

Chapter 1 – Introduction – The Genre of Counterfactual Historical Fiction

1.1 Rationale

The primary purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive methodology with which to analyse counterfactual historical fiction. In short, counterfactual historical fiction is a genre in literature that comprise narratives set in worlds whose histories run contrary to the history of our actual world. They often tend to focus on changed outcomes of wars and battles owing to their prominence in our history. The most common themes explored within the genre are: ‘What if Hitler won the Second World War?’ and ‘What if the South had won the American Civil War?’.

As I will show in this chapter, previous studies of counterfactual historical fiction have focused on various aspects of counterfactual histories – some research focuses on developing a formal typology for the genre and others examine the genre’s poetics or offer interpretive literary analyses of particular counterfactual historical fiction. While there is some research that engages with how readers process such fiction, this is an area that is largely underdeveloped. As such, worked examples of counterfactual historical fiction that address the reader’s role and more specifically, focus on how they interact cognitively with the worlds built by these texts are significantly lacking. I argue that a methodology with which to effectively analyse counterfactual historical fiction must focus on the genre’s poetics as well as account for reader experientiality. This monograph will therefore offer a cognitive-narratological methodology with which to analyse counterfactual historical fiction. According to Herman (2013) “[a]pproaches to narrative study that fall under the heading of cognitive narratology share a focus on the mental states, capacities, and dispositions that provide grounds for—or, conversely, are grounded in—narrative experiences” (paragraph 1). As such, what this book more specifically offers is a systematic critical approach based on a customised model of Possible Worlds Theory taking into account the narrative, its structure as well as the mental processes facilitating world-building. Further, this is supplemented by cognitive concepts modelling the different processes that readers go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction.

I will analyse three texts in this monograph to both show the need for a revised Possible Worlds model, and to demonstrate the dexterity of the subsequent model. Owing to its dominance within the cannon, counterfactual World War II novels, that construct fictional

worlds in which the Axis Powers have won the Second World War, have been chosen for analysis. In particular, Robert Harris' *Fatherland* (1992), Sarban's *The Sound of his Horn* (1952), and Stephen Fry's *Making History* (1996) have been chosen because they each portray a different kind of counterfactual world. Nonetheless, the model that I offer is one that can be replicated and applied across all narratives within the genre.

This chapter explores the literary genre of counterfactual historical fiction in detail. In the first section of this chapter, I briefly introduce the concept of counterfactuals before explaining counterfactual historical fiction as a literary genre. In the next section, I review the existing scholarship on this genre to show how it has been previously examined. In doing so, I also highlight gaps in current scholarly research that this book aims to fill.

1.2 Counterfactual Writing – The Genre of Counterfactual Historical Fiction

“Cleopatra’s nose: had it been shorter, the whole aspect of the world would have been altered” (Pascal, 2003 [1670]: 48). This quotation from Pascal expresses the concept of counterfactuals rather remarkably – it conveys the idea that a slight alteration could lead to highly changed outcomes. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2017) defines the word counterfactual as “[p]ertaining to, or expressing, what has not in fact happened, but might, could, or would, in different conditions”. For example, in social psychology, and in what is a more appropriate definition, Neal Roese and James Olson define the term counterfactual as something that “literally, runs contrary to the facts” (1995: 1 – 2). Therefore, a counterfactual expresses what has not happened, but as Roese and Olson point out, this is done by creating alternatives to facts. According to narratologist Hillary Dannenberg, a counterfactual is “generated by creating a nonfactual or false *antecedent*. This is done by *mentally mutating* or undoing a real-world event in the past to produce an *outcome* or *consequent* contrary to reality” (2008: 111, italics original). Dannenberg here explains how a counterfactual scenario is created when a particular event in our actual world is changed, thereby producing a new version of the actual world. Based on this, my own example of a counterfactual statement is: *if I had watched Game of Thrones last night, my friends couldn't have spoiled the cliffhanger for me*, where ‘I watched Game of Thrones last night’ is the false antecedent that produces the outcome – ‘couldn't have spoiled the cliffhanger’.

Simply stated, a counterfactual historical description is an exploration of a what-if scenario with some speculation on the consequences of a different result. That is, what if some major historical event had gone differently? How could that have changed the world? Within the context of literary fiction, narratives that explore such what-if scenarios are called counterfactual historical fiction. Duncan (2003) describes counterfactual historical fiction as “not [...] history at all, but a work of fiction in which history as we know it is changed for dramatic and often ironic effect” (209). Counterfactual historical fiction can thus be considered a genre of fiction that is rich in possibilities. Inevitably, all fictional narratives are rich in possibilities because they present a what-if scenario in the sense that they imagine a world where such and such event or series of events take place, but they differ crucially from counterfactual historical fiction where the worlds created posit what-if scenarios based on rewriting the history of our actual world. In the words of Ryan (2006), “[a]lternate [...] history fiction creates a world whose evolution, following a certain event, diverges from what we regard as actual history” (657).

Spedo (2009) defines the genre by differentiating it from historical fiction stating that the key difference between counterfactual historical fiction and historical fiction lies in the way each of these genres is written and perceived by readers. He suggests that although counterfactual historical fiction is written as if it were real in that such fiction include historical characters and events presented within a historical context, readers tend to think of such fiction as made-up because they are aware that they are being presented with a historical timeline that never happened. Historical fiction, on the other hand, Spedo maintains is also written as though it is real, but unlike counterfactual historical fiction, readers consider historical fiction as being a representation of actual history.

