From Frivolous “What-Ifs” to an Obligatory Analytical Method: Counterfactual History in Scholarly Texts and the British Invasion Scare Fiction Tradition

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In this review article, our task is two-fold. First, we will create an overview of how counterfactual history has been understood and defined by historians and scholars from neighbouring fields. The stances vary from completely dismissive to arguments that counterfactual thinking is in fact one of the key methods of any historical enquiry. Second, as an example of counterfactual fiction, we will examine how a notable British tradition of invasion scare fictions has imagined the idea of the islands being taken over by hostile actors, historical or imaginary.

> There is no action or event, great or small (leaving predestination out of account) which might not have happened differently, and, happening differently, have perhaps modified the world's history for all time. (Squire 1932, v)

So wrote English journalist, critic, playwright and poet J.C. Squire in his introduction to the book *If It Had Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History*, published in 1932. As the title of the book and the citation suggest, the book explores "imaginary history" – history which did not happen. The book consists of eleven chapters, which deal with such topics as "if the Moors in Spain had won", "if Napoleon had escaped to America", "if Booth had missed Lincoln". (Squire 1932) Authors include G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Harold Nicolson and H.A.L. Nicolson – British authors and historians who also had public roles as politicians and/or government officials. The most famous of the authors is Winston Churchill, whom the same attributes suit more than adequately.[1]

In this review article,[2] our task is two-fold. First, starting with the afore-mentioned *If It Had Happened Otherwise*, we form an overview of how counterfactual history has been understood and defined by historians and scholars from neighbouring fields. We omitted futurology as well as historians' accounts which contemplate how history can be applied for imagining the future as we believe that counterfactual history has been applied above all to speculating on the futures of the past, not futures of the present.

Even with that restriction our review is not all-inclusive, but our objective is to be as comprehensive as possible regarding the main issues presented by the authors. We hope to have covered a sufficient number of texts for the reader to understand the main problematics and concepts within the genre. The method for choosing the works we discuss below was as follows.

We began by compiling texts which explicitly, for example in the title, appeared to discuss the subject. References in articles led to the discovery of more texts, as expected. As a result, we cover 35 texts from 32 authors, (all but one) written between 1984 (though we use the English edition from 1993) and 2024. There were more, but they were omitted either because they were not accessible to us[3] or were in languages we felt we do not know well enough to trust that we get matters right, especially in such a theoretical, concept-based subject as counterfactual history. However, we consider our research material to be certainly adequate for the task at hand. What we do not cover is all the various historical events or settings that the texts use for demonstration.

That would have been a truly exhaustive additional undertaking. The fact that we cover some texts in greater length than others is not related to quality but to the sheer amount that there is to introduce and highlight. In addition, some authors have quite little to say about the genre on theoretical level and focus on practical cases instead.

As we will see, *counterfactual history* is the most frequently used term for speculative history-writing, although synonyms such as alternative history and allohistory are also used to explain the historiographical mode or method. It should be pointed out that *counterfactuality* is a term or a concept which is applied in discussing many other things than history, which is our focus here. An excellent example of the matter is the book *Counterfactual Thinking, Counterfactual Writing* (2011). Of its fourteen chapters only one ("'What-If?': Counterfactuality and History" by historian Georg Christoph Berger Waldenegg) focuses on counterfactual history (as in academic historiography) as a concept.

Our review article features two parts. The first we described above. The second part concerns itself with a related genre, alternative/counterfactual historical fiction. This has been a popular genre for centuries and remains so today – particularly stories concerning Nazi Germany (or Nazis in one or another shape or form). Perhaps it is fitting, then, that our example also includes Nazi Germany. It is, however, not a coincidence as the idea for this article was born when we were writing the article "*It Happened Here* ja Kolmannen valtakunnan visuaalinen ja temaattinen vetovoima" ("*It Happened Here* and the visual and thematic magnetism of the Third Reich") on the 1964 British independent film by Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo. The film features the counterfactual setting of Britain having been invaded by Nazi Germany in 1940. (Mähkä & Tringham 2024) We will return to the film later in this article, too.

In reality, in modern times, Britain has been very rarely invaded, but this reality stands in stark contrast to her fiction. Instead of reviewing fictions (literature, film, television etc.) on, say, on the theme of Nazi Germany invading Britain, we will create an overview of the genre of *invasion scare fictions* written between the 19th and 21th century. We highlight both the themes covered in these works and the backgrounds – contexts – of the people who made them. Just as in the genre covered in part one of this article, there is an "axis" of parameters at work in counterfactual conceptions: historical – general / conceptual. It is usually down to the reader to evaluate which is the dominant form in a text. Just as in historiography, the present is the context for a historical

enquiry, not the past – even if the counterfactual contemplates the future (of the past) on the surface.

The objective of this article is to introduce readers to how the topics at hand have been addressed by scholars and artists, and as such we do not engage in discussions with their arguments or themes. Rather, our aim is to provide what is hopefully a useful "database" (Table 1) for counterfactual history and a take on a long-term example of one fictional genre, or perhaps imaginative tradition, based on a related speculative phenomenon.

We would like to highlight that we will not make direct references between the overview of the (mostly) academic takes on counterfactual history and the second part dealing with the British tradition on invasion scare fictions. Although there are many connections between these, we suggest that the reader make any relevant connections regardless of the given case.

PART I

	Positive Attitude	Critical Attitude	Useful	Waste of Time	Entertain-ment Only	Comparison to Everyday Life	NOTES
Squire 1932		X		X		X	Seems sorry he had to edit and co-author the book!
Demandt 1984 (1993)	X		X			X	History that happens is just as astonishing as that which never happens.
Ferguson 1997	X	X	X		X	X	If done right, very useful. Otherwise, entertainment value only.
Cowley 1999 & 2001	X		X				States history is an art, not science.
Lebow 2000	X		X				Review article on *Virtual History* and Ferguson's WW1 book.
Hellekson 2001	X		X				Compares the genre to science fiction.
Gaddis 2002	X		X			X	Counterfactuals are a "virtual laboratory" for historians.
Rosenfeld 2002 & 2005		X	X				Connects the rise of counterfactuals to postmodernism and alerts other scholars of the phenomenon.
Bunzl 2004	X		X				"A user's guide to counterfactual history"
Salmi 2004	X		X				Wonders if our historical understanding is more based on what did not happen.
Niemi & Pernaa 2005	X		X				Encourage authors to use a less normal style than in academic work.
Bernard 2005	X		X				Highlights counterfactual history's educational potential.
Jokisipilä & Niemi 2006	X		X				Critical esponses to Niemi & Pernaa (eds.) book used to continue discussion.
Badsey 2008	X		X				Divides the genre in basic types, literature and history.
Kaye 2010	X		X				"Counterfactualism is a useful process for historians as a thought-experiment because it offers grounds to challenge an unfortunate contemporary historical mindset of assumed, deterministic certainty".
Waldenegg 2011		X	X				The genre "involves more perils than pleasures".
Roberts 2011	X		X				Encourages using counterfactual history in school classes.
Singles 2011	X						Reviews Widmann (not covered here) while criticising earlier English works.
Nolan 2011	X		X			X	Lists eight points why counterfactuals should be applied in history.
Seppälä 2012 & 2018	X		X				The contrastive counterfactual theory of causal explanation is the key concept.
Singles 2013	X						Connects the genre with postmodernism
Evans 2014		X			X		"Frivolity and whimsicality are two of the main reasons why alternative histories have not been taken seriously by historians, even by some of those who have advanced them."
Malcolm 2014	X		X				Allohistorical works form an intriguing and little-known aspect of post-memory of World War One.
Huijgen & Holthuis 2014	X		X			X	The authors "argue for the use of Counterfactual Historical Reasoning (CHR) in history education".
Levy 2015	X		X			X	Counterfactuals, used with extended criteria, are useful in validating causal inferences
Sunstein 2015	X		X			X	Historians are pervasively counterfactualists.
Black 2015	X		X			X	"Counterfactualism is central to the process of clarifying historical processes".
Lähteenmäki 2016	X		X				Features a very useful discussion based on many articles covered in this article.
Wendell 2020	X		X				Study on students shows that counterfactual thinking produces better historical understanding.
Penchev 2021		X			X		Whether an event is real or counterfactual history can only be decided only post factum.
Virmajoki 2024	X		X				An interventionist way of thinking should be standard in the case of counterfactuals.

Table 1.

SQUIRE 1932

J. C. Squire (1932, v) argues that in people's lives "If" usually "takes the form of 'If only'". When this happens, it carries implications of regret, as in 'if I had not done that, I would be happier'. In the case of history, for Squire, first, "trivial" matters are not typically considered to have changed much in the greater picture, and, second, we tend to think that matters could have gone worse than they did. At the end, Squire does not appear to think much of alternative or counterfactual history, and in his rather abrupt introduction to the volume he has edited notes that some writers "mingle more satire with their speculations than do others" (1932, vi; see also Ferguson 1997, 9–10).

DEMANDT 1993 (1984)

Historian Alexander Demandt's book *History That Never Happened* (English translation 1993, the original book in German in 1984) is most certainly a pioneering work. While the English edition appeared almost a decade later than the original German edition (which we refer to), nonetheless we point to the fact that Demandt published in 1984, even if it obviously lacked the potential to reach an audience as wide as the later English edition, and this must be taken into account with regard to the timeline of counterfactual theorisations.

