

ContactZone

Peer-reviewed International E-Journal
Call for Papers

Alternate Histories

edited by Carlo Pagetti and Tomasz Skocki

Since the publication of Philip K. Dick's seminal novel *The Man in the High Castle* in 1962, alternate history (or alternative history, or allohistory, in Italian ucronia, or storia controfattuale) has been one of the most interesting and engaging subgenres within the science fiction spectrum. However, alternate history is at least as old as science fiction itself, as many alternative visions of historical events and/or speculative studies on possible historical scenarios have been published since at least the nineteenth century. Moreover, thanks to more recent works such as Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Enrico Brizzi's *Epoepa fantastorica italiana*, or Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, alternate history has often crossed the boundaries between speculative fiction and the literary mainstream. In the last decade both *The Man in the High Castle* and *The Plot Against America* have been adapted for television with great success, once again proving the popularity of the genre.

Perhaps more than any other subgenre of speculative fiction, alternate history gives writers the tools to explore the complexity of our world, allowing them to re-configure many of the canonical assumptions about the past and its relationship with the present, national identity and culture, politics, ideology, and social issues. Ideological presuppositions play a crucial role in counter-factual imagination: it is one thing to imagine a nightmarish Nazi rule in Europe, another to fantasize on a utopian New Order born out of Hitler's victory. Gender issues are also increasingly relevant: alternate histories are also written by female authors, such as Katharine Burdekin in the 1930s or, more recently, Sandra Newman (*The Heavens*).

On the whole, while the most popular works within this genre are concerned with relatively recent historical events, such as World War II, the rise of totalitarian regimes or the assassination of John F. Kennedy, other works, e.g. Robert Silverberg's *Roma Eterna* or Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt*, deal with a far more distant past, further broadening the scope of alt-historical speculation. We should not forget that fantasy literature has also explored the implications of an alternative historical path, as it happens in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* fictional world.

The purpose of this issue of *ContactZone* is to examine the many different facets of alternate history in the 20th and 21st centuries, spanning from classic science fiction authors such as Fritz Leiber or Isaac Asimov and genre-bending visionaries like Philip K. Dick or Guido Morselli to contemporary classics like Philip Roth, feminist writers such as Sandra Newman, and bestselling authors such as Robert Harris or Stephen King, as well as films, television series, graphic novels and other forms of popular culture. The choice is not limited to authors writing in English, and contributions on writers and works from other linguistic and cultural contexts will be welcome.

Possible areas of inquiry may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Alternate histories in science fiction.
- Alternate histories in mainstream fiction.
- Classic vs. contemporary alternate histories.
- Alternate histories in fantasy.
- Alternate histories in comic books, graphic novels, and videogames.
- Alternate histories in film and television.
- Alternate history and the historical novel.
- Alternate history and war.

- Alternate history and time travel. The butterfly effect.
- The socio-political, ideological, and gender implications of alternate history.
- Dictatorships and totalitarianism in alt-historical works.
- World building in alt-historical works.
- Art, literature, pop culture and sports in alt-historical worlds.
- Alternate geographies and maps.
- Alternate universes and multiverses.
- Feminist alternate histories.
- Alternate histories in different countries and languages.
- Alternate history and Postmodernism.

Bibliographical references

- Hellekson, Karen 2001. *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*. Kent State University Press.
- Hellekson, Karen 2009. "Alternate History". In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Morgan, Glyn, Palmer-Patel C. 2019. *Sideways in Time: Critical Essays on Alternate History Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press

Abstract submission:

Please send a 300-word abstract and a 100-word bio-note to the following email: t.skocki@uw.edu.pl and aisff.starfiction@gmail.com

Language of the paper: English or Italian

Important dates:

Deadline for abstract submission: **30 September 2024**

Notification of acceptance: **10 October 2024**

Submission of paper: **30 February 2025**

Publication: **May 2025**

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