What is interesting about the genre of counterfactual historical fiction is that it is a kind of thought experiment where the author takes as their starting point an existing historical situation and changes it to explore the world of what-if scenarios. This starting point where the fictional history diverges from actual history is known as the ‘point of divergence’. Singles (2013) defines the point of divergence as “the moment in the narrative of the real past from which alternative narrative of history runs a different course” (7). According to her, the point of divergence is also the chief characteristic that distinguishes counterfactual historical fiction from other related genres.

The genre of counterfactual historical fiction is often seen as part of a larger category that also includes some types of science fiction and fantasy. Hellekson (2001) reminds us:

Science fiction asks, ‘What if the world were somehow different?’ This question is at the centre of both science fiction and the alternate history. Answering this question in fictive texts creates science fiction or other fantastic texts, including fantasy and magic realism. One important point I wish to stress is that the alternate history is a sub-genre of the genre of science fiction, which is itself a sub-genre of fantastic (that is, not realistic) literature (3).

Here, Hellekson addresses the long-standing question of whether or not counterfactual historical fiction is a sub-category of science fiction and firmly concludes that it is. I do not agree with the argument that merely having a world that is different from our actual world makes it science fiction. Counterfactual historical fiction is not always science fiction and fantasy. Though some texts have science fictional elements (for example, *Bring the Jubilee* [1953] by Ward Moore involves the protagonist travelling back in time using a time machine) and some have fantastical elements (for example, *Temeraire* [series] by Naomi Novik that imagines a world during the Napoleonic War fought using dragons), there are also others that contain neither (for example, *SS-GB* [1978] by Len Deighton is set in a world where England is occupied by Germany after Nazi Germany won the Second World war and *The Yiddish Policeman’s Union* [2007] by Michael Chabon presents an alternate world where during the Second World War, the Jews were relocated to a city named Sitka which in the present day is a large Yiddish metropolis). While some counterfactual historical fictional texts are set against science fictional contexts, there also exists a broad body of work in counterfactual historical fiction that is not science fiction, and at this point counterfactual historical fiction needs to be considered a genre on its own.

Jeff Prucher in his *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* (2007) notes the preferred usage of the term ‘Alternate History’ by literature scholars to refer to texts that construct worlds based on historical what-ifs. Hellekson (2001) points out that other terminology such as alternative history, alternate universe, allohistory, uchronia, and parahistory is also used to refer to this particular form of fiction (3). In addition to these terms, Charles Renouvier (1876) uses the term ‘Uchronie’ from French which denotes a fictionalised historical time period to refer to this genre and Gallagher (2007) proposes to call these texts ‘alternate world novels’. Gallagher explains, “[a]lternate-history novels attempt to

create a complete alternative reality, presenting in detail the social, cultural, technological, psychological and emotional totalities that result from the alteration, which is why they are often called ‘alternate *world* novels’” (58, italics original). Throughout this book, I will be using the term counterfactual historical fiction to refer to these texts over the more popular ‘alternate history’ because using the premodifier ‘counterfactual’ instead of ‘alternate’, emphasises the typical nature of this type of fiction to present a world that is contrary to the history of our actual world. The term “alternate” only conveys that such fiction present a history that is different to or a substitute to the actual world history. However, my argument is that the historical descriptions presented in this type of fiction are not merely alternate to, but they are also historical deviations that are counter to actual world historical facts. The implicit distinction here is that the term ‘counter to’ expresses more clearly that the historical deviations in such fiction challenge accepted accounts of history in the actual world. Moreover, the suffix ‘fiction’ clearly indicates that it is fiction. Therefore, calling this genre ‘counterfactual historical fiction’ emphasises that it presents *fictional* worlds that include *historical descriptions* that are *counterfactual* to the actual world history.

While an extensive discussion of the genre’s canon is beyond the scope of this book, at this point it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the genre’s development before contextualising the approach that I aim to offer. Rosenfeld (2005) views the genre as a long-standing phenomenon tracing its history back to Greek and Roman History with Livy speculating what would happen if the Roman Empire faced the armies of Alexander the Great and Herodotus contemplating the potential consequences of a Greek defeat at Marathon in 490 B.C.E (5). According to Hellekson (2009), however, the first novel-length counterfactual historical fiction which was published in large quantities can be dated back to 1836 when French writer Louis Geoffroy penned his *Histoire de la Monarchie Universelle – Napoléon et la conquête du monde 1812–1832* [History of the Universal Monarchy: Napoleon and the Conquest of the World] (13). The text envisions the Napoleonic Empire victorious in the French invasion of Russia in 1812 followed by the invasion of England in 1814 and later unifying the world under Bonaparte’s rule. However, in the actual world the French army were defeated in 1812 by the Russians and consequently Napoleon’s dream of conquering Europe was shattered. Hellekson also states that the first known counterfactual historical fiction text in the English language is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *P’s Correspondence* published in 1845 (454). This text recounts the tale of a mad man who lives in an altered version of 1845 where famous people such as Lord Byron, P. B. Shelly, John Keats, and

Napoleon Bonaparte, to name a few, are still living. While Hellekson dates the first counterfactual historical fiction to the early nineteenth century, Rosenfeld (2005) holds the view that the first counterfactual historical novels began appearing in the mid-nineteenth century. Amongst all, he asserts that Charles Renouvier's *Uchronie* (1876) was distinguished "for giving the genre one of its defining terms" (5). The term 'uchronie' (a French word which translates to 'uchronia' in English) was invented by Charles Renouvier in his novel to refer to counterfactual historical fiction and is now identified as another term for such fiction (see Prucher, 2006).