He begins by asking whether there is any point considering what never happened, arguing that "conjectures" of such histories are a "taboo" among historians, dismissed as "idle fantasy, frivolous speculation" – "how else it might have happened – that is no subject for a historian." "The dignity of history lies in using critical examination of sources to the facts and set them forth", Demandt writes. However, as the reader has concluded from the book's subheading*, A Treatise on the Question, What Would Have Happened If…?*, Demandt will step out of "proper" history, with the aim of showing that "our picture of history will remain incomplete if it is not brought into the framework of unrealized possibilities. "Consideration of history that never happened is necessary despite understandable doubts, is possible despite considerable difficulties, and has its didactic value in providing insight into *actual* history." (1993 [1984], 1–2)

Demandt follows his very brief introduction with seven chapters. The first of these is entitled "Objections", with the subheading "Thinking about history that never happened is a taboo". He introduces what he sees as the main criticisms, ending with the conclusion that the objections are not valid, because speculation is needed for historical understanding; "every fact has implications beyond itself". (1993, 3–8) The next chapter is "Aims"; "Thinking about history that never

happened is necessary" because it completes knowledge, highlights crucial situations and the futurity inherent in them, as well as causal factors, value judgements, coincidences, and so on. He concludes by stating that the "construction of alternatives is heuristically useful and didactically indispensable". (1993 [1984], 10–37)

The next chapter, "Justifications", argues that "the postulation of unrealized possibilities can be justified", and that "the historically possible occupies the space between the unimaginable and the actual". For Demandt, "*necessity* is a historically unusable word", while it is also crucial to understand that "possibilities are not all equally plausible". He also argues that "current predictions of futurology are just as uncertain as those of the past". (1993 [1984], 39–68) Demandt follows with 15 historical examples from antiquity to the 20th century (two examples concerning Hitler!) (1993 [1984], 69–113), before moving on to "Obstacles", "Thinking about history that never happened is difficult", not to mention writing it academically – convincingly, is Demandt's point here. Even "sudden, profound changes" are difficult to postulate, let alone "long-term, far-reaching developments". However, Demandt puts these issues into perspective as he concludes that "the difficulties in imagining possible history are rooted in the problems of learning about actual history". (1993 [1984], 115–134)

The chapter "Insights", "Considerations of alternative possibilities is instructive" proposes that "alternatives remote from reality are unlikely." This means that the actual history will have a strong role in what could be considered plausible as an alternative historical event or chain of events. "Historical forces are in dynamic equilibrium" – moving one force must be followed by moving the others. (1993 [1984], 135–153) In the conclusion, "Prospects"; "Is history an error of nature", Demandt states that historical standpoints change with time: "If we look back at our history and distinguish between main and side paths, between the right and the wrong course, it could turn out that as seen from the future, we are not on the main path but somewhere off to the side. The standpoint from which we identify false paths of history could itself lie on one of them. We can neither rule that out without overvaluing ourselves nor accept it as true without contradicting ourselves." (1993 [1984], 156) Finally, "reality forms an island, an archipelago, in the ocean of the possible. […] History that happens is just as astonishing as that which never happens." (1993 [1984], 159–160)

FERGUSON 1997

Like Squire, historian Niall Ferguson (1997, 2–3) approaches making sense of counterfactual history from the perspective of our everyday lives. He argues that even if we know we cannot go back in time to alter events and decisions, banal or life-changing, imagining counterfactuals is “a vital part of the way in which we learn”. We approach the future through processing the past by weighing actual outcomes against alternatives which did not take place.

Ferguson’s 90-page introduction to the volume he edited and co-authored, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, is a seminal piece on the subject at hand. He begins his historical discussion by citing two English historians. E.H. Carr dismissed counterfactual history as a “parlour game” and a “red herring”, while for E.P. Thompson it was “unhistorical shit” (1997, 4–5). Ferguson goes on to point out that a negative attitude towards counterfactual history is not limited to any school of history, citing Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce, for whom it has no place in the field of history. Similarly, for English philosopher Michael Oakeshott, if a historian engages in counterfactual “experiment”, “he steps ‘outside the current of historical thought’” (1997, 5–6).

Ferguson touches on a popular genre discussed also in this article, counter-historical fiction. His example is the novel *Fatherland* by Robert Harris (1992), which Ferguson (1997, 7–8) finds “well researched” but “irredeemably fictional”, in which “a Nazi victory in the Second World War becomes merely a titillating backdrop for a good departure-lounge yarn”. Interestingly, Ferguson (ibid.) compares counterfactual history to futurology in their relationship to history. Ferguson also discusses *If It Had Happened Otherwise*, noting Squire’s attitude in a similar manner to that which we did above. He believes the book “discredited the notion of counterfactual history for a generation”, and that the book was “soon dead and buried” (1997, 9–11).

Ferguson (1997, 12–20) moves on to point out a number of flaws in the genre. First, authors (over)emphasise “single, often trivial” changes. Second is the “effect of humour”, which is often intentional and also connected with the first point, that counterfactual settings are highly reductive to *a* single factor as made *the* factor of a large historical event or setting. Third, in the context of New Economic History’s quantitative approach, is a lack of historical plausibility, “not because they are reductive or frivolous but because they are anachronistic”. Ferguson concludes his criticism by summarising two kinds of counterfactual types: products of imagination which are highly reductionist and implausible, and computations used to test hypotheses which make anachronistic

assumptions. As a result, either by “posing implausible questions” or by “providing implausible answers, “counterfactual history has tended to discredit itself”. (1997, 18–19)

However, Ferguson (1997, 85–89) does believe that counterfactual history can be very useful in understanding the past if it is used in a plausible manner – and this is what “virtual history” means in the title of the book: “simulations based on calculations about the relative probability of plausible outcomes in a chaotic world”. What is to be considered plausible or probable can *only* be those alternatives that the contemporaries considered at the time. This must be demonstrated by contemporary evidence. There is, Ferguson argues, a double rationale for counterfactual analysis. First, it is a *logical* necessity in understanding what happened, why was a certain action taken, and so on. Second, it is a *historical* necessity for attempting to understand how the past “actually was”. This also helps in realising that what did happen was often not the outcome the contemporaries saw as the most likely. Finally, “virtual history” is “a necessary antidote to determinism”. (On Ferguson, see also Jokisipilä & Niemi 2006, 12–13)

BULHOF 1999

Philosopher Johannes Bulhof approaches contrafactual history as a question of modality. He argues that even if philosophers and historians have “long been suspicious of modal and counterfactual claims”, they in fact often use them for a variety of purposes: helping to explain causes and, hence, events. Yet, Bulhof notes, there are serious limitations to this. First, there really are no original sources to indicate what might have happened. There can be contemporary sources including speculations, statements on what could or might have had happened, but that is a different matter. Bulhof admits that he was surprised to discover in his study that “not only were counterfactual claims everywhere, but they are very important to our understanding of history, because it is not only about what happened but why. Belhof writes that “counterfactuals, causes, and explanations are three sides of the same strange counterfactual coin; you cannot have one without the other two”. (1999, 145–147)

COWLEY 1999 & 2001

Military historian Robert Cowley edited and co-authored two volumes on alternative history, *What If?* (1999) and *More What If?* (2001) which most likely are among the most widely known works in the genre. The first thing that a reader notices are the subheadings of the books. The first mentioned includes “the world’s foremost military historians imagine what might have been” and

the latter has “eminent historians” doing the same (see also Waldenegg 2011, 130–131). It seems clear that the purpose of this is to both attach prestige to the books and pre-emptively deflect at least some of the expected criticism.

It is obvious that Cowley sees considerable merit in the counterfactual, which Cowley mentions as being “the vogue word in academic circles” (1999, xi). He sees it as a tool for enhancing the general understanding of history, with the ability to reveal “in startling detail … the essential stakes of confrontation” and the “potentially abiding consequences” (ibid.). Further, counterfactual histories can challenge “long-held assumptions” and “define true turning points”. The last mentioned is a notable argument among texts reviewed in this article, as it appears to say that there is something lacking in commonly accepted understandings of an event; the latter may suffer from “hindsight bias” (1999, xii). There is no questioning of counterfactual history in Cowley’s text, only possibilities, quite dramatically summoned by the final statement of the 1999 introduction: “For the historians, as the maxim goes, the dominoes fall backward. In *What If?* we will attempt to make them fall forward.” (1999, xiv)

In his introduction to the 2001 volume, Cowley begins by stating that “one of the troubles with history as it is studied today is that people take it too seriously”. He continues by writing that he does not mean to say that “history isn’t serious business”; he only has “serious qualms about the way history is dispensed”. The reason for “the solemnity of history” stems from school, in which we are “force-fed history as social studies”. It should be understood, instead, as a narrative, “a vast and ever-evolving novel”. (Cowley 2003, xv) Cowley writes that military history is a natural, “irresistible” field for counterfactual history, but it works just as well in history in general. While admitting that what-if scenarios have entertainment value and their purpose is also to provoke, for him, “there is no better way of understanding what did happen in history than to contemplate what might very well have happened”. Finally, Cowley thinks that “some historians try to change an art into a science”. Instead, it should be understood that history should have no rules. (2003, xvii) We cannot help thinking Cowley’s tone could have been inspired by likely criticisms of his first volume.

LEBOW 2000

In his review article based around Niall Ferguson’s (ed.) above-discussed *Virtual History* (1997) and Ferguson’s *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (1999), American political scientist Richard Ned

Lebow writes that despite the fact that counterfactuals have been used in literature and "are taken seriously" in physics and biological sciences, for "most members of our profession counterfactual arguments appear to have no scientific standing" (2000, 550–551). For Lebow, counterfactual experiments, as he calls them, "vary attributes of context or the presence or value of variables and analyse how these changes would have affected outcomes". Interestingly, he states that in history and political science "these outcomes" are always uncertain, because "we can neither predict the future nor rerun the tape of history". (ibid.) Lebow appears to argue that a historian or political scientist cannot know where s/he will end up when embarking on an experiment, for example, "what if Finland had never gained independence?" This is almost in complete opposition to the harshest criticism of contrafactual history, according to which it is a waste of time because the outcome is not information at all.

