to. Judged on its merits, *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* may, perhaps, be best viewed as a mediocre vampire novel set in nineteenth-century America with some twentieth-century afterthoughts. Such a judgment may appear even more valid when comparing and/or contrasting Grahamé-Smith's effort to other similar but far more successful vampire novels set within a defined historical context, such as Dan Simmons's *Children of the Night* (1992).[15] In the latter novel, Simmons brilliantly

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[14] The novel has been described, for instance, as "a sinister fantasy in which bloodsucking becomes a metaphor for draining the nation of vitality and the will to survive." Delbanco, "The New Adventures of Abe," 34.

[15] The novel's title, *Children of the Night* derives from the 1931 film, *Dracula* when Bela Lugosi playing Count Dracula stops his carriage carrying the hapless R. M. Renfield and admonishes his passenger to 'Listen to them [wolves howling]. The children of the night. What beautiful music they make." Simmons surely shares his vampire-protagonist's low opinion of Stoker's "silly novel" and the subsequent "inept motion picture." Dan Simmons, *Children of the Night* (New

skewers Nicholae Ceauşescu, the Romanian dictator, by employing well-established conventions of the vampire novel to portray convincingly Romania as a charnel house created by the most successful dictator of the twentieth century who leads a band of deadly vampires. In addition, Simmons presents a fascinating study of the nature of blood, its function in the human body while speculating on how that function might differ in a vampire body. In contrast to Grahamé-Smith's cavalier attitude towards historical characters and events, Simmons portrays events, people and places with great historical accuracy, making very few additional historical changes beyond those consequent upon transforming Ceauşescu into a vampire. The novel thus gives its readers considerable insight into the hideous conditions created by the Romanian police state that include the infamous traffic in orphans, the hiding of AID's victims, especially children, an economy that at the expense of depriving citizens of food eliminated the national debt, the reams of Secret Police files of informers, the miles of *Securitate* tunnels under Bucharest and the heavily armored *Securitate* themselves including their army tanks—all done without sacrificing the terror, conflict, betrayal, and mystery associated with vampire fiction.[16] Where *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* after its invented over-the-top unhistorical portrait of the United States' greatest president limps to its tepid conclusion, *Children of the Night* creates and maintains high tension throughout, while effectively displacing anxieties created by Ceauşescu's Police State into this new space of vampire fiction.

Alternate History

Within history speculative stories about Lincoln and the Civil War, such as Carter's and Charyn's (but obviously not Grahamé-Smith's), are labeled "Counterfactual History" yet within science fiction the same type of tale, as exemplified by *The Man in the High Castle* and *Fatherland,* becomes designated "Alternate History." By the twenty-first century Alternative History had grown so popular as a sub-genre of science fiction that it took up many feet of shelf space in most contemporary virtual and brick-and-mortar book stores.[17] A particularly vivid example and one of

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York: Warner, 1992), 333.

[16] For a first person account of Romania in the darkest days under Ceauşescu see Donald E. Morse, "Travelling in Transylvania 1987-88," *Hungarian Review* 7.1 (January 2016): 72-80.

[17] Wolfe claims that "alternate history . . . in recent years has gotten so gentrified that it's about ready for its own iPhone app. ("'click here to see where your life went wrong'") Gary K. Wolfe, review of *Lucky Strike* by Kim Stanley Robinson.

the most successful twentieth-century science-fiction Alternative Histories remains Kim Stanley Robinson's 1984 short novel, *The Lucky Strike*. In that novel Robinson imaginatively recreates the world of the crews selected to drop the first atomic bomb complete with their varied personalities and on-going rivalries along with their boredom waiting for assignments and their endless poker games.

In most such successful Alterative History fiction there occurs a "divergence point"—to borrow Connie Willis's useful term—that is, the point at which the story diverges from recorded history. Tom Shippey defines four essential characteristics of any "divergence point": "The divergent point . . . should be (1) plausible, (2) definite, (3), small in itself, and (4) massive in consequence."[18] In Robinson's story this divergent point occurs when Paul Tibbets, the captain of the crew chosen to drop the bomb, demonstrates to a United States Air Force official his and his crew's ability to fly their B-52 under adverse conditions by taking off without using the two right wing engines—something the historical Tippets did, indeed, do. The alternative history Robinson creates begins, however, at this divergent point, where one of the two remaining active engines on the left wing fails, leaving of the original equipment only a single woefully inadequate engine. This engine by itself cannot keep the plane aloft and so it crashes in a fire ball killing all aboard. The narrator speculates that "something . . . minor . . . trivial . . . had made all the difference," such as, perhaps, a welder applying his torch "a second less than usual" leading to an engine breakdown.[19] Such oversights could also account for the ubiquitous plane wreckage found at the end of each runway on the historical as well as the "alternative" Tinian Island. "For want of a nail, the battle was lost," has long been true. What Robinson adds, however, is the character of a 37-year-old back-up bombardier, Frank January, who, having experienced the Blitz while stationed in London recalls vividly during his long periods of inactivity the fear it engendered along with the awful casualties that resulted from bombing a civilian population. With the death of Tibets and his crew January now assumes responsibility as the bombardier who will actually drop the bomb. Having time to reflect, however, he comes to the painful conclusion that

