

Trajectories of Fascism: the fiction of Nazi triumph

Anyone attempting to study fascism must deal with a significant handicap: there simply isn't much of it to study. Even the historical regimes that would seem to be obvious candidates for the category, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, have prompted no small degree of controversy about the extent to which each merits the label.¹ This is not to suggest that there is little to say about it: on the contrary, volumes upon volumes have been written exploring in minute detail countless aspects of fascism, from the psychology of its adherents to the occupation of France to Nazi aesthetics to the Holocaust. So when I say that fascism is a limited topic, I refer not to its depth, which is endless, but rather its breadth. As a comparison, consider communism. A wide variety of communist regimes have flourished in various parts of the world, however briefly: from the Stalinist USSR to Maoist China, from thoroughly industrialized East Germany to third-world Nicaragua and Angola, from European Poland to Asian Vietnam to Latin American Cuba to African Ethiopia. We have watched it change and develop in one nation, the Soviet Union, over the course of nearly a century: from an infant regime under Lenin to a brutal totalitarian state under Stalin to a well-established superpower under Khrushchev and Brezhnev to the final days of glasnost and perestroika under Gorbachev. We have seen communism established by revolution, as in Russia, and imposed from without, as in Eastern Europe; we have seen communist regimes overthrown, as in Chile, seen them crumble, as in Europe, and seen them defiantly cling to life, as in North Korea. But fascism? When we speak of fascism we nearly always find ourselves stuck with a grand total of two societies: one in south central Europe that lasted just over twenty years, and one in north central Europe that barely lasted twelve. This isn't all that much to work with.

This problematizes any attempt to cobble together any sort of definition or theory of fascism in the general case. The paucity of examples makes it rather difficult

¹ Indeed, Robert Paxton suggests in the first paragraph of "The Uses of Fascism" (*The New York Review of Books*, November 28, 1996) that distinguishing Italian Fascism from German Nazism was the *focus* of work on fascism from the end of the 1970s until quite recently.

to back up one's claims. To contend, for instance, that fascist parties only reach power by the invitation of established conservative forces and fail to have an impact in countries where conservative elements are already strong² is not to make a false claim by any means, but rather one whose usefulness is questionable. It's a bit like saying that Nirvana's studio albums make heavy use of distortion — it may be true, but there are so few of them (three, all told) that the value this observation might have in predicting what a fourth album might have sounded like may not be negligible but is certainly subject to question. To make generalizations about fascism from our observation of historical fascist societies is to extrapolate from a handful of data points, and an awfully narrow range of data points at that. We have never seen a regime acknowledged by most scholars as fascist outside of Europe. We have never seen a regime acknowledged by most scholars as fascist since 1945. We have certainly never seen a fascist regime win a world war. What might a fascist society that did fit into one or more of these categories look like? We can only imagine.

Fortunately, imagination is the proverbial coin of the realm where fiction is concerned. While neither historical fascist regime survived the Second World War, the Axis has triumphed time and time again in the pages of what is usually called science fiction but is gradually winning converts to the more accurate label of “speculative fiction.”³ Literally scores of writers have penned tales of a Nazi victory and the subsequent history of the Third Reich; my aim in this paper is to explore both the commonalities and the controversies to be found in this sub-genre, and discover what the different trajectories are telling us. But first, a few words about alternate history itself would seem to be in order.

² As Paxton implies on pages 50-1 of “The Uses of Fascism.”

³ More accurate because most works in the genre derive not from an exploration of scientific phenomena but from speculation about what the future — or alternate presents, or pasts — might look like. UMI Research Press's series of critical works on the subject is in fact called “Studies in Speculative Fiction.”

Alternate history

The tradition of alternate worlds as a device in SF stretches back to at least Guy Dent's 1926 novel *Emperor of the If*.⁴ This book was more concerned with exhibiting the possibilities of alternate history than developing any parallel world in particular; before long, works began appearing concentrating on a single scenario. Perhaps the most well-respected of these to appear before Philip K. Dick 1962 *The Man in the High Castle* was Ward Moore's 1953 *Bring the Jubilee*, a novel about a Confederate victory in the American Civil War that Dick was known to have read and enjoyed.⁵ But *The Man in the High Castle*, a novel set in a world where the Germans and Japanese have won WWII and partitioned the United States between them, was the landmark work in the genre, a book with which Dick, in Kim Stanley Robinson's words, "helped to draw an entire genre up with him."⁶ It won speculative fiction's premier honor, the Hugo Award, made Dick's career (he no longer had to work in his wife's jewelry business to support himself⁷), and established alternate history as a thriving sub-genre; the parallel worlds concept has since even been parlayed into a reasonably successful television series, Fox's *Sliders*. Alternate history has also extended tendrils outside of SF, finding itself included in thrillers like Len Deighton's 1979 *SS-GB* (set in a Nazi-occupied Britain but, being more concerned with the military details of ridding the island of the Germans than in depicting the German regime, and being set in 1941 rather than after a Nazi victory in WWII, not dealt with here), in mainstream fiction like Robert Harris's 1992 *Fatherland* (in which Germany has conquered Europe but the United States has won the war in the Pacific, leading to a cold war between the two powers), and even in more literary efforts like Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, a tale of a world in which the Reformation failed — and in which a character named Philip K. Dick writes a book