Lebow argues that that the difference between counterfactual and "so-called" "factual" (quotation marks in both cases by the author) can in many cases be marginal. One reason for this is that historians often need to construct their argument from several sources, making conclusions as they go. In addition, historians need to understand both the factual and counterfactual beliefs of historical actors to account for their behaviour, as Lebow put it. What is more, counterfactuals are "an essential ingredient of scholarship"; they are useful in determining research questions and also answering these questions – they are "fundamental to all theories and interpretations", and counterfactuals are useful for experimentation and simulation with historical scenarios. Finally, plausible counterfactuals must have a real probability of creating an outcome the researcher intends to present. This appears to be in contradiction with Lebow's "uncertainty" argument above. Testing plausibility should include the following eight factors: clarity; logical consistency or cotenability; enabling counterfactuals should not undercut the antecedent; historical consistency; theoretical consistency; avoid the conjunction fallacy; recognise the interconnectedness of causes and outcomes; and consider second-order counterfactuals. Above all, this list aids in avoiding "poor counterfactuals". Lebow's review of *Virtual History*, especially Ferguson's long introduction, is harsh, as he finds it "a literature review without much purpose", and his conclusion "as rambling as his introduction". (2000, 551–570)

HELLEKSON 2001

Science fiction scholar Karen Hellekson states that her book *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (2001) is "the first published text to examine the alternate history in terms of

history". This is surprising given that she acknowledges *Virtual History* and *What If?* in her introduction. However, our conclusion is that she claims this because two concepts, drawing especially on Paul Ricœur and Hayden White, time and narrative are at the core of Hellekson's monograph's case studies. What is more, these are placed within "the larger framework of four models of history", which are "the eschatological, genetic, entropic, and teleological models". (2001, 1–5, 15, 111)

Hellekson also briefly discusses various names for the genre. She (obviously) prefers alternate history to alternative history, "allohistory" (see Rosenfeld 2002 and Malcolm 2014 below), "uchronia"[4] or counterfactual [history]. Hellekson notes that historians appear to favour the last mentioned, and argues that alternate history is grammatically correct in comparison to alternative history. Despite preferring alternative, she has chosen to use alternate because the former also has another meaning in history, "histories that approach their subject from a nonstandard position". (2001, 3)

Hellekson also establishes sophisticated parallels between alternate history and science fiction (e.g. the concept of parallel worlds). As for history, she notes that alternate histories generally "presuppose" a linear conception of time, using cause-and-effect points to unfold – the last mentioned being a genre trademark. Hellekson sees alternate history as "reinforcing historical knowledge" and having "important psychological effects", in the form of realisations that "it could have happened otherwise, save for a personal choice". For her, the genetic model of history (which is "concerned with origin, development or cause") is "the most comfortable and the most natural place for the alternate historian to work, particularly those interested in battles". (2001, 2, 36–37, 108–109)

GADDIS 2002

Political scientist and military historian John Lewis Gaddis (2002) includes a chapter in his book on "how historians map the map", as he puts it. Gaddis discusses counterfactuals in connection with causation and contingency. For him, historians for the most part "have remained happily on their methodological island", while natural and social sciences have seen changing trends. At the core is the question of causation: "if there really are only dependent variables in history, then how do historians establish and confirm causal relations among them? How, if everything depends upon

everything else, can we ever know the cause of anything?", Gaddis asks, and argues that historians avoid answering questions of this sort. (2002, 91–92)

Drawing inspiration from E.H. Carr and Marc Bloch, Gaddis discusses accidents as unpredictable everyday occurrences involving causation. History can similarly be considered to be a question of causation. Gadis extracts three sets of distinctions from Bloch: First, there is *the distinction between the immediate, the intermediate, and the distant*: Gaddis writes: "although historical narratives normally move forward, historians in preparing them move backward"; historians "tend to start with some particular phenomenon—large or small—and then trace its antecedents. Or, to put it in the terms I used earlier, they begin with structures and then derive the processes that produced them." There is a "*principle of diminishing relevance* at work, however: *"*the greater the time that separates a cause from a consequence, the less relevant we presume that cause to be." (2002, 95–96)

Second, the distinction between *exceptional* and *general* causes, which is related to the distinction between *necessary* and *sufficient* causation in the context of a given historical event or phenomena. Context is a key concept here, as causes "always have contexts, and to know the former we must understand the latter". (2002, 97–98) The third "procedure", as Gaddis puts it, for establishing causation is analysing the role of *counterfactuals*. He makes an analogy to natural sciences: "using their imagination, historians were to perform procedures similar to what chemists and physicists do with their test tubes, centrifuges, and cloud chambers. They would revisit the past, varying conditions as they did so to try to see which would produce different results. They would do this by means of counterfactuals." (2002, 100)

Gaddis points out that historians cannot "rerun" history as the past, but neither can natural scientists rerun time. Counterfactuals, regardless, are a "virtual laboratory" for historians, which they use – by considering events – "in their minds". Using counterfactuals requires strict "discipline", just like laboratory work. (2002, 100, 102)

ROSENFELD 2002 & 2005

Historian Gavriel Rosenfeld begins his article (2002) on alternate history – or, as Rosenfeld writes, "more eloquently allohistory"" – by stating that not only has it "emerged seemingly out of nowhere" "during the last decade" but also "become one of the most fertile fields of historical enquiry". He goes on to highlight that mass media has taken an interest in the genre, to the extent

that even its harshest critics must take notice, some of them even “legitimizing” the “once-unwanted bastard child of their profession”. Rosenfeld connects the rise of alternate histories to postmodernism, “with its [postmodernism’s] blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, its privileging of ‘other’ or alternate voices, and its playfully ironic reconfiguring of established historical verities”; postmodernism “encouraged” alternate history as a historical phenomenon. Finally, the “information revolution” through “cyberspace and virtual reality” has given “us” the “confidence to break free of the constraints of real history as well”. While this sounds highly critical (because the author is clearly sarcastic), Rosenfeld concludes by hoping he has “alerted” and perhaps “stimulated” other scholars “to plunge into a field rich with fascinating opportunities for historical insight”. (2002, 91–92, 113)

In his 2005 book *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism*, drawing on a “well-established genre” of alternate histories concerning Nazi Germany, Rosenfeld constructs a number of alternate historical scenarios of his own. Despite controversies and a fear that works on the subject might be used for revisionist purposes, he hopes to show that inquiry into alternate history is a legitimate scholarly undertaking, and that “examining tales of what never happened can help us understand the memory of what did”. Rosenfeld mentions postmodernism and the information revolution in the 2002 article and adds “the acceleration of what has been called the ‘Entertainment Revolution’” as contexts of alternate history’s recent growth of popularity. “Infotainment” is not foreign even in the “ivory tower world of academia”. He concludes by stating that alternate histories explore the past “less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the state of the contemporary world”. (2005, 1–11)

BUNZL 2004

Philosopher Martin Bunzl’s “User’s Guide” to counterfactual history offers an overview of previous texts and their cases on the subject. His argument is that counterfactuals are not as easy to avoid as one might think. His conclusion is that “counterfactual reasoning plays an unavoidable implicit role in history”, and it is a genuine option to focus a study on them. For Bunzl, indirect evidence should be the basis of the evaluation of counterfactual claims, “not imagination”, though there is always the question of at which point in a counterfactual case one actually enters the latter. (2004, 857–858)

SALMI 2004

In his brief newspaper column, cultural historian Hannu Salmi (2004) writes that alternative history is a literature genre, but also a popular history avocation. He points out that there are online communities dedicated to it, noting World War Two, the American War of Independence and World War One as the most popular objects of speculation. Salmi argues that the more plausible an alternative scenario is, the more fruitful speculations occur. He writes that for a cultural historian, speculations feel “unnatural”, because historical phenomena are complicated and change slowly. Yet, speculation should not be sniffed at, because there is always information on how things were thought to happen (but did not), and often these have been used to justify matters as being inevitable. Salmi concludes by contemplating that maybe our understanding of history is not based on what happened but what could have happened.

NIEMI & PERNAA 2005

In their introduction to an edited volume of alternate Finnish history, contemporary historians Mari K. Niemi and Ville Pernaa use the interesting term “unrealized history” (2005, 7. This is different to other texts discussed in this article. It carries the fascinating implication that the imaginary scenarios of the book deal with history which did not happen. This is a complete opposite to views that alternate history is not history at all. It may be that the term was inspired by one of the book’s authors, Juhana Aunesluoma, whose chapter Niemi and Pernaa cite in their introduction; Aunesluoma writes about realised history (cit. 2005, 9). They also reveal that they encouraged writers to use a more liberal style than standard academic historiography, also to highlight the notion that sometimes history-writing borders on literature/fiction. Finally, they believe that the chapters inspire the reader to “argue” with what the authors have written about a scenario (2005, 10–11).

JENSEN 2005

Historian Bernard Eric Jensen’s paper focuses on history taught at schools. His starting point is a 1997 survey, in which over 30,000 students and teachers in over thirty countries in Europe were “asked about their views on history and history teaching”. The disparity between teachers’ and students’ views turned out to be so great that the researchers were puzzled. It also turned out that students found teaching methods and contents – books, lecturing, “storage of facts” – unsatisfactory. What the students wanted instead was audio-visual media, sources and documents

and museums over the textbooks. The conclusion was made that history teaching was out of date. (2005, 151–152)

Bernard moves on to discuss the educational potential of counterfactual history. He describes an experimentation at the University of Berlin in 1983–1984 where students were given realistic alternative scenarios to "play". The university ruled that the students were not given credits because of the nature of the course. The professor, ancient historian Alexander Demandt, went on to publish a book on the subject (which we covered above), which became successful. Jensen hypotheses on what might happen if counterfactual history became an integral part of history teaching in schools, concluding that it might lead to a "more creative and productive approach" to teaching history. He argues that it would not be "sloppy" and "superficial" but a stimulating intellectual challenge, which helped to understand past cultures and also "the actual temporality of history"). (2005, 155–158)

JOKISIPILÄ & NIEMI 2006

Contemporary historians Markku Jokisipilä and Mari K. Niemi use media reviews of Niemi & Pernaa 2005 (see above). This is both interesting as a rhetorical solution, and, in a way, logical as their text is an introduction to a follow-up volume on alternative Finnish history by the same publisher. They state that even though there is a more sophisticated word for "what-if" -speculating, "counterfactual deduction" [our translation from Finnish], many professional historians consider it merely a pastime, perhaps entertaining but a hopelessly pointless activity. In discussing the above-mentioned media reviews of the book, they highlight the fact that views of the genre (and the book) varied greatly, but above all it was inspirational – regardless of the reviewer's opinion. (Jokisipilä & Niemi 2006, 7–9) The reviews that Jokisipilä and Niemi cite all appear to contain ironic and sarcastic tones, hinting at a feeling that the genre is not being taken completely seriously.