As is already evident from the examples above, counterfactual historical fiction addresses a range of different historical events and scenarios, but as Rosenfeld (2005) and Hellekson (2001) have noted, some popular themes explored by counterfactual historical fiction writers are often political reversal stories in which the outcomes of crucial political events in history like that of wars and battles are changed. Examples of scenarios in counterfactual historical fiction texts that satisfy this pattern include: what if Roosevelt was defeated in 1940 while appealing for his third term as President? (for example, *The Plot against America* [2004] by Philip Roth); what if the British had never left India? (for example, *The Warlord of the Air* by Michael Moorcock [1971]); what would have happened if the Soviet Union won the Cold War? (for example, *The Gladiator* [2007] by Harry Turtledove); what if the Southern Confederacy had won the American Civil War? (for example, The Southern Victory series by Harry Turtledove that contains eleven counterfactual historical fiction novels beginning in 1997 and published over a decade); and more commonly what if Hitler had won the Second World War? (for example, *The Man in the High Castle* [1962] by Philip. K. Dick, *Fatherland* [1992] by Robert Harris, *SS-GB* by Len Deighton [1978], *In the Presence of mine Enemies* [2003] by Harry Turtledove).

Other themes that do not engage with military or war outcomes include: what would the world have been if it had entered the computer age much earlier (for example, *The Difference Engine* [1990] by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling), what if in the absence of Christianity, other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism were the dominant religions (for example, *The Years of Rice and Salt* [2002] by Kim Stanley Robinson), what would a world where the reformation did not take place be like (for example, *The Alteration* [1976] by Kingsley Amis), or even what if the old world of Europe and parts of Asia and

Africa disappear overnight and are replaced by land with different flora and fauna (for example, *Darwinia* [1998] by Robert Charles Wilson).

Within the scope of this book, I will be analysing political reversal stories: those that imagine a world where the Axis Powers – Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan – have won the Second World War. In the actual world, the Axis Powers were defeated in the Second World War by the Allies, Britain, France, The Soviet Union, The United States of America, and China. Germany's defeat in the Second World War also led to Adolf Hitler's suicide in 1945, a historical fact that is often contradicted in counterfactual World War II fictions. The concept of the Axis victory in the Second World War has been explored often in counterfactual historical fiction texts, thus making it one of the most popular themes within this genre. I have chosen fictions that explore an alternative World War II outcome specifically because they are so dominant within the canon, thereby allowing me to draw on a variety of examples that will help me illustrate my argument.

These texts that explore the concept of the Axis victory in the Second World War posit scenarios that Rosenfeld (2005) observes have four recurring themes in them: “ 1) the Nazis win World War II; 2) Hitler escapes death in 1945 and survives in hiding well into the postwar era; 3) Hitler is removed from the world historical stage either before or sometime after becoming the Führer; 4) the Holocaust is completed, avenged, or undone altogether”(13). In my book, I define novels that engage with an altered Second World War timeline as ‘counterfactual World War II’ fictions. The next section explores this type of fiction in some more detail.

Counterfactual World War II fictions have appeared in various forms of media. Rosenfeld in his *The World Hitler Never Made* (2005) surveys a range of novels, comics, television, movies, and videogames in order to study why counterfactual questions around the Nazi past have been so prolific in the post-war era. Rosenfeld believes the proliferation of what-ifs around an altered Nazi past and their development through time may be because the defeat of Germany has become one of the most important moments in Western history. He further links it to collective memory, highlighting the event's historical significance and asserts that “by examining accounts of what never happened, we can better understand the memory of what did” (90). Here, Rosenfeld suggests that such narratives have the potential to refine people's understanding of what really happened in our world by underpinning the importance of a Nazi defeat in the Second World War. In a similar study that focusses mainly

on the fictional treatment of a counterfactual Nazi past, Geoffery Winthrop-Young (2006) also concludes that “there is unanimous agreement that no scenario is treated more often than an altered outcome of the Second World War” (878) and, for the same reason as Rosenfeld, he seeks answers to the reason behind the “increasingly inevitable recycling of the Third Reich” (878). In his essay, he explores whether or not a “genre-specific dynamics” (880) determines the recurring depictions of Nazis. From his analysis of texts such as Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Eric Norden’s *The Ultimate Solution* (1973), and Harry Turtledove’s *The Presence of Mine Enemies* (2003), he infers that counterfactual historical fiction texts go through different phases of development that coincide with the unveiling of new information with reference to Nazi Germany. This suggests that there is a correlation between the development of research on Nazi Germany within historiography and the development of counterfactual historical fiction on altered Nazi pasts.