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Locus, April 2010, np.

[18] Tom Shippey, "Alternate Historians: Newt, Kingers, Harry, and Me," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 8.1. (1997): 17. Poor Alternative History may, however, contain many, perhaps dozens of such points. A parallel to the mandatory divergence point in Alternate History stories is the almost ubiquitous Butterfly Effect in time-travel stories.

[19] Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Lucky Strike* (1984. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), np.

what this mission amounts to is "murder[ing] a whole city" of 200,000 people.[20] At the last minute he delays releasing the bomb despite the cries and curses from the rest of the crew so that it explodes in all its hellish fury not over the city of Hiroshima but over a deserted island. After being summarily court-martialed and sentenced to die by a firing squad, and, as he awaits execution, the bombardier learns that a second bomb has also missed its city target because of cloud cover. "So we never dropped an atom bomb on a Japanese city," he exclaims.[21]

In Robinson's Alternative History then such events do indeed imaginatively "diverge" from the historical record taking off on a quite different but equally plausible trajectory. Unlike a time travel story, where any protagonist's attempt to change history produces often disastrous results as, for example, the infamous time-traveler who steps upon a butterfly and alters future history. *The Lucky Strike*, like most Alternative Histories, offers a positive view by altering the past with what Wolfe calls its "retro-corrective fantasies in which things turn out more like they should have."[22] Moreover, as in the best counterfactual history, the alternatives delineated in *The Lucky Strike* do "provoke insight into policy choices," which philosopher Julian Reiss saw as one of the greatest values of employing counterfactuals, and which is clearly also one of the benefits of Alternative History.[23] Robinson's *The Lucky Strike* remains compelling reading with its fully realized characters, careful plotting, realistic dialogue and scrupulous attention to convincing details especially when compared and contrasted to historians Kantor and Shirer's pallid parlor games, Charyn's trivializing and Grahamé-Smith's over-reaching.

One recent very welcome development in this popular genre has been the spate of books by Native American writers who also found their voice and subject by writing Alternative History. There have been many tales of stereotyped native North Americans by white writers—most notably Thomas Kinsella's series of short stories collected in *Dance Me Outside* (1977) and *Fencepost Chronicles* (1987) where the native may indeed be the trickster but a trickster as the white man envisions him. Other white

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres*, 63. A similar reason is given by the philosopher Julian Reiss when he argues that "a historian can determine if a decision of a historical actor was a cause of an outcome of interest by asking 'did the outcome occur but for the decision?'" Reiss, "Counterfactuals," 155. Clearly, Alternative Histories alter "the outcome" by changing "the decision" however slightly at Connie Willis's "divergence point."

[23] Reiss, "Counterfactuals," 175.

writers who have done better include both Robert Seidman in *One Smart Indian* (1979) and Dan Simmons in *Black Hills* (2010) where both adopt the native viewpoint, language and values while creating highly individual, non-stereotypical characters. But it remained for several native writers to produce alternate histories that rewrite from the viewpoint of Native North Americans the familiar story and its consequences that Kurt Vonnegut once labeled as Columbus and "the Sea Pirates."[24]

Part of the Columbus story that usually goes unmentioned in popular legend is his dual motivation in sailing west.[25] He did, of course, desire to discover large quantities of gold, but he also hoped to find the lost Paradise of Genesis since Eden and the new World were closely associated in the European imagination. Ferdinand and Isabella would get their gold, while Columbus in finding the Earthly Paradise would enjoy the healing of his soul, possess various unknown lands, and receive a series of titles including Admiral, governor and viceroyalty with all the perquisites that went with them. Yet in discovering the New World, Columbus found not the Earthly Paradise, but instead unleashed an Earthly Hell on the Native Americans already in residence.[26] Unable and unwilling to envision any society but the Christian, mercantile, European one they knew, Columbus and his crew became, indeed, the "sea pirates" wrecking havoc wherever they went.