Jokisipilä and Niemi argue that any analysis of a causality necessitates using counterfactual thinking; why did the contemporaries end up doing A instead of B when either option appears to have been equally possible or even likely? It is also possible, Jokisipilä and Niemi state, that a solution was the result of something other than conscious thinking. In other words, a historian must attempt to trace the options available to the contemporaries, to "get inside their minds". Finally, even speculation only for the sake of entertainment must be based on realism – be historically plausible – in order for it to work. (2006, 9–12)

BADSEY 2008

Military historian Stephen Badsey analyses 45 literary works (28 of which have been published since 1990) on World War One which contain counterfactuals. He argues that as a literary form, counterfactual history "exhibits two interconnected variants". One is "a counterfactual reality as the setting for the otherwise conventionally structured novel", appealing to the "same broad readership as science fiction, tech-fiction, and more rarely as satire". The second and more serious type is the use of counterfactuality as an analytical tool by historians. This sub-genre "attempts to place on a scholarly basis the common human reaction to a major historical event". Badsey goes on to argue that counterfactual history is different to science fiction, cautionary fiction and historical fiction in that the latter use counterfactual settings to examine the preoccupations of their own time, whereas the former is concerned chiefly with the past. Finally, establishing probability is a key factor in counterfactual history by historians, even if the objective of entertainment is usually present. (2008, 352–356, 362)

KAYE 2010

Political scientist Simon T. Kaye (2010) highlights his view on counterfactuals as follows: "Counterfactualism is a useful process for historians as a thought-experiment because it offers grounds to challenge an unfortunate contemporary historical mindset of assumed, deterministic certainty". (2010, abstract) A key argument behind this is that "counterfactual claims are implicitly present in virtually all academic histories, and this is especially so when a historian approaches his/her subject "with a certain *sureness*" (that A caused B). There can be unconsidered counterfactualism, which also points to certainty of an argued causality, but, conversely, "the primary potential of *deliberate* and explicit counterfactualism, defined here as *a historical narrative of events that never occurred*, is that it immediately begs a historian to consider the extent of his or her own sureness [all italics by Kaye]. (2010, 38–39)

Kaye introduces three categories which "present key historical assumptions that counterfactual thought-experiments, utilized correctly, may undermine". He states that other methods can also be used for the same end, but that counterfactuals are the most effective way. First, the Assumption of Indispensability (which "incorporates two ahistorical value-judgments: first, the classical-optimist implication that the real world, as it exists, is both 'inevitable' and 'the best of all possible worlds'" and as such, simplifies human progress). Second, The Assumption of Causality (as a tool, a

method, counterfactualism "may test the assumption of causal relationships between events by removing elements, factor by factor, in a series of educated thought-experiments, historians can begin to test a causal hypothesis quasi-scientifically"). Third (and most important), The Assumption of Inevitability (determinism; "events that were very much in doubt in their own time may be presented by a historian as being ultimately inevitable. but this constitutes a failure to fully articulate the history of an era, since historical outcomes are as often unlikely as they are likely, regardless of whether they actually come to pass"). (2010, 40–42) From here, Kaye moves on to a discussion on previous texts on counterfactuals and related works.

ROBERTS 2011

Social scientist Scott L. Roberts begins his article on using counterfactual history to "enhance students' historical understanding" by discussing what he sees as the distinction between the terms alternative and counterfactual history. For Roberts, the former is a literary genre "usually steeped in science fiction" such as time-traveller stories, while the latter is "often used to describe works that are based on historical fact", or, in which "the point of divergence is caused by 'realistic' circumstances such as a historical figure making a different decision in relation to what actually happened". Roberts cites a number of earlier texts of the latter genre, many of which are addressed in this article, too. (2011, 117–118)

Roberts then moves on, based on his experiences, to explain how counterfactual history should be used in history courses, including potential weaknesses. He also gives a list of popular works of counterfactual/alternative history, which includes textbooks, novels, films, television series, a videogame and Cowley's *What If*, the texts of which Roberts labels "essays". He gives a step-by-step model on using counterfactual / alternative history in class, from introducing the topic to creating counterfactual questions, a map of an alternative world, and various learning methods. He concludes by encouraging more teachers to use counterfactual history as students enjoy it and it deepens their historical understanding. (2011, 118–122)

WALDENEGG 2011

We mentioned the context of this chapter – counterfactuality in a wider scope – in our introduction. Waldenegg begins by pointing out that while there have been theoretical undertakings of counterfactual history, many create historical what-if scenarios, focusing on "inevitable results" or "consequences" (quotation marks by Waldenegg). He goes on to critique

some authors for exaggerations and being too self-confident. Like us, he comments upon concepts such as “eminent historians” and narratives of serious scholarship having been used in an attempt bring the genre credibility by other means. (2011, 130–131). After providing some examples of the genre, Waldenegg moves on discuss the concept of counterfactual history, in which plausibility and likelihood are at the core (2011, 134–137).

Waldenegg questions the condition for counterfactual history that contemporaries must have – based on primary sources – thought about a certain possibility of action, because source materials only reveal that much of a given historical situation. Further, dominant theories and explanations become “obsolete” over time, and once marginalised views may become dominant. Waldenegg finds a number of forms in historiographic counterfactuals, which he presents as the following opposites (quotation marks by Waldenegg): “direct”/“explicit”–“indirect”/“implicit”; “unspecified”–“detailed”; “cautious”–“strong”; “temporal range”–“substantive range”; “pluri-causal”–“mono-causal”. He concludes by stating that many works combine these and, interestingly, that these are not binary categories. Waldenegg “contends” that historians should “grapple” with counterfactual histories, even if they involve more “perils than pleasures”.) (2011, 139–149)

NOLAN 2011

Philosopher Daniel Nolan (2011) argues that there are “at least eight good reasons practicing historians should concern themselves with counterfactual claims”. What is more, “four of these reasons do not even require that we are able to tell which historical counterfactuals are true and which are false.” (2011, abstract). Nolan states that he had three reasons for writing the article in the first place: his article presents a more comprehensive list than previous authors; and his arguments are more nuanced than other writers’; he stresses that “a number of reasons for historians to concerned with counterfactuals are largely independent of which counterfactuals are true, or correct”. (2011, 318–319)

Nolan sets up his list with two points. 1.“Reasons to use counterfactuals independent of truth”: potential for expanding one’s historical imagination; thinking about hypothetical cases might give ideas to apply elsewhere; and clarifying positions and illuminating assumptions; counteracting hindsight bias; gaining understanding of historical subjects’ counterfactual beliefs. 2011, 321–323). 2. “Using true counterfactuals”: worries about an ability to evaluate counterfactuals must be tackled by relaying on the supposition that counterfactuals “are in good shape epistemically,

metaphysically and semantically"; counterfactuals are especially relevant in the context of causation; "while causal reasoning in history remains a matter of art, the fact that we go naturally from counterfactual questions to causal questions and back, even if these transitions are non-deductive, ought to be treated with respect". Counterfactuals are also important for historical explaining. (2011, 324–329)

Nolan's list of eight points is as follows ("The final four presuppose that we can, with some reliability, sort the correct counterfactuals from the incorrect ones, but the first four do not even suppose that."): 1. "Mind expanding" (considering counterfactuals can invigorate the historical imagination and suggest new, non-counterfactual hypotheses for investigation); 2. Bringing out disagreement (revealing underlying assumptions); 3. Mitigating hindsight bias and increasing appreciation of historical contingency; 4. Understanding from the inside (historical actors' worrying counterfactual matters); 5. The value of counterfactuals in their own right; 6. Causation (counterfactuals an important part of causation); 7. Explanation (some explanations of particularly valuable sorts line up with counterfactual dependence of the explanadum on the explanans); 8. Informing value judgements (counterfactual information is relevant to assessments of responsibility, of the legitimacy of pride or regret, and of praise or blame). (2011, 333–334)

SINGLES 2011 & 2013

English Studies scholar Kathleen Singles' review article on counterfactual history in literature (2011) offers an overview on published works – several the same as in this article – while making points and observations on the genre, with criticism in a similar manner to Lebow 2000 discussed above. For Singles, theoretical writing on the genre has been characterised by "a lack of ambition", "seldom going beyond arguments about terminology and categorization in order to investigate critically and systematically *what is there*" (Singles 2011, 182). She also notes that non-English scholarship – of which a list of works is provided and discussed by Singles – has typically been omitted from the discussion. Singles' focus is on reviewing Andreas Martin Widmann's *Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung. Untersuchungen an Romanen von Günter Grass, Thomas Pynchon, Thomas Brussig, Michael Kleeberg, Philip Roth und Christoph Ransmayr* (2009)[5].

Interestingly, the title of Singles' 2013 book *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity* points to a playful character in what she terms alternate history. This appears to stem

from two basic “observations”: first, alternate history “deals with history”; second, it is “by definition not history writing” (Singles 2013, 20). As in her 2011 (2011, 182) text, Singles (2013, 14–16) writes about “pursuing a poetics of alternate history”. The fact that there is discord among scholars even on the name of the genre, means that one should be established because the genre has become so popular. Again (as in her 2011 article), Singles engages in a detailed and critical discussion on an impressive number of previous works on alternate history.

Finally, Singles argues that alternate history may be contextualised in the postmodern, not “historiographic metafiction” as she sees the majority of studies as having done. Alternate histories“reflect the postmodern tension between artificiality and authenticity, but they do not deny the existence of a real past, nor do they deny the validity of a normalized narrative of the real past”. What is more, Singles concludes that alternate histories do not challenge historiography and mainstream notions of history, quite the contrary: “they conservatively support the normalized narrative of the real past”. (Singles 2013, 7)

SEPPÄLÄ 2012 & 2018

Social scientist and historian Päivi Seppälä’s MA thesis on counterfactuals and causal explanation in historiography (2012) is a highly detailed, 100-page study on the subject. Seppälä begins by introducing the basic setting concerning historians’ stance on use of counterfactuals: the “protagonists” and the “antagonists” of counterfactualism and discusses the basic polarised arguments of the sides. She divides the antagonistic arguments into four categories: “metaphysical” (e.g. ontologies of possible worlds), “semantic” (e.g. conditions are too vague), “epistemological” (e.g. evidence does not support counterfactual inferences) and arguments “based on disciplinary identity” (e.g. factual = history, counterfactual = anti-history). (2012, 5–15)

Based on Nolan (2011) discussed above, Seppälä (2012) lists eight protagonists’ reasons for using counterfactuals as well discusses “a mysterious link between causal explanatory claims and counterfactual claims”. Overall, causation is a key concept for Seppälä, as is the contrastive counterfactual theory of causal explanation. She examines the interventionist methodology for counterfactual interferences in detail, with helpful equations and graphics, including problems of complexity and modularity, as well as the problem of unknown common causes.