According to Duncan (2003), “most alternate histories [...] tend to depict dystopias, bad societies that might have been” (212) and this trend can be seen in most counterfactual World War II novels. For instance, some novels portray a Nazified Britain where a number of British citizens are seen collaborating with the Germans, aiding the Nazi Holocaust (for example, *The Ultimate Solution* [1973] by Eric Norden and *SS-GB* [1978] by Len Deighton). Other narrative motifs in counterfactual World War II texts is advanced Nazi technology – in particular, advanced nuclear technology, jet aircrafts and sophisticated space technology (for example, *The Man in the High Castle* [1960] by Philip. K. Dick) or some form of genetic engineering (for example, *Sound of his Horn* [1952] by Sarban). Given the dominant views on National Socialism, it is not surprising that the trend in these novels is the portrayal of the Nazis and their regime solely as malevolent. Rosenfeld (2005) assesses the situation and points out that counterfactual World War II novels mostly portray worlds that depict the Nazis as being sinister. He believes that the primary reason for this is to always remind people about the Nazi carnage. He clarifies by drawing on the words of George Santayana – “those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana [no date] in Rosenfeld, 2005: 18) suggesting that people learn from mistakes and therefore it is important to remember them so as to ensure that it is never repeated. Furthermore, I would suggest that readers are likely to expect a dystopian world from a counterfactual historical fiction of the Nazi past. As Eyerman (2001) explains, when there is “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (2), it becomes a “cultural trauma” (2). The crimes committed by the Nazis

against the Jewish race have become a part of our cultural memory and as such it is impossible to fathom a Nazi rule devoid of cruelty.

1.3 Existing Research on Counterfactual Historical Fiction: from Formal Typologies to the Importance of Readers

This primary aim of this book is to offer a cognitive-narratological methodology with which to analyse counterfactual historical fiction. As the discussion has shown, narratives within genre of counterfactual historical fiction are set in worlds whose histories run contrary to the history of our actual world. Evidently, such texts use our actual world as their epistemological template and as such create an epistemological link between the world of the text and the world we inhabit. Readers play a crucial role within the context of counterfactual historical fiction because the counterfactual nature of the text can be acknowledged only when readers identify historical contradictions present within the fictional world. For a reader to appreciate the historical deviations in a such texts, they must be able to use their knowledge of the actual world to cross-reference counterfactual descriptions in the world of the text to its corresponding fact in the actual world. This type of cross-referencing is especially important while reading a counterfactual historical fiction text because the point of such texts is to invite the reader to compare the textual actual world history to the actual world history. Ryan identifies this process of comparison as fundamental to the experience of reading counterfactual fiction when she states that “the purpose of such thought experiments is to invite reflection on the mechanisms of history, and the real world always serves as an implicit background” (Ryan, 2006: 657). As Ryan states, the purpose of such fiction is draw attention to the actual world and the significance of such texts is understood only when a reader uses their knowledge of the actual world to interpret the text. For this purpose, a model to analyse counterfactual historical fiction texts must address the reader’s role by systematically theorising the different processes that they go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction texts.

Since the aim here is to devise a methodology with which to analyse counterfactual historical fiction, it is important to discuss existing approaches to the genre. Hellekson’s *The Alternate History – Refiguring Historical Time* (2001) in which she provides “a framework from which researchers may analyse the genre” (108) is a good starting point. As Hellekson

asserts, her framework is based on examining “alternate history in terms of history” (111). What she offers therefore, is an examination of the relationship between the genre of counterfactual historical fiction and history. For this purpose, she begins by offering a classification of counterfactual historical fiction based on the point of divergence, or as Hellekson terms it “the moment of the break” (5).

In her typology, Hellekson distinguishes between the ‘nexus story’, the ‘true alternate history’, and ‘parallel world stories’. According to her, the nexus story is one that “occurs at the moment of the break” (5), the true alternate history “occurs after the break, sometimes a long time after” (5), and the parallel worlds story “implies that there was no break at all” (5). She explains that the nexus story is one that alters “a crucial point in history, such as a battle or an assassination” consequently rendering a changed outcome. She cites Poul Anderson’s *Time Patrol* stories as an example of a nexus story on the basis that they centre on the nexus event by foregrounding “the primacy of events – even little-known events – in the shaping of history” (6). A true alternate history, according to Hellekson, “posit[s] different physical laws” (5) focussing on a “radically changed world” (5). This is represented by texts such as *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip. K. Dick and Edward Moore’s *Bring the Jubilee* (1955) because they present a fictional world that is set long after the point of divergence. For this reason, they also present worlds that are scientifically and technologically advanced as a result of the changed nexus event. As Hellekson states, these texts show how “a historical event turning out differently will in turn result in a number of other changes that cascade, culminating in worlds dramatically discontinuous with reality” (8). Her final category, which is the parallel world stories, according to her, posit multiple alternate worlds that exist simultaneously and “[g]enerally, protagonists can move (or at least communicate) between these worlds” (8). Texts such as Piper’s *Paratime* (1981) and *The Coming of the Quantum Cats* (1986) by Frederik Pohl are her examples of parallel world stories because these texts present multiple alternative historical worlds, where travelling between them is possible.