The complex Native American response five hundred years after the event to the on-going tragedy initiated by Columbus and the complicated anxieties that event unleashed may be glimpsed in several Native American contemporary Alternative History novels as, for example, William Least Heat Moon, *Columbus in the Americas* (2002), Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich, *The Crown of Columbus* (1991), Thomas King, *A Coyote Columbus Story* (2002) and Gerald Vizenor, *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991). Each of these works incorporates a Columbus "discovery narrative" in a new imaginative space but from quite different angles and with varied results. Each also uses a different narrative strategy—some borrowed from "the European literary heritage"[27] but each is firmly rooted in the Native American oral story-telling tradition. That

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[24] Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions* (New York: Delta, 1973), 10-11.

[25] The section on Native American Columbus stories draws upon Katalin Nagy Biróné's excellent unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Discovery Narratives in Contemporary Native American Fiction," (Ph.D. diss., University of Debrecen, 2007).

[26] For a compelling account of Columbus's atrocities, see Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present* (New York: Harper, 1980), 1-7.

[27] Biróné, "Discovery Narratives in Contemporary Native American Fiction," 16.

tradition, like all oral story-telling, offers "validation of a different sort [from written stories, one that] comes from the communal sanction given to oral tradition; that is, the receiver of the text receives along with it a set of procedures for judging and interpreting the materials presented," as Brian Attebery outlines.[28] Moreover, as Native American community-based oral stories and tales, these novels take up the story of sickness [initiated by Columbus] where its effects "can start to heal . . . through the traditional healing function of the native storytelling 'event.'"[29]

Gerald Vizenor once commented on the Columbus story told across the US including in Native schools: "I don't consider it healthy to tell a bad story that victimizes me."[30] Instead, in *The Heirs of Columbus* he attempts to tell a story where Christopher Columbus and "his dubious missions . . . overshadow the recognition and survivance of Native American Indians."[31] To accomplish this end he ignores questions about colonists and colonizing in favor of mixing tribal myths with his own fiction, then combining both with Western historiographic conventions, but the latter are—to borrow Katalin Biróné Nagy's understated term—"handled freely" by way of pastiche.[32] Columbus himself becomes a mixed blood and a trickster, yet fails to benefit from or develop in his new role. Rather than heroically discovering a new world, he returns to his old one dispirited

> Tired and broken because he [Columbus] lost most of his body parts on the way, . . . the old shamans heated some stones and put him back together again. . . . Harm, the water shaman, said he dreamed a new belly for the explorer, and Shin, the bone shaman, called in a new leg from the underworld, and he got an eye from the sparrow woman, so you might say that we created this great explorer from our own stones at the tavern.[33]

In this reconstitutive process his painfully "twisted penis" (30)—"a curse that turned the mere thought of sexual pleasure to sudden pain" (31)—is also restored. Yet Columbus remains impotent, disoriented, devoid of personality, unable "to turn into a story,"[34] and so disappears while his

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[28] Brian Attebery, "Fantasy and the Narrative Transaction," *Style* 25.1 (1991): 25.

[29] Biróné, "Discovery Narratives in Contemporary Native American Fiction," 166.

[30] Quoted in Laura Coltelli, "Gerald Vizenor: The Trickster Heir of Columbus: An Interview." *Native American Literatures Forum* 2-3 (1990-1991): 102.

[31] Gerald Vizenor, "Manifest Manners: The Long Gaze of Christopher Columbus," *Boundary* 2.19 (1992): 228.

[32] Biróné, "Discovery Narratives in Contemporary Native American Fiction," 122.

[33] Gerald Vizenor, *The Heirs of Columbus* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991), 19. All further citations will be given in the text in parentheses.

[34] Biróné, "Discovery Narratives in Contemporary Native American Fiction," 137.

flagship becomes a casino defined as a "reservation on an anchor" (7). In another role reversal that smashes the stereotype of the technologically-challenged Indian, Vizenor has his Indians employing lasers, doing computer simulations and engaging in sophisticated genetic research. The latter comes about because of their belief in the healing power of the genes they have inherited from Columbus then reconstituted that are able to "reverse human mutations, nurture shamatic resurrection, heal wounded children, and incite parthenogenesis in separatist women" (132). Thus by using the techniques of Alternative History, writers such as Gerald Vizenor have been able to do what many other great fiction-writers and historians have always done: made visible those who are invisible and given voice to those who have been silenced. Surely such stories are some of the most successful examples of displacing anxieties into new spaces of the imagination.