Seppälä’s 2018 chapter discusses “explaining in historiography” through the above-mentioned contrastive counterfactual theory of causal explanation. She argues that with the addition of the

idea of “causal mechanisms”, the theory serves as a natural frame for understanding historical reasoning through the questions “what”, “how” and “why”. (2018, 199 – 205) This logically leads to asking “what if”, which means entering the sphere of counterfactualism. After introducing the main arguments against (“how can one make conclusions from what did not happen”) and for (“counterfactual conclusions are conceptually connected to making causal conclusions”), Seppälä states that the contrastive counterfactual theory of causal explanation supports the pro-counterfactualists’ view. She highlights that explicit use of counterfactuals is the only way to present research problems to probe the inevitable and coincidental in a given historical moment or event (206–208).

EVANS 2014

Historian Richard J. Evans’ *Altered Pasts* (2014) is one of the very few books on counterfactual history. Curiously, he calls “this short book” “an essay” on the subject (2014, xv). Evans divides his subject (and book) into four chapters, “wishful thinking”, “virtual history”, “future fictions” and “possible worlds”. The first chapter provides the reader with a very useful historical look at known counterfactuals through the centuries, stating that political motives and thinking have inspired most of them. He also discusses Squire (1932), describing him as “a somewhat blimpish figure” who was hostile to literary criticism and was sympathetic to the British Union of Fascists, as well as commenting on the essays in Squire’s book. In the same context, we learn that by “wishful thinking” Evans suggests that counterfactuals stem from nostalgia – or regret – towards the past. (2014, 9–11). Overall, Evans’ main criticism is that most authors who create alternative histories do not describe or contemplate what consequences their scenarios would have had in the greater picture. Evans also discusses Demandt’s 1984 book, and while he is mainly critical, he also credits Demandt for “introducing a note of German seriousness into the subject”. (2014, 21–22)

In the chapter “Virtual History”, apparently named after Ferguson’s book (1997), Evans gives professional historians writing counterfactuals credit for taking their job (and themselves) “very seriously”. For him, said historians justify their counterfactual work by declaring that they seek to “restore free will and contingency to history and to reenthrone the individual actor in a history too often studied in terms of impersonal forces”. (2014, 31–32) Evans moves on to discuss various works since the 1990s, namely following Ferguson’s volume, and also Marx’s and Marxism’s positions and legacies concerning historiography, and in particular as targets of counterfactualists’

criticisms at deterministic visions of history, which Evans sees as politically motivated (we will return to this in the context of Jeremy Black's 2015 book).

As its title suggests, the chapter "Future Fictions" focuses on counterfactual fiction. The discussion revolves mainly around speculative futures on Nazi Germany and World War Two, which is to be expected as these are commonly acknowledged as by far the most popular topics of the genre. Of scholars, Rosenfeld's work (see above) is referenced here. Despite Evans giving historians some credit, as noted above, for seriousness, "[…] counterfactual history essentially belongs in the same world as these other, more obviously fictional works of the imagination, some of which have a much longer track record and came into fashion long before counterfactual histories became commonplace" (2014, 91)

The final chapter, "Possible Worlds", discusses the question of *possibility* (italics by Evans) in counterfactuals. "True counterfactual scenarios, whether historical or fictional, always involve drawing historical consequences, often far-reaching in nature, from altered historical causes. A great deal of the time, what this produces is "banal in the extreme", Evans writes (2014, 94–95). Using historian Jeremy Black's book (2008[6]) as an example, he argues that not all historians succeed in creating counterfactuals as counterfactuals; they are mere "possibilities" that things might have turned out differently. (Ibid.) Another term Evans uses here for what he sees as not 'proper' counterfactuals is "parallel history", referring to popular historian Dominic Sandbrook's 2010–2011 essays as an example (2014, 98–101).

Evans summarises his thoughts as follows, "Frivolity and whimsicality are two of the main reasons why alternative histories have not been taken seriously by historians, even by some of those who have advanced them. Historians have always considered it their first task to find out what did happen, not to imagine what might have happened, and while the former task poses challenges of varying severity, the latter is on the face of it quite impossible, for history depends crucially on rules of evidence, and in the latter case there is little or no evidence to which those rules can be applied".

MALCOLM 2014

In his chapter in an edited volume on World War One, literature scholar David Malcolm (2014) provides an overview of what, to him, is a surprisingly scarce topic concerning the conflict, that of allohistorical fiction. He provides a list of such works, highlighting that Alexander Demandt, whose

book (1984) is discussed above, has written more than one allohistorical text on the war (Malcolm 2014, 180, 183), as well as mentioning that two texts of the Squire-edited volume (1932) appear to have been written "with an avoidance of that war in mind". Malcolm concludes that, for example, Robert Cowley's and Niall Ferguson's allohistorical writings have shown that the period 1914–1918 can be imagined "in fruitful ways". (2014, 183–185).

As for general discussion on academic writings on allohistory and allohistorical fiction (the difference is that the first-mentioned are written by historians, the second by fiction writers – though sometimes the "border between the two is blurred"), Malcolm lists a variety of names of the genre: virtual history, counter-factual history, alternative history, *Uchronie* (uchronia), *Allotopie* (allotopy), *Gegengeschichte*, *historia ficcíon*, and parahistory. For him, the genre characteristically concerns itself with a scenario in which "a key moment of conjunction of events is assumed to turn out differently from the documented record. [...] Such texts (historical of fictional) develop the implications of such a proposition." (2014, 171–173)

HUIJGEN & HOLTHUIS 2014

Historian and educationalist Tim Huijgen and pedagogist Paul Holthuis (2014) are perhaps least equivocal concerning the potential and benefits of the genre, as they "argue for the use of Counterfactual Historical Reasoning (CHR) in history education" (abstract). They are also one of the few to compare historical choice-making and subsequent consequences to everyday life. Interestingly, they also argue rather categorically that for historians, "it is unnatural to see the present as anything other than the only possible outcome of historical events" (2014, 103). As the citation above reveals, the authors have come up with what appears to be their own formulation of "*what if history*, *alternative history* and *virtual history*" (2014, 104) [italics by the authors], "Counterfactual Historical Reasoning".

This is based, quite logically, on Historical Reasoning, on which Huijgen and Holthuis provide a very useful diagram (2014, 105). According to the authors (2014, 106), applying "CHR" enables students to become more aware that historical events are results of choices made by many people, and making different choices would have led to different outcomes. Further, the authors state that CHR can also make students "more aware that the past [sic – rather than *history*] as it appears to us is in fact no more than a historian's construction" [...] based on the scarce remaining clues". As a

conclusion, Huijgen and Holthuis (2014, 108) state that for them, “CHR is highly suitable to stimulating students’ critical and creative thinking, as well as their historical thinking and reasoning. They can uncover and undermine assumptions, expand their imagination, argue and reason from a historical context, ask historical questions and analyse sources.”

LEVY 2015

Political scientist Jack S. Levy (2015, 379) notes that “historians have invoked counterfactuals ever since Herodotus argued that if the Athenians had not defeated the much stronger Persian forces in the Battle of Salamis (480 BCE), ‘Hellas would have been conquered by the Persians’”. Levy goes on to state that – as this article aims to demonstrate – “historians have been quite divided, however, to the analytic utility of counterfactuals” (ibid.). Looking at earlier criticisms of the history genre, he highlights that counterfactuals have been seen as too arbitrary in selecting starting points for scenarios, resulting in “counterfactuals of convenience” [quotation marks by Levy]. (Ibid.) However, in addition to critical commentaries, Levy also discusses arguments which have been made in favour of the mode, the strongest of which is by political scientist Bruce Bueno de Mesquita: “we cannot understand what happened in reality without understanding what did not happen but might have happened under other circumstances” (2015, 380).

Levy moves on to differentiating between the main types of counterfactuals. First, there is a distinction between, on the one hand, the methodological, epistemological or evaluative use and on the other hand, the descriptive analysis of counterfactuals. The first mentioned is about evaluating the utility, the second about how people actually use them. The second major distinction is between “plausible” (“minimal rewrite” / idiographic/historical) and “miracle” (“no constraints on key variables” / nomothetic or generalising) counterfactuals. (2015, 381–383)

Levy’s own key point of interest is applying counterfactual analysis in helping in validating causal inferences in historical analysis. He points out that almost all causal statements “imply some kind of counterfactual”. He demonstrates how this works in equations. (2015, 384–385) In an analysis of causal inferences, a counterfactual analysis serves as a tool, not as a stand-alone method, as Levy highlights. This means that for each historical case, “counterfactual analysis needs to be combined with process tracing”, and there should be, if possible, a comparative method as well. In addition, “if another historical case closely resembles the parallel world generated by a minimal-rewrite counterfactual in this case, it should be employed”. (2015, 385–386) Finally, criteria for evaluation

include “clarity”, “the minimal-rewrite rule”, “cotenability”, “consistency with well-established theoretical generalizations”, “historical accuracy”, “temporal proximity”, “redirecting counterfactuals” and “comparative counterfactual analysis” (2015, 388–400).

SUNSTEIN 2015

The title of legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein’s article, *Historical Explanations Always Involve Counterfactual History* (2015), highlights the author’s argument, on which he elaborates as follows: “To offer an explanation of what happened, historians have to identify causes, and whenever they identify causes, they immediately conjure up a counterfactual history, a parallel world. No one doubts there is a great deal of distance between science fiction novelists and the world’s great historians, but along an important dimension, they are playing the same game” (2015, abstract). “What does it mean to say that one thing, or one event, ‘caused’ another”, Sunstein asks, pointing to the question of causation’s role in historiography (2015, 1).