After categorising these texts, Hellekson further identifies each of these counterfactual historical fiction texts using four models of history – ‘eschatological’, ‘genetic’, ‘teleological’, and ‘entropic’. According to Hellekson, “the eschatological model of history is concerned with the final events or ultimate destiny [...] of humankind or history” (2). These texts often include worlds that are destroyed completely. She states that Poul Anderson’s *Time Patrol* series are “fundamentally eschatological in nature” (97) because

these texts “point us forward to an ultimate destiny, to a glorious end, an eschatological promise” (107). Hellekson here refers to the protagonist Manse Everard’s choice to preserve his future by destroying all alternate histories. The genetic model on the other hand, according to her is “concerned with origin, development, or cause” (2), that is, texts that use this model revert to the incident that has caused the counterfactual world. Texts such as Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* and Piper’s *Paratime* follow the genetic model of history because they discuss the origins of their changed worlds. The entropic model “assumes that the process of history is of disorder or randomness” (2) and Hellekson states that Brian Adiss’s *The Malacia Tapestry* (1961) is a good example of this model. In the text, the counterfactual world is a result of dominant intelligent dinosaurs in the distant past. Malacia in the present is a city where change is forbidden and as a result of this the city is decaying. Hellekson states that “nothing happens in the novel in terms of the story arc – the characters remain unchanged, just as Malacia does” (110) and for this reason she identifies this text as entropic. In contrast, the teleological model maintains that history has “a design or purpose” (2). Hellekson offers Bruce Sterling’s and William Gibson’s *The Difference Engine* as an example because in this text an intelligent computer called a ‘narratron’ narrates the story. According to Hellekson, “the iterations of the text exhibit a design that leads to a final cause: machine intelligence” (110) making it a good example of the teleological model. Most of the texts that Hellekson discusses are genetic models, even if they are identified as also being one of the other models. As she notes, this is because the alternative historical timelines featured in these texts are a result of a specific event in the past being altered thereby also causing all the following events to be altered, ergo cause leading to effect.

As the preceding overview shows, Hellekson (2001) offers a typology of counterfactual historical fiction that is based on the point of divergence. However, she does so by mainly focusing on the formal features of the text and as such does not take into account the reader’s role when reading such texts. Like Hellekson, Alkon (1994) also offers a typology of counterfactual historical fiction that is based on the point of divergence and the historical context of the text, but he approaches this from the perspective of a reader. Unlike Hellekson who examines counterfactual historical fiction texts in terms of how the point of divergence is treated within the fictional world, Alkon considers these texts based on how the points of divergence are revealed to the reader.

Alkon (1994) differentiates between what he calls ‘classical’ alternate history and ‘postmodern’ alternate history and argues that the former “may serve to provide enhanced awareness of what the past was like and of our relationships to it as well as our present historical moment [while the latter] may serve the more postmodern purpose of blunting awareness of actual historicity and of chronological distinctions” (48). Therefore, according to Alkon, classical alternate histories pay more attention to the development of the historical timeline within the text compared to postmodern alternate histories. To show how classical alternate histories achieve this, Alkon draws on texts such as Ward Moore’s *Bring the Jubilee*, Philip. K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* and Harris’ *Fatherland* and states that texts such as these include “historical information or references to orient the reader with respect to points of divergence and congruity between the fictional and real worlds” (81). As an example, Alkon shows how *Fatherland* includes an ‘Author’s Note’ at the end explaining to the readers “where real and imaginary history intersect in [the novel]” (77). Similarly, he shows that Dick in *The Man in the High Castle* includes a page of “‘Acknowledgements’ listing history books and other sources [that] becomes in effect an invitation to compare Dick’s fiction with documents invoking the real past” (74). Alkon maintains that classical alternate histories focus on the historical context by ensuring that the point of divergence is causally connected to the following altered events. In contrast, Alkon classifies texts such as *Peter Nevsky and the True Story of the Russian Moon Landing* and Gibson and Sterling’s *The Difference Engine* as postmodern alternate history. He places these texts under a larger category of the postmodern because unlike classical alternate histories, these texts do not adhere to the notion of a plausible causal relationship. Rather they conflate the past, present, and future “by importing features of our present into the past” thereby creating causal confusions (80). As an example, Alkon draws on *The Difference Engine* that is set in 1855 and in which “readers encounter [...] twentieth-century concepts very thinly disguised: a racing car is ‘line-streamed for maximum speed; a ship has an anti-rolling mechanism actuated by sensors providing ‘back-feed’” (80) to show how anachronisms are used in the text without sufficient causal explanation as to how the world changed so drastically.

Alkon acknowledges that “alternate history requires more knowledge of real history on the part of its readers” (69) compared to any other type of fiction. He therefore includes the role of readers in his distinction between classical and postmodern alternate histories when he explains that classical counterfactual historical fiction tends to avoid historical chaos by making the points of divergence explicit while postmodern counterfactual historical

fiction relies on the reader's ability to infer the differences between the actual world and the counterfactual world. Notably, Alkon recognises the importance of a reader's awareness of actual world history when reading counterfactual historical fiction. He thus implicitly shows that the role of readers within the context of understanding counterfactual historical fiction is an important one. However, Alkon does not interrogate this concept of readers any further. For instance, he does not look into how different readers with their different levels of knowledge cognitively process such fiction. As evidenced, he only uses the concept of readers to develop his typology of counterfactual historical fiction.