⁴ This is the work Gregory Benford selects as the originary work of alternate history in the preface to *Hitler Victorious*; others have argued for Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy-Château's 1836 *Napoléon et la conquête du monde* and even Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (<http://www.skatecity.com/ah>, 09 December 1996.) Rigorous standards or Anglophone bias? You be the judge.

⁵ Gregg Rickman, *To the High Castle: Philip K. Dick: A Life 1928-1962* (Long Beach, CA: Fragments West / The Valentine Press, 1989), 373.

⁶ Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 39.

⁷ Rickman, 370.

called *The Man in the High Castle* about a world in which the Protestants rather than the Catholics had achieved world domination.⁸

Writers of alternate history can fall anywhere on the ideological spectrum — CM Kornbluth’s “Two Dooms,” a short story about a German and Japanese victory in WWII, is quite virulently racist in its own right⁹ while Dick’s Japanese San Francisco is superior to the American version in some ways.¹⁰ But there is also an ideology or perhaps an ontology inherent in the notion of alternate history itself: as Kim Stanley Robinson (a Hugo-winner in his own right) puts it, “Although it may at first appear to be a mere frivolity, an alternative to our history made substantial in a work of fiction will remind us constantly that history is not inevitable, that it could have turned out differently than it actually did, if even a minor human act had been different. This theory of history is therefore decidedly not deterministic, and it assumes that history is, rather, a collection of persons with free will, some of whom are in strategically important positions.”¹¹ Alternate history implicitly critiques a view of history as rule-governed and essentially predictable: to take the present case as an example, they tacitly argue against the notion that fascism regimes *cannot* win a world war by presenting entirely plausible scenarios in which they do. They call attention to the fact that probability does not equal inevitability, that chance (a successful assassination attempt on Roosevelt in 1933, an unsuccessful one on Heydrich in 1942)¹² has as powerful a role in history as nature does. And the ways in which they vary with one another are just as important as those in which they vary with reality. What would a victorious Third Reich have looked like? The very presence of multiple credible yet significantly different models preempts anyone who might claim that fascism has an obvious trajectory: were it so obvious, we’d be able to tell at a glance which possible outcome was more “correctly” imagined. At the same time, what renders any given model of postwar fascism credible is the extent to which it is recognizable as a conceivable

⁸ For more on the Dick/Amis connection, see Rickman, 377.

⁹ Indeed, pages 41-3 are little more than an anti-Asian rant.

¹⁰ Kim Stanley Robinson writes: “As Darko Suvin has pointed out, [the sequence in *High Castle* in which a character experiences a glimpse of the true 1962 San Francisco] is in the great utopian tradition of treating the real world as a vision of hell. Acknowledging this, we also acknowledge that Dick’s Japanese San Francisco is at least in part a utopia.” Robinson, 44.

¹¹ Robinson, 41-2.

outgrowth of the prewar fascism with which we are familiar; the elements that we find over and over again with each story, those which make the imagined regime identifiably fascist, might thus constitute a sort of roundabout, inductive “minimal case” for fascism as a whole. Sifting through the various narratives to find the themes that recur time and time again would thus seem like a good way to start.