Sunstein’s article comments richly upon Richard Evans’ book “Altered Pasts” discussed above. His conclusion is that Evans “does not appear to like counterfactual history to any degree”. (2015, 2) For Sunstein, Evans argumentation is for the most part “sensible, wise, and convincing”, but he also has a fundamental objection to Evans’ “ultimate conclusion”: “For those who seek to venture historical explanations, including Evans himself, counterfactual history is inevitable, because any causal claim is an exercise of counterfactual history. Historians are pervasively counterfactualists.” Finally, Sunstein admits that he is a science fiction fan and a teacher of law; the last mentioned (also) has “an extensive literature on the topic of causation and hence on possible worlds”. Is history different from law, Sunstein asks, and answers himself “It might be, if the historian is simply describing what happened [as facts without causality]” (2015, 2–3)

BLACK 2015

The title of historian Jeremy Black’s book is *Other Pasts, Different Presents, Alternative Futures* (2015), which points to the idea of how the three temporal dimensions are intertwined in historical thinking (see 2015, 13), and also to how a historian’s background and orientation to the past influences, for example, how s/he regards counterfactuals. This shows in Black’s countering of Evans’ criticism of his earlier work [2008] – the discussion is on politics. Both Evans and Black appear to agree that counterfactuals are far more favoured among conservative analyses than elsewhere. Black juxtaposes counterfactuals with what he calls historical “determinism”. He also

contextualises the debate to a British context: “This point can be taken further by noting that the established Left– Right dichotomies do not apply in the same fashion to counterfactuals in all countries.” (2015, 11, 13, 21, 188)

Black’s book is one of the strongest in promoting the value of counterfactuals: “A crucial value of counterfactualism is that it returns us to the particular setting of uncertainty in which decisions are actually confronted, made, and implemented. […] Counterfactualism— conjecturing on what did not happen in order to understand what did, or, more precisely, the use of conditional assertions based on what is known not to have occurred— thus entails, or should entail, the disciplines of scholarship (2015, 1)”. Black highlights that for him, counterfactualism is a tool, “rather than a position or a school of thought” (2015, 3). He provides the reader with plentiful of examples from politics to society, as well from scholarship.

Black discusses the useability of counterfactuals in contexts of various types of history and admits that, for example, in the case of religious history, it is not a relevant, or even acceptable, method. One of the main reasons for this is that counterfactuals in general often heighten the role of free will as well as that of chance. (2015, 42, 61–65) Black argues that in history, “the question “What if?” is very heuristic and should remain in dialogue with “Why?” and “How?” Counterfactuals, moreover, must be included in “Why?” and “How?” explanations if these explanations are to be true to their historical moments.” (2015, 18) Concluding, Black makes points in order to argue for the validity of counterfactualism. “Firstly, it helps return us to the uncertainties and contingencies of the world as experienced by contemporaries, and of the events we study. Second, counterfactualism thereby indicates the fallacy of drawing lessons from the past [….] instead, there is no firm past from which to dictate to the future”. His third argument is: “the questions “How?” and “Why?” should be in dialogue with “What if?” if these explanations are to be true to their historical moments. Aside from returning us to the possibilities latent in both “How?” and ‘Why?” this dialogue, more specifically, also enables us to focus on political traditions as, in practice, an accretion or deliberate consequence of choices made from among contingencies.” (2015, 199–202)

Finally, “counterfactualism offers a variety of different advantages for academics: principally as an ancillary scholarly tool of analysis; as a valuable teaching method, used to indicate the complexities of past situations and choices; and as a more disciplined version of a widespread public need to appropriate and reflect on the past. Dealing, as it does, with what did not happen, counterfactualism cannot, of course, equate with scholarship that seeks to recover what did, but it

is mistaken to go on to argue that counterfactualism has no value, and indeed cannot help in this recovery; it is also wrong to presume that established scholarly practices are without serious problems." What all this means that for Black, "counterfactualism is central to the process of clarifying, and thus assessing, not only the options of the past but also the way in which choices and changes had particular consequences." (2015,204)

LÄHTEENMÄKI 2016

In the title of his chapter on counterfactual history, philosopher of history Ilkka Lähteenmäki asks whether the genre is "a possibility, phenomenon or heresy". He begins by noting that the genre has shown a notable rise in popularity since the 1990s, then moves into listing some key works. Lähteenmäki highlights that our times have phenomena, such as the explosion of information technology on one hand and intellectual currents such as postcolonialism on the other, with their emphasis on alternative, "other" perspectives may well have inspired counter-historical theorisations.

Lähteenmäki moves on to discuss counterfactual history's relationship with the problem of historical causation, highlighting military history as a popular genre for counter-historical ponderings on causation. Drawing on Kaye (2010, see above), Lähteenmäki discusses the usefulness of counterfactualism as a tool for analysing causations. He also points out historical narration in general typically features implicit counterfactuals: as a historian is narrating a chain of events, the style of narration must appear open-ended for the reader, and, simultaneously – seemingly – for the historian as well.

Lähteenmäki highlights the distinction between counterfactual thinking (a heuristic model) and counterfactuals as "desired history" (such as in the Soviet Union), noting the value of the first-mentioned. He then moves on to discuss how champions of counterfactual history are deconstructing historical determinism (which Lähteenmäki sees an umbrella concept for teleology, socioeconomic factors dictating political events, and general laws steering history).

Drawing on Black (2015, see above) Lähteenmäki contextualises counterfactualism in a wider scepticism towards the traditional historical method. Counterfactualism represents modern historiograhy in polyphonic interpretation, and it offers a tool for highlighting the most important factors for a historical event or phenomenon. Using a notable number of texts also presented in this article for richly-detailed discussions, Lähteenmäki highlights the general issue of implausibility

and the possibility of politically-motivated historiography (mentioning the Evans–Black dispute we discuss above) as two key issues in the genre. His conclusion on counterfactual history is that a historical analysis only using counterfactual scenarios will not guarantee a plausible result, and thus is not sufficent for a study's methodology. It can, however, aid in mapping ideas and assumptions which otherwise might be overlooked.

GALLAGHER 2018

Historian and literary scholar Catherine Gallagher's book (2018) discusses "counterfactual imagination in history and fiction". Half of the volume focuses on Nazi Germany invading Britain and "Nazi Britain", which makes it, as far as we know, the most extensive work on a topic which remains the most popular counterfactual, historical or fictional. Overall, Gallagher's study "explores why and how we conduct these counterfactual thought experiments" and "when […] did this mode of speculation start and what forms has it taken in previous centuries and our own?" Finally, she also assesses "What uses does it have, and what contexts stimulate its growth?" (2018, 1–2)

Gallagher divides the texts she analyses into three categories. First, "counterfactual histories" and "analytical works prominently featuring counterfactual speculations", which have "generally analytical rather than narrative quality". These texts also have a "tendency to indicate multiple possibilities that went unrealised rather than to trace out single historical alternative trajectories in detail. (2018, 3) Gallagher discusses the history of this genre "from Leibniz to Clausewitz", in other words concentrating on earlier thinkers more than most texts reviewed in this article do.

The second category is "alternate history", texts which describe "one continuous sequence of departures from the historical record, thereby inventing a long counterfactual narrative with a correspondingly divergent fictional world, while drawing the dramatis personae exclusively from the actual historical record" (ibid.) Finally, there is the "alternate-history novel", which invents both alternative-historical narratives and fictional characters. Gallagher summarises by saying, "Combining with various novelistic generic forms, these fictions allow for the illusion of a more complete alternative reality, presenting in detail the social, cultural, technological, psychological, and emotional totalities that result from alternations". (Ibid.)

WENDELL 2020

Historian Joakim Wendell's article (2020) is on how upper secondary school students (age 16 to 17 years) used counterfactual reasoning in a task given to them concerning historical reasoning. The task required explaining "the causal importance of a historical actor for a historical event" (2020, abstract). Wendell introduces the reader to the basic setting of historians either dismissing counterfactualism or seeing it as a valuable historical tool. Wendell's stance is the latter, and according to him, history education has been "cautiously optimistic". The challenge, for the teacher, is "a lack of concepts or criteria for determining whether counterfactual arguments made by students can be understood as more or less qualified in relation to historical explanation". This was the basis for Wendell's research questions. (2020, 51)

Wendell highlights the question of "manipulation" in relation to counterfactuals. There are two main elements which can be subjects to manipulation: structural factors and historical actors. The first mentioned "entails a change in a condition influencing the studied event […]", while manipulating a historical actor "changes something" about the actor in question – and removal is also a form of manipulation. Wendell's study focuses on these questions: "what is being manipulated and whether the manipulation allows for the possibility of an alternative outcome". However, these "are not inherently linked to any form of qualification, since there is no a priori reason for a manipulation of actors to be more qualified than a manipulation of structures." Wendell, however, provides a set of values for evaluating counterfactuals which correlate the said difficulty of qualification. These are "plausibility", "context sensitivity" and "support by comparison and/or generalization". (2020, 52–54)

Wendell then breaks down his own study (on Nazi Germany). As a result, 114 out of 139 students' texts contained at least one counterfactual statement. Of the remaining 25, three demonstrated "advanced explanatory reasoning" without the help of counterfactuals, while the rest "struggled with adequately responding" to the task, because they just listed certain facts or evaluated differing interpretations through consequences. (2020, 56–57) Wendell's conclusion is that student reasoning becomes more qualified when they focus on structural factors, or include actors as well, or make comparisons between alternatives. He points out that the quality of the responses which did not involve counterfactuals are the clearest indicator of the value of counterfactual thinking. (2020, abstract, 63)

PENCHEV 2021

Philosopher Vasil Penchev compares modal history to counterfactual history. For him, "modal history is probable, and its probability is *subjective*" (2021, abstract). In fact, he lists reasons why he regards history in general as not an objective science, and suggests a modal approach to highlight this matter: "modal history doubles history just as the recorded history of historiography does it", Penchev argues, and states this is a necessary "condition of historical objectivity, including one's subjectivity: whether actors' *ex-ante* or historians' *post factum*". This double objectivity forms a hermeneutic cycle. (2012, abstract)

For Penchev, counterfactual history can be considered as history in the "conditional mood", and if history in general cannot be regarded as an objective science, then counterfactual history is closer to literature. Penchev contrasts counterfactual history to what he understands as "alternative history". The latter is "real history", such as "the history of China observed from Europe" – the observer's external viewpoint makes it counterfactual history. (2021, 1–2) From here, Penchev moves on to discuss phenomenological concepts of history.