Like Alkon (1994), Singles (2013) in her analysis of counterfactual historical fiction texts, emphasises the importance of readers within the context of explaining the genre of counterfactual historical fiction. In her study, she compares the genre's poetics with other similar genres of fiction such as historiographic metafiction, science fiction, and fantasy that seem to overlap or crossover with counterfactual historical fiction. Her aim here is to situate counterfactual historical fiction within the wider context of fictional narratives, especially against the backdrop of narratives that bear resemblances to counterfactual historical fiction. As a result of examining the textual strategies such as point of divergence and other alternative historical descriptions that makes these texts counterfactual, Singles foregrounds "the context of reception" (8). She states that counterfactual historical fiction "as texts which rely on text-external knowledge, make specific demands on the reader" (84) in that such texts depend on the reader's ability "to contrast his or her knowledge of the narrative of history with the one presented in the text" (8). Singles recognises that counterfactual historical fiction requires a specific type of reader, "one with a horizon of knowledge about history as well as the ability to 'read' textual clues" (119). Singles' analysis here on counterfactual historical fiction readers specifically is significant because she acknowledges the function of readers within the context of counterfactual historical fiction and asserts that "the realisation that the role of the reader, or the particular challenge posed to the reader of distinguishing between history and its alternate version is a genre-defining aspect of alternate history" (280). Although Singles, like Alkon (1994) accounts for the reader and maintains that their knowledge of the actual world history is crucial to the reading process, she does not develop this by theorising what readers do with this knowledge while reading counterfactual historical fiction texts.

Supporting this idea of how knowledge of actual world history is key in terms of understanding counterfactual historical fiction, Yoke's (2003) essay offers a close reading of Sarban's *The Sound of his Horn* (1952). More specifically, Yoke offers an interpretation of the text by showing how Hitler's Reich during the Second World War in Nazi Germany can be used to understand the fabricated world of *The Sound of his Horn*. What Yoke essentially demonstrates here is the cognitive operation of using the actual world to make sense of the counterfactual fictional world. In a similar kind of study, Spedo's (2009) dissertation 'The Plot Against the Past: An Exploration of Alternate History in British and American Fiction' offers an interpretive analysis of individual works of counterfactual historical fiction. Spedo maintains that one of the defining features of the genre of counterfactual historical fiction is its relationship to the actual world history. To show the link between the text and the actual world history, Spedo carries out a close reading of three counterfactual historical fiction texts – Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Robert Harris' *Fatherland* and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* – to interpret the historical references included in these texts. Spedo focuses on how history is treated within these texts and because of this, throughout his analysis he implicitly acknowledges the centrality of the reader to show how these texts make references to our actual world history. For example, in his analysis of *Fatherland* he maintains that “[m]anifold are the analogies between the actual Communist and the counterfactual Nazi regime” (11). More specifically, he demonstrates that “[t]he unearthing of the embarrassing secrets of an aging [Nazi] regime [in *Fatherland* is] eerily similar to the actual USSR” (11). Consequently, he shows how this link between the Nazi regime and U.S.S.R can be used to interpret the world presented in *Fatherland*.

Similarly, Gallagher (2018) offers a comprehensive historico-literary study of counterfactual narratives in her *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*. She begins by dividing counterfactual narratives broadly into three categories: “counterfactual narratives” that include counterfactual speculations with an analytical focus; “alternate history” for works that describe a singular continuous divergence from actual world history while all along drawing on actual historical figures and events; and “alternate-history novels” that include texts that combine the fictional with the counterfactual (3). What follows is a thorough examination of each of these categories, tracing its development and arguing that there is a close relationship between counterfactual narratives, the political climate, and historical awareness at the time. For example, in writing about *Fatherland* and its portrayal of justice, Gallagher draws our attention to the “historical-justice

effort: indicting, finding, apprehending, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators of crimes against humanity” (305) highlighted by the text. As such, she also shows how the text references the post-World War II efforts in our world by drawing parallels to the 1952 Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany. Like Spedo (2009), what Gallagher offers is a new reading of counterfactual narratives, especially from a political lens. Yoke’s (2003), Spedo’s (2009), and Gallagher’s (2018) approach that highlights the close relationship between actual world history (and politics) and counterfactual narratives is central to my argument because it supports the model that I am devising to theorise the different cognitive processes that readers go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction.

What is of absolute significance to this book is Dannenberg’s (2008) analysis of counterfactual historical fiction texts because she not only addresses the role of readers and the importance of using the actual world knowledge of history, but she also offers a cognitive model that captures the step-by-step process of what readers do when they read such fiction. Before she presents her model, the various functions of counterfactual events in novels are studied analytically in order to provide an effective categorisation of counterfactual historical fiction based on their ontological hierarchy.

Although Dannenberg does not analyse particular counterfactual historical fiction texts extensively, she does provide a model with which to analyse these texts that is based on Fauconnier and Turner’s concept of conceptual blending (cf. Dannenberg 2004, 2012). Therefore, the model that Dannenberg develops is a cognitive one capable of theorising the process that readers go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction texts. The cognitive model builds on Fauconnier and Turner’s study of the mental processes of ‘conceptual integration’ or ‘world blending’ to comprehend counterfactual statements (also see Turner, 1996; Fauconnier and Turner, 1998, 2003) as I explain below.