The Embedded Historical Novel

Finally, several recent novels that are neither counterfactual nor Alternate History appear as almost old fashioned history novels except that they are embedded in science fiction and/or fantasy. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Galileo's Dream* (2009), for example, features a "larger than life character that has little in common with the Galileo of legend."[35] But if this Galileo "isn't the Galileo of pop legend," he is clearly also not quite Bertolt Brecht's revolutionary, either.[36] The novel gives us a pocket history of science extrapolated into the future along with a clear picture of exactly what the historical Galileo accomplished. Gary Wolfe believes that Robinson's Galileo may "turn out to be the most moving and accurate fictional portrait of this 'first scientist' that we're likely to see." "Much of the brilliance of Robinson's historical narrative," Wolfe rightly maintains,

> lies in simultaneously preserving that myth [of Galileo's heroism] and puncturing it: he's able to lead us meticulously through Galileo's sometimes astonishing reasoning (such as developing a method of calculating longitude by using the orbits of Jupiter's four Galilean moons), while at the same time building an utterly convincing portrait of an often arrogant and petty genius who complains about his salary, abandons the mother of his children, and sends his beloved daughters off to a convent before they're even properly of age.[37]

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[35] Wolfe, Review of *Galileo's Dream*, np.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

Like *The Lucky Strike*, this well-researched novel is packed with convincing details, creating a brilliantly conceived plot with beautifully realized characters—at least in the Galileo-in-his-time sections. Unlike *The Lucky Strike*, however, *Galileo's Dream* is not *alternative* history but *novelized* history; that is, a novel that attempts to depict accurately the historical Galileo. What distinguishes it from history novels, however, is its all-encompassing context for it is an historical novel buried within a science-fictional construct that includes time travelers from the future with a base of operations on Ganymede, one of Jupiter's moons. That science-fiction plot is too complicated to recount here but Robinson uses it to narrate discoveries from the history of science both past and future and then skillfully interweaves it with the story of the historical Galileo, his life and times and his discovery of longitude.

James Morrow's *The Last Witchfinder* (2006) similarly presents an historical novel but he embeds it not within science fiction but within fantasy.[38] Like Robinson, Morrow has done prodigious, meticulous research then created fully developed characters within the detailed historical epoch of eighteenth-century England and its American colonies. In both Robinson's and Morrow's novels, the science fiction and/or fantasy elements, such as time-travelers from the future on Ganymede in *Galileo's Dream* or the protagonist's ability to breathe under water in *The Last Witchfinder,* are ingenious but may not have been absolutely necessary in either case as in both novels it is the history, the historical characters and their confrontations with authority—in short, the historical novel that remains immediately and forcefully persuasive.

Conclusion: The Permeability of the Disciplines

The rise of counterfactual history as a significant component of both popular and scholarly historical accounts of important events and people runs parallel with a general broadening and extension of the discipline into historical novels, fantasy and science fiction. As Wolfe argues, "science fiction and fantasy seem to have been particularly imperialistic in colonizing what was once the realm of the historical novelist."[39] Yet, there is also the distinct possibility that any and all disciplinary boundaries and not just history's, literature's or science fiction's may prove permeable.

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[38] See James Morrow, "Preface," *The Last Witchfinder* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), xv.
[39] Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres*, 61.

Perhaps the most extreme example is a recent novel in which the characters, when faced with that most popular of all current fantastic horrors— that ultimate repository of "displaced anxieties" a zombie apocalypse!—reach for their tried and true survival tool: the calculus! The novel in question, *Zombies and Calculus* by Williams College math professor Colin Adams, published by Princeton University Press in 2014, demonstrates once again the enduring truth of the need for such "spaces of the imagination." As Virgil many centuries ago pointed out in Book III of the *Eclogues*: "The Muses love alternatives."[40]

Side-stepping this example of zombies and the calculus, the current popularity of counterfactual history, the historical novel, fantasy history, Alternative History and the embedded historical novel suggest that history, along with literature, science fiction and fantasy and, like the Muses, "love alternatives." The fluidity and permeability of this broad range of disciplines and genres goes far beyond the "evaporating genres" of Wolfe's seminal study. This evaporation currently occurs across a spectrum of history, literature, fantasy, science fiction and even mathematics to the point where historical research now enhances such "spaces of the imagination" as science fiction and fantasy while speculative thinking and fantasizing by displacing anxieties enriches the study of history through counterfactual history, novelized history, Alternative History and embedded history.

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[40] Quoted in Robinson, *Galileo's Dream*, np.

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