Bigness

The one detail of Harris’s *Fatherland* that reviewers can never seem to resist mentioning is the Great Hall of the Reich. The moment it appears, during a tour the protagonist is taking of Speer’s Berlin, it is easy to see why:

[The tour guide announces:] “The Great Hall of the Reich is the largest building in the world. It rises to a height of more than a quarter of a kilometer, and on certain days — observe today — the top of the dome is lost from view. The dome itself is one hundred forty meters in diameter, and St. Peter’s in Rome will fit into it sixteen times. [...] The Great Hall of the Reich is used only for the most solemn ceremonies of the German Reich and has a capacity of one hundred and eighty thousand people. One interesting and unforeseen phenomenon: the breath from this number of humans rises into the cupola and forms clouds, which condense and fall as light rain. The Great Hall is the only building in the world that generates its own climate...”¹³

This is hardly an isolated example of the obsession with scale evident in the imagined Nazi worlds of alternate history. Many of the architectural wonders we find are borrowed directly from Hitler and Speer’s own plans; hence we find their Arch of Triumph in *Fatherland*:

“Construction of the Arch of Triumph was commenced in 1946 and work was completed in time for the National Day of Reawakening in 1950. The inspiration for the design came from the Führer and is based upon original drawings made by him during the Years of Struggle. [...] The arch is constructed of granite and has a capacity of two million, three hundred and sixty-five thousand, six hundred and eighty-five cubic meters.” She sneezed. “The Arc de Triomphe in Paris will fit into it forty-nine times.”¹⁴

and again in Brad Linaweaver’s “Moon of Ice”:

¹² The turning points in *High Castle* and *Fatherland* respectively.

¹³ Robert Harris, *Fatherland* (New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1992), 28-9.

¹⁴ Harris, 24.

As we traveled under Speer's Arch of Triumph, I marveled for — I suppose — the hundredth time at his architectural genius. Germany would be paying for this city for the next fifty years, but it was worth it. Besides, we had to do something with all that Russian gold!¹⁵

Of course, scale is more than just a matter of really big buildings. Harris's Great Hall is a trifle compared to some of the audacious projects undertaken by Dick's Nazis in *The Man in the High Castle*: "Project Farmland ... Now *there* the Nazis had shown genius; the artist in them had truly emerged. The Mediterranean Sea bottled up, drained, made into tillable farmland, through the use of atomic power — what daring!" thinks one of the characters early on.¹⁶ But whenever this dubious achievement is mentioned, Dick always couples it with another: "That huge empty ruin ... Africa. For the ghosts of dead tribes. Wiped out to make a land of — what? Who knew? Maybe even the master architects in Berlin did not know. Bunch of automatons, building and toiling away. Building? Grinding down. Ogres out of a paleontology exhibit, at their task of making a cup from an enemy's skull..."¹⁷ Virtually every story in which the Nazis win WWII is a dystopia, of course, if only because no respectable publishing house releases neo-Nazi propaganda — but while many treat the Nazis' penchant for bigness as value-neutral, Dick supplies an implicit critique. The Nazis may have drawn up blueprints for magnificent halls and monuments, but what they built were death camps; and those who think on a grand scale have the capacity for evil on a grand scale. Dick suggests that a culture that values the small, such as Japan with its bonsai trees and *wabi* ("[t]he ability to find in simple objects a beauty beyond that of the elaborate or ornate"¹⁸), possesses an inherent safeguard against monumental crimes. "No Japs built ovens," says a character in the buffer zone between the Japanese and German portions of North America;¹⁹ another character in San Francisco reflects that the occupying Japanese

¹⁵ Brad Linaweaver, "Moon of Ice," *Hitler Victorious*, ed. by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 168.

¹⁶ Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 25.

¹⁷ Dick, 11.

¹⁸ Dick, 104.

¹⁹ Dick, 35.

“would no more set up gas ovens than they would melt their wives into sealing wax.”²⁰ It is a far cry from Kornbluth, whose Japanese and Germans were equally loathsome.

Harris supplies his own explicit interpretation of what the Nazi obsession with scale signifies: “Higher, longer, bigger, wider, more expensive ... even in victory, thought March [the protagonist], Germany has a parvenu’s inferiority complex. Nothing stands on its own. Everything has to be compared with what the foreigners have...”²¹ By these lights, the fascist compulsion to think big merits not fear so much as pity or perhaps contempt.

Technology

How does Nazi ambition translate into the world of technology in these stories? To a certain extent much as one might expect: Dick’s Nazis have reached Mars in 1962,²² and Sheila Finch’s “Reichs-Peace” has Hitler’s son exploring the moon.²³ The Germans of *The Man in the High Castle* travel around the world in rockets that can cover the distance from Stockholm to San Francisco in forty-five minutes.²⁴ Yet the technology available to the average individual, even one on the side of the victors, is curiously limited. Even in *The Man in the High Castle*, television is a rarity: “there was four hours of image broadcast during the day in Berlin. Someday there would be television stations in all the major European cities. And, by 1970, one would be built in New York.”²⁵ Plastic is produced only by a company called IG Farben and is thus extremely rare and prohibitively expensive.²⁶ But even this scenario gives the Nazis more credit for technical innovation than most. A pervasive trend in this sub-genre of fiction is an emphasis on the Nazi disdain for science.