According to Fauconnier and Turner (1998), a counterfactual claim such as: *If Churchill had been the prime minister in 1938 instead of Neville Chamberlain, Hitler would have been deposed and World War II averted* (286), asks us to blend two input spaces to create a “separate, counterfactual mental space” (286). From the example above, the first input space consists of the information that “Churchill in 1938 [was an] outspoken opponent of Germany” (286); and the second input space includes the information that “Neville Chamberlain in 1938 [was] prime minister [and] facing threat from Germany” (286). They

continue, “to construct the blend, we project parts of each of these spaces to it, and develop emergent structure there” (286). The cognitive operation of ‘blending’ thus creates a unique blend of two input spaces – Churchill from input space 1 and the role of the prime minister from input space 2, resulting in a blended space in which Churchill in 1938 is prime minister. Thus, the blended space now consists of both the antecedent – Churchill as prime minister – and the consequent – World War II averted. My diagram as shown in Figure 1.1 illustrates Fauconnier and Turner’s (1998) concept of blending using their example:

<Figure 1.1 here [Caption: Visual representation of Fauconnier and Turner’s (1998) concept of blending]>

Dannenberg (2008) uses Fauconnier and Turner’s (1998, cf. 2003) theory of blending outlined above and visually represented in Figure 1.1 to analyse counterfactual statements in her study of counterfactual historical fiction. In particular, she applies the blending model to a passage she cites from John Wyndham’s *Random Quest* (1961) in which the protagonist finds himself transplanted into a counterfactual version of the mid-twentieth century where, in 1954, Nehru who was the Prime Minister of India in the actual world, is in prison and Rab Butler is the Prime Minister of Britain instead of Winston Churchill. She suggests that:

the real world reader recognizes that she comes from a world in which Nehru became prime minister of India as a result of that country’s independence in 1947 and in which Rab Butler never became the leader of the British Conservative Party or prime minister in post war Britain. [...] The Nehru of this text, however, is a blend of two “mental spaces” from real-world Indian history: the first input space is Nehru’s act of civil unrest against the British prior to Indian independence, which are here extended into the counterfactual space of 1954. The second real-world input space is Nehru’s becoming prime minister of India as from 1947: while this fact is contradicted in the emergent counterfactual space (in which the imprisoned Nehru is patently not enjoying the privileges of prime minister), it is precisely because of the ironic contrast with the counterfactual scenario that it is a key input feature in the counterfactual construct that the reader is invited to entertain in her mind (Dannenberg, 2008: 59).

Dannenberg uses this example to show the success of the blending model which posits that when a reader is presented with a counterfactual description in the text such as the one above, they will first recognise names such as Nehru by “accessing [their] real-world encyclopaedic

knowledge” (59). Presuming that the reader possesses all prior knowledge of twentieth century history, she suggests that the next step is for the reader to recognise that Nehru in the text is a counterfactual version of Nehru in the actual world. This leads to the understanding that the Nehru of the text is a blend of worlds that include inputs from the actual world history. Therefore, unlike the previous research outlined above, Dannenberg develops a model that surpasses simply recognising that readers must have and use their actual world history knowledge in order to understand a counterfactual historical fiction text by also explaining the underlying cognitive processes that readers are likely to engage in. As she reveals in reference to the example that she analyses, “the cognitive dynamics here go beyond the automatic activation of previously stored knowledge” (59) because a “counterfactual construct does not simply involve recognition but the creation of a unique blend” of actual world input spaces (59). As such, what she provides is a cognitive model that theorises the reader’s mental processing of the counterfactual history presented in these texts. However, as I will show in Chapter Two, while the blending model is effective for the analysis of some counterfactual historical fiction texts, it cannot be applied across all narratives in the genre. As a solution to this issue, I offer a systematic approach based on Possible Worlds Theory that is capable of modelling the different processes that readers go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction and one that can be replicated and applied across all narratives within the genre.

Dannenberg (2008) uses the example above to also criticise the use of Possible Worlds Theory as a method of analysis for counterfactual historical fiction. More specifically, she argues that “the world-separatist possible-worlds framework is incapable of penetrating the cognitive dynamics of counterfactuals” (60). Thus, her analysis in this case is used to dispute the effectiveness of frameworks that separate fictional texts into ontological domains and in particular Possible Worlds Theory. The basis for Dannenberg’s criticism of Possible Worlds Theory lies in the fact that it is essentially a tool that is used to *separate* the worlds of a text and it is therefore not capable of mapping the cognitive operation that requires the blending of input spaces. The criticism thus suggests that Possible Worlds Theory is not capable of analysing counterfactual historical fiction and a different cognitive model is essential for this purpose. While I agree that a cognitive model must be used to understand counterfactual historical fiction, as I will argue in Chapter Two and further demonstrate in subsequent chapters, it is also vitally important to separate the text into its constituent worlds.