VIRMAJOKI 2024

For political scientist and philosopher Veli Virmajoki (2024) the interesting matter involving counterfactuals in historiography concerns token events: particular occurrences, conditions, patterns, and so on. Virmajoki's task is to examine "how counterfactuals function is historiography" and "how we can reason about counterfactuals in a controlled manner". His overarching argument is that (i) "because historical explanations require counterfactual thinking, (ii) because this explanatory function can be defined through an interventionist account of explanation, and (iii) because interventionism can also clarify many issues related to counterfactual reasoning beyond explanation, (iv) an interventionist understanding of counterfactuals should become the starting point. (2024, 2–3)

For Virmajoki, counterfactuals serve important functions. The *practical* function is that they "provide insights that are significant to our self-understanding or even moral issues", while the *epistemological* function "relates to their ability to provide insights that are relevant to our historical understanding and knowledge" [italics by Virmajoki]. This leads to "(i) providing insights on the actual course of history, (ii) providing insights on contingency, (iii) providing explanatory understanding". Function (iii) enables historical counterfactuals to satisfy functions (i) and (ii). (2024, 7)

Virmajoki moves on to highlight two questions concerning historical counterfactuals: "how should we understand the change required by the antecedents?" and "how can we track what would have happened after the antecedent?", commenting that the first mentioned has been discussed more but the latter is actually more interesting (2024, 14). He discusses tracking counterfactual scenarios and how they show that all historiography requires generalisations. Virmajoki concludes as follows: "While counterfactual reasoning is difficult and there are several places for disagreement in the process, the reasoning does not differ fundamentally from the more familiar types of historiography" (2024, 25).

PART TWO

Overview of British invasion scare fiction [7]

Invasion fiction has been written about many countries for approximately a hundred and fifty years,[8] with the seminal work of British invasion fiction often considered to be *The Battle of Dorking* by George Tomkyns Chesney in 1871. Who wrote these works, who read them and why were they written? A brief overview here will serve to pick out a few themes that unite or divide them. War fears, popularity as entertainment and the increase in creative fiction relating to new and imagined technology conspired with the desire of military officers to improve their country's armed forces on the one hand and the desire of editors and publishers to make a profit on the other. We shall concentrate on the period 1871 to 1978. Clearly, not all publications can be considered even within this restricted time period as there is an enormous number, but key works and others of special interest will be noted.

A number of forces came together in the late 19th century to promote these speculative works of fiction. Magazines were sold and read in enormous numbers, and the serialisation of stories in these was common – Charles Dickens's *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836–1837) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1851–1852) are famous examples, and *A Scandal in Bohemia* by Arthur Conan Doyle was the first of 56 Sherlock Holmes stories to appear in the Strand Magazine when it was published in 1891. At this time, "it became a matter of course for magazines to offer fictional narratives alongside non-fiction essays, reports of proceedings, political commentary, recipes, sheet music, social news, and a plethora of other material". (The Periodical Market and Victorian Short Fiction, no year) We cover fictional narratives, non-fiction essays and political commentary and note the close and changing relationship between these in this overview

– how invasion fiction, especially British invasion fiction, moves from its roots in fiction-as-warning to warning-fiction-as-entertainment. The hallmarks of this change are the presence and then increasing absence of an initial essential factual basis in current reality[9] and a strong focus on storyline for recreation and enjoyment.

The Battle of Dorking by George Tomkyns Chesney can be seen as the original seed for the enormous crop of invasion literature that flourished from its publication until the outbreak of WWI – and which has continued until the present day. That said, as Matin (2011, 388) points out, "there had earlier been abortive forays into the invasion-scare genre," referring specifically to the short story *"Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before." A History of the Sudden and Terrible Invasion of England by the French, in the Month of May, 1852* by an anonymous author. He could equally well have referred to Louis-Napoleon Geoffrey-Chateau's *Napoléon et la Conquête du Monde: Histoire de la monarchie universalle*, published in 1836 (Geoffrey-Chateau 1836). Indeed, the 19th century had been a period of satirical prints,[10] serialisations of texts, short stories and pamphleteering, and the concept of an *invasion scare*, as they were often termed, had already become established. There is even a claim to be the earliest of all that could be made by Francis Cheynell's *Aulicus his dream, of the Kings sudden comming to London* from 1644, during the English Civil War.[11] Nonetheless, *The Battle of Dorking* marked a watershed.

This short story, initially published as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine*, was intended as a warning concerning the vulnerability of England (to be understood as the UK as a whole) and caused a considerable stir amongst the military and politicians (Matin 2011, 385). It was also exceedingly popular amongst the public at large, said to have been "without a doubt one of the most heavily read and discussed works of the Victorian era." (Matin 2011, 389) Whilst intended by its author as a warning to politicians and the people alike, it was certainly read widely and was doubtless enjoyed in much the same way as any thriller of today. The novel provoked numerous responses and counterblasts, but, most importantly for our purposes, through its success it also prepared the ground for an entire genre of invasion fiction. Since its publication, there has been an enormous number of short stories, novels, films and plays on this subject, some intended as serious warning fiction – desiring to evoke a response from politicians or the military – some intended to be consumed 'merely' as entertainment, and doubtless many others which may have had a warning in the intent of the author(s) but served very well served as entertainment by publishers eager to expand their sales.

As technological advances disrupted the old order and excited the minds of authors and the public alike, writers and publishers were swift to capitalise upon this new market opening up that combined science fiction with invasion themes. *The Angel of the Revolution: A Tale of the Coming Terror* by George Griffith appeared in 1893 and the celebrated *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells that appeared in 1897 were successful enough that Wells also published *The War in the Air* in 1908. These mark the drift from politically- and militarily-inspired writings towards consumption as entertainment – after all, when it comes to science fiction, it is unclear what action the contemporary military or politicians could be expected to take against the prospect of death rays and other unknown technology, but they can earn the author (and publisher) a fair income as entertainment.

Novels as warnings were not discarded, however, and they continued to be published: *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service* by Erskine Childers appeared in 1903 and was swiftly followed by *The Invasion of 1910* in 1906 by William Le Queux. The latter was initially serialised in the *Daily Mail* but was subsequently published in book form. That it was intended as a warning is clear enough as Field Marshal Earl Roberts, who felt strongly that Germany would be England's future foe, provided considerable help to Le Queux in composing the work.[12] However, it is equally clear that the publisher, the Daily Mail, worked to maximise its sales. As C. D. Eby points out, "editors of the *Daily Mail* at first rejected the route he prescribed for the German juggernaut" as the villages mentioned were too small to sell sufficient copies of the newspaper; fortunately, "the author obligingly diverted his invading hordes to pass through larger towns in order to boost circulation figures." (Eby 1988, 33)

This was a mass market readership and emphasises the increasing role being played by entertainment. This was only one of the ways in which the publisher sought to promote the work, however. To encourage sales, "Londoners were astonished by the appearance of men walking the streets wearing Prussian helmets and sandwichboards which announced the daily progress of the Germans."[13] Apparently, the public were shocked by people in the uniforms of the enemy, a very similar reaction to that evinced by Kevin Brownlow's use of German uniforms and equipment during his filming of *It Happened Here* (see below) many years later in 1964. The success of his story encouraged Le Queux to write *Spies of the Kaiser* in 1909 – a publication where entertainment served as warning since, as Nicholas Hiley points out in his introduction to the 1996

reprinting of *Spies of the Kaiser*, the Secret Service Bureau (later MI5) itself owed its creation partly to William Le Queux and his fantasies of German spy activity in England.[14]

Works written for entertainment naturally lent themselves to a wider audience, and for many writers this was a major consideration for financial reasons. Regarding *Spies of the Kaiser*, "It made a small fortune for Le Queux; there were translations into twenty-seven languages, and over one million copies of the book edition were sold." (Clarke1978, 406) This movement towards entertainment led sometimes to bombast. *The Swoop of the Vulture* by James Blyth in 1909 was seen at least by one contemporary reviewer as lacking in style: *"the author writes at a white-heat, which, while it gives undeniable power to his work, disfigures it oftentimes with signs of haste, and carries him into reckless irresponsibility" and that it "makes him careless in style, and rushes him headlong into involved and seemingly interminable sentences."*[15] The same reviewer had already commented that "*the publication of books such as this, of which both Britain and Germany are at the present time suffering an infestation is wholly to be regretted and deplored."* It seems clear that, for some at least, the market was becoming saturated.

As a result, the publication of *The Swoop!, or How Clarence Saved England* later in 1909 by P. G. Wodehouse was a clear parody of Blyth – signalled especially clearly by the title. Invasion literature as genuine warning literature was in steep decline, and its omnipresence alongside its questionable quality marked it out for ridicule. Despite this, it seems that warning invasion literature was not entirely replaced. For example, in 1913 *When William Came: A Story of London under the Hohenzollerns* was published by Saki (the pseudonym of Hector Hugh Munro) and can be seen as a warning regarding the need for compulsory military service or, as Satoru Fukamachi argues in *When William Came: A Prophetic Propaganda War*, as an "attempt to portray a fictional Germany's policy, not to tell readers how to prepare against military force, but how to be prepared for their propaganda." (Fukamachi 2021) Even this must be tempered by the fact that Munro appeared to be in need of a bestseller for financial reasons. (Byrne 2007*,* 120) Entertainment and sales trumps all.

This was just as true in the years approaching the Second World War. Famously, Churchill was always short of money, and as a result he wrote and read political speeches for profit, but he, too, was not above writing alternative history – his essay *If Lee Had not Won the Battle of Gettysburg* was published in 1932 in *If it Had Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History.* This was an interesting book, not least because it includes essays by such big names

(alongside Churchill, one can find Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and other authors and politicians) but also for how the status of the authors conflicts with the second part of its title – 'Lapses into Imaginary History'. This certainly does not give the impression that this kind of alternative historical literature was highly regarded, even if one could hope that the use of 'lapses' here was a little tongue-in-cheek. Although Churchill's essay is not invasion literature per se (the result of the plot is that WWI does *not* in fact take place), the attraction of writing speculative works was clear. When Churchill *did* write warning literature (Arms and the Covenant, 1938), it was a political treatise and in no way fiction.