What this book offers is therefore a cognitive-narratological methodology that can be used to formally describe the different worlds created by such texts as well as theorise what readers do when they read such fiction. Possible Worlds Theory has been productively employed for this purpose by a number of theorists (see Pavel, 1986; Eco, 1984; Ryan, 1991; Bell, 2010). For that reason, rather than replacing Possible Worlds Theory with an entirely cognitive account such as Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980; Cook, 1994; Semino, 1997; Jeffries, 2001) or Contextual Frame Theory (Emmott, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998), I incrementally build Possible Worlds Theory by supplementing it with new and refined cognitive concepts. The result is an elaborate Possible Worlds model that is capable of accounting for both the cognitive and the narratological aspects of counterfactual historical fiction.

1.4 Structure of the Book

The introduction examines the scholarship on counterfactual historical fiction. It provides an overview of the study of counterfactuals between disciplines and explore the genre of counterfactual historical fiction in detail. Within this chapter, I also carry out a review of the literature around the genre of counterfactual historical fiction before concluding that the genre lacks a suitable systematic methodology that theorises the different cognitive processes that readers go through when they read such fiction.

In Chapter Two, I present my methodology – Possible Worlds Theory – which I argue is the most suitable methodology with which to analyse counterfactual historical fiction. I begin by explaining the theory in detail. For this purpose, I trace the development of Possible Worlds Theory from its foundation in philosophical logic to its application in narratology. The chapter will suggest ways in which Possible Worlds Theory is highly relevant for the analysis of counterfactual historical fiction, but also indicate that it requires modification and supplementation for it to be entirely successful.

In Chapters Three and Four, I offer modifications to Possible Worlds Theory that is essential for the effective analysis of all narratives within the genre of counterfactual historical fiction. Although Possible Worlds Theory is useful because it offers a modal universe with which the worlds created by texts can be labelled and analysed, in its current form the theory does not sufficiently address the role of readers in its analysis of fiction. I

demonstrate that an effective model to analyse counterfactual historical fiction texts must go beyond categorising the worlds of texts by also theorising what readers when they read this type of fiction. For this purpose, in Chapter Three I offer the first set of modifications to Possible Worlds Theory by introducing ‘Reader K-worlds’ (RK-worlds) to label specific knowledge worlds that readers use to apprehend the counterfactual world. By way of illustration, I show that my concept of RK-worlds is able to account for the activation of actual world knowledge in the mind of the reader more explicitly than current Possible Worlds models. I further introduce two additional new cognitive concepts that are crucial to theorising and analysing the processes that readers go through when they read counterfactual historical fiction namely ‘Ontological Superimposition’ and ‘Reciprocal Feedback’.

In Chapter Four, I develop my approach further and offer the second set of modifications to Possible Worlds Theory by critically examining two conflicting concepts, counterparthood and transworld identity, that are often perceived as substitutes for each other. I show that within the context of counterfactual historical fiction, these concepts cannot be conceived as surrogates for each other, because they can be each used to precisely describe a different type of actual world individual in fiction depending on the manner in which they are presented. Subsequently, I redefine counterpart theory and transworld identity from a cognitive point of view. Furthermore, to work within the context of counterfactual historical fiction, I also redefine the concept of essential properties and rigid designation. In offering these modifications to Possible Worlds Theory, I differentiate between the diverse ways in which actual world individuals are presented in texts, thereby also accounting for how readers process them differently.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are offered as analytical chapters. In each of these chapters, I focus on specific features that are introduced by the chosen texts respectively. The three texts that I have chosen as case studies are Robert Harris’s *Fatherland* (1992), Sarban’s *The Sound of his Horn* (1952), and Stephen Fry’s *Making History* (1996). I use these texts to illustrate and further adapt the theoretical framework that I offer rather than to illuminate or to provide a new interpretation of the texts.

Using *Fatherland* as my first case study, in Chapter Five I focus on actual world images and quotations used in the text to show how the Possible Worlds model that I offer can be used to effectively study the mixed fictionality of multimodal narratives. More specifically, I show how the images presented within the textual actual world are

simultaneously fictional and non-fictional. I offer a systematic method in the form of a fictionality scale based on Possible Worlds Theory that distinguishes their ontological status depending on how they are presented and used in texts, along with a reader focused approach that takes into account their perceived ontological status based on RK-worlds. Furthermore, focusing on specific quotations used in the text, I also show how readers use their RK-worlds to process and make sense of these.

In Chapter Six, using *The Sound of his Horn* I focus on the dystopian counterfactual world that is created through unreliable narration. In doing so, I demonstrate the theory's adeptness in analysing texts that rely heavily on reader's RK-worlds to make sense of the counterfactual world. Since this text further exploits reader comprehension by presenting an unreliable narrator, I also explore how Possible Worlds Theory deals with unreliable narration to demonstrate the manner in which readers process multiple worlds with seemingly different ontological statuses created within a text.

My final case study is *Making History*, a text that presents multiple worlds through historical alterations. In Chapter Seven I show how Possible Worlds Theory is capable of offering a nuanced understanding of the text's use of contradictory chapters and statements. I will also show how the model that I offer is equipped to explain how readers process contradictions presented in the text.

The concluding chapter will overview the theoretical and analytical ramifications of the monograph. It also proposes areas for further research that will benefit both Possible Worlds Theory and wider scholarship of counterfactual historical fiction.

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