The 1920s had seen a proliferation of novels that took invasion literature strongly in the direction of science fiction. The irrepressible Le Queux published *The Terror of the Air* in 1920, Ivan Petrushevich *The Flying Submarine* in 1922, Edgar Rice Burroughs *The Moon Men* in 1925 and Floyd Gibbons *The Red Napoleon* in 1929. These all took modern technology and extrapolated it into the future without genuinely positing an imminent invasion threat – though they were all more or less explicitly anti-communist in nature. As the 1930s progressed, the gradual building threat of Nazi Germany inspired at least one more notable traditional warning novel, *Swastika Night* by Katharine Burdekin in (1937). In her work, Japan and Germany are victorious – leaving England defeated and under German control.

The outbreak of WWII reduced the publication and consumption of invasion literature of every kind, presumably due to the potential for the real thing, but this was also doubtless exacerbated by the paper rationing that began in 1940. One notable work from this time period, however, is *I, James Blunt* (1942) by H. V. Morton, an English journalist. This novella depicted the Germanisation of a conquered Britain, envisioning the subjugation of its people militarily, politically and ideologically. Morton made no money as such from the story as he was working for the government – it was commissioned by the Ministry of Information, a body that also employed other famous writers, such as Graham Greene and Malcolm Muggeridge, to produce booklets and other publications for propaganda reasons during the war. Given the date of publication, it is not warning invasion fiction in the classic sense, pushing a somnolent nation to rouse itself before it is assaulted, but a warning in the sense of the potential cost of failure to defend a nation already at war.

The post-War period saw an enormous increase in invasion works that took an alternative history perspective – heavily focusing on the possibility of the Second World War ending in a Nazi victory.

Not all of the artistic work of this kind was literature per se; there were plays and films with these themes, too. As early as 1947, the Noël Coward stage play *Peace in Our Time* appeared in a London still scarred by the war. It set its action in the bar of a pub where local drinkers are revealed to have very different reactions to the German occupation, from supporters of the resistance to outright collaboration. The play was only a moderate success and was perhaps not well-suited to an audience seeking relief from the stress and depression that the war had brought. If it was a warning, it was one after the fact; if it was entertainment, it was insufficiently entertaining.

In 1962, American author Philip K. Dick released his influential *The Man in the High Castle*, a book that was enormously important for the future of alternative history. In the introduction to the Folio Society edition of the novel 2015, Ursula K. Le Guin wrote that it ”may be the first, big lasting contribution science fiction made to American literature.”[16] The story proposes a victory by the Axis powers and Imperial Japan that results in the carving up of the United States into spheres of influence. The plot has several layers to it and examines individuals' reactions to living under the new regimes. Dick's research into the Nazi themes was sufficiently intense as to prevent him ever progressing with a sequel, saying, "I had to read what those guys wrote in their private journals in order to write *The Man in the High Castle*. That's also why I've never written a sequel to it; it's too horrible, too awful."[17] Invasion literature can be a warning or for entertainment, and it may be anchored in the near future or involve futuristic technology, but it always has the capacity to deal with very serious – even horrific – subject matter.

The Man in the High Castle was filmed as a television series shown between 2015 and 2019. The imagery used was visually very true to Nazi and authoritarian style. One aspect that especially drew attention – and criticism – was its use of Nazi and Japanese symbols. In order to promote the series, a New York City subway shuttle was painted with Axis-themed images:

The flags featured on the subway shuttle ads did not include actual swastikas or rising suns, but were instead flags from the TV series designed to deliberately evoke the symbols of an imagined Nazi and Japanese occupation of a defeated America. While the flags were based on the standards of the Axis forces, their designs became something more abstract—and more troubling.[18]

However, even if Nazism being victorious in general, or more commonly, is very often an American theme, it was imagined in Britain both before World War Two and after. Examples include Den Leighton's novel *SS-GB* (1978) and the BBC's television series *An Englishman's Castle* (1978). The

first-mentioned succeeded in “dragging the fascist leader out of the gutter and putting him back into the mainstream of recent British history,” whilst the other two fictional works had the same basic setting of Nazi Germany having invaded and beaten Britain.

All this very much connects with how the Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo film *It Happened Here* was received when it was filmed in 1964. The plot proposed a successful Nazi invasion and occupation of Britain, which was not in itself an original premise; what made it stand out was its focus on the psychology of occupation, the employment of genuine right-wing activists speaking about their beliefs and its use of authentic uniforms and equipment. Among other symbols is a Nazi eagle with a St. George cross that appears on a supposed newsreel. This authenticity was intended by Brownlow and his co-director Andrew Mollo to imbue the film with a sense of realism, to shake the audience into realising what the right-wing really believed, and certainly forms a part of the warning style of invasion fiction. (See also Mähkä & Tringham 2024)

Nonetheless, the importance of such invasion fiction in alternative history literature was certainly in decline in comparison with its role as sheer entertainment. In 1978, Len Deighton published his novel *SS-GB* about the Nazi occupation of Britain that followed an early German victory. Interestingly, Deighton had mentioned *I, James Blunt* in a letter to a bookseller, demonstrating the importance of early warning works such as Morton’s in driving later entertainment.[19] Certainly it seems likely that other works similar to Deighton’s found it easier to find a publisher after the success of *SS-GB*, such as *Kenneth Macksey’s Invasion: The Alternative History of the German Invasion of England, July 1940*,[20] which appeared in 1980. Similarly, perhaps inspired by the filming and success of the series *The Man in the High Castle* in North America, a British drama series was produced based upon Deighton’s novel in 2017. It appears clear that the appetite for invasion fiction has not only changed from texts with sober (or overly excitable) warning intent but has expanded in terms of numbers, and in doing so has itself invaded and occupied many new genres: from the earliest 19th century novellas and novels, through 20th century plays and films to 21st century television series available on demand.

Conclusion

In this review article we have compiled what we see as a representative set of texts concerning counterfactual history. Our aim was not to attempt a critical synthesis on the matter but rather introduce each author’s main arguments and stance on the subject. The main conclusions are:

most authors have a positive, but nonetheless frequently critical, perspective. At the extremes, some regard the genre as purely entertainment, “a parlour game”, as E.H. Carr famously dismissed it (see above); others see it as an essential, obligatory method in understanding what happened. We also noticed that in general, there is relatively little commentary on other authors’ works in the texts we covered. Some texts are commented upon quite often (Ferguson being one good example), some strikingly little (Demandt’s pioneering book especially).

As for the British invasion scare fiction, it is a very notable historical genre. We could have analysed all British-originated fiction on what indeed seems to be the most popular historical setting *overall* in speculative fiction, World War Two, and in the case of Britain, invasion and occupation by Nazi Germany, but we chose to show that invasion scare literature has a strong tradition. It is fitting that some popular 2010s productions (some curiously made during the “Brexit”-era) are remakes of the World War Two / Nazi-genre although it is hard to believe that the producers are playing on the idea that Nazism will once again take over Germany and this time, they will succeed. It is the theme of being conquered as an idea that must be one imaginary context.

Finally, as Alexander Demandt (1993 [1984], 159–160) put it: “History that happens is just as astonishing as that which never happens.” Quite. However, we hope to have made a useful “database” for anyone contemplating whether to start asking counterfactual question about history and wondering who else has done the same – and written about it – before.

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All links verified 27.11.2024.

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Notes

[1] The book is available online, open access, at the Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/dli.ernet.532973/page/171/mode/2up

[2] We would like to thank the two scholars who reviewed our text for their excellent and valuable feedback. Because of the article’s unusual form, both rejected the manuscript as a peer-reviewed review article. For this reason, the article was published as a non-peer-reviewed review article.

[3] Typically because they were not in journals subscribed to by our university’s library.

[4] See http://www.uchronia.net/intro.html

[5] The book is not included in this article for linguistic reasons – our German is not good enough!

[6] Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain a copy, though we do cover Black’s 2015 book on essentially on the same subject, alternative history, in this article.

[7] Timeline of featured stories: https://www.theriddleofthesands.com/listing-of-featured-stories/

[8] The varied nations involved can be seen in, for example, E. A. Driant's *La Guerre de Demain* ("The War of Tomorrow") from 1888 about a French war with Germany and *La Guerre fatale: France-Angleterre* (The Fatal War: France-England) about a French war with the UK, *The Stricken Nation* by Henry Grattan Donnelly from 1890 involving a British invasion of the USA, and *Kaitō Bōken Kitan: Kaitei Gunkan* ("The Undersea Warship") by Shunrō Oshikawa from 1900 about Japanese submariners fighting off imperial opponents such as Russia, China and the USA.

[9] As Clarke (1978, 33) wrote, "The alarm bells ring in vain in future-war fiction, if the projected action is not seen to follow directly from the dangers or the opportunities that have always shaped contemporary thinking about the future of a nation or of the whole world".

[10] A prime example being the satirical prints of J. Gillray, one of his best-known being *French Invasion or Buonaparte Landing in Great Britain* from 1803.

[11] Cheynell, Francis. 1644. *Aulicus his dream, of the Kings sudden comming to London*. In the digital collection *Early English Books Online 2.* https://name.umdl.umich.edu/B08742.0001.001. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14106/B08742.

[12] James, David. 1954. The Life of Lord Roberts. London: Hollis & Carter, 424

[13] Ibid.

[14] Nicholas Hiley's introduction to the 1996 reprint of *Spies of the Kaiser*, xviii

[15] Review from New Zealand Evening Post, Volume LXXVII, Issue 150, 26 June 1909, 19. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19090626.2.123

[16] Cited in: Ursula K. Le Guin. 2019. *Words Are My Matter: Writings on Life and Books.* Mariner Books: Boston, 121.

[17] Lord RC. 2006. *Pink Beam: A Philip K. Dick Companion*, 106. Dave Hyde Ganymedean Slime Mold Pubs.

[18] Andrew Frost. "Bad Future: Real-Time Alternate History." Studies in the Fantastic, Number 5, Winter 2017/Spring 2018, 26–46. University of Tampa Press.

[19] Blog post "HV Morton the science-fiction writer" October 16, 2021. https://hvmorton.com/tag/i-james-blunt/ The HV Morton Society.

[20] Kenneth, John Macksey. 1980. *Invasion: The Alternative History of the German Invasion of England, July 1940,* Greenhill Books.