Kornbluth’s Nazis, for instance, have reached the year 2100 without being able to develop an atomic bomb — the only use they can find for uranium is “coloring glass a

²⁰ Dick, 12.

²¹ Harris, 25.

²² Dick, 10.

²³ Sheila Finch, “Reichs-Peace,” *Hitler Victorious*, 222.

²⁴ Dick, 17.

²⁵ Dick, 76.

²⁶ Dick, 20.

pretty orange.”²⁷ Linaweaver’s believe that the Earth is hollow²⁸ and that the moon is made of ice.²⁹ Not a single one of these many permutations of the Third Reich has developed that staple of science fiction, the computer. These fictional Nazis are much more interested in magic.

Of the authors of these works, only David Brin actually goes so far as to posit a Third Reich whose experiments in necromancy are successful,³⁰ but many alternate Nazi regimes give it a try. Linaweaver’s SS evolves from a military outfit to an enclave of sorcerers;³¹ Finch’s Nazis murder Jews out of hatred, but Gypsies in an attempt to coerce them in revealing the secret of telepathy;³² German “science” is also primarily concerned with psychic powers in Tom Shippey’s “Enemy Transmissions.”³³ In “Two Dooms,” the anti-Nazi protagonist is able to use the Nazi obsession with magic to his advantage: just when he is about to be tortured for refusing to cooperate with the Nazis, he explains that “A spell was put on me by a satanic Jewish magician. It involved the ritual murder and desanguination of seven beautiful Nordic virgins.”³⁴ The Nazis are very understanding and agree that it would be unfair to blame him for his conduct under the circumstances — after all, this kind of thing could happen to anyone. And the Third Reich in Hilary Bailey’s “The Fall of Frenchy Steiner” actually bases its military strategy on a young German girl’s visionary dreams:

“I was the virgin who prophesied to Attila, I was thirteen years old and I lived like a ritual captive for four years, officiating at sacrifices and Teutonic saturnalia, watching goats have their throats cut with gold knives, seeing torchlight on the walls — all that. I went into a kind of mystic dream where I was an Aryan queen helping her nation to victory. And in my midnight conferences with the Leader I prophesied. I told him not to attack Russia — I know he would be defeated. I told him where to concentrate his forces to use them to their best effect. Oh, and much, much more...”³⁵

²⁷ CM Kornbluth, “Two Dooms,” *Hitler Victorious*, 30.

²⁸ Linaweaver, 215.

²⁹ Linaweaver, 184.

³⁰ David Brin, “Thor Meets Captain America,” *Hitler Victorious*, 131-57. In this story Nazi atrocities are sufficiently evil to power the black magic that revives the Aesir, or Nordic gods.

³¹ Linaweaver, 193.

³² Finch, 230.

³³ Tom Shippey, “Enemy Transmissions,” *Hitler Victorious*, 272.

³⁴ Kornbluth, 51.

³⁵ Hilary Bailey, “The Fall of Frenchy Steiner”, *Hitler Victorious*, 80.

It thus seems apparent that for many writers, one of the key defining elements of Nazism was its anti-modern pagan character. But those who emphasize the reactionary tendencies of fascism and those who depict futuristic technology alike agree on one thing: far more than magic, the Nazis were and would have continued to be monomaniacal about race.

Race

I will leave discussion of the actual Holocaust for the section on trajectory; right now I'm still exploring the way these writers diagnose fascism, so to speak, and it seems as though no alternate history of Nazism is complete without at least a passing reference to the way the overwrought racial distinctions of the period might have developed.³⁶ "Two Dooms" is a rather extreme case, with its Race Science Laboratory built into the Chicago Parteihof, taking up sixteen city blocks abutting Lake Michigan.³⁷ Here people are heard to make comments along the lines of "I'll wager we find you're a proto-Hamitoid hemi-Nordic of at least degree five"³⁸ and other jargon that would make even a hardcore theory buff blush. *Fatherland* is a milder case; here at least the divisions are more comprehensible:

Category One: Pure Nordic. Category Two: Predominantly Nordic or Phalic. Category Three: Harmonious Bastard with Slight Alpine Dinaric or Mediterranean Characteristics. These groups qualified for membership in the SS. The others could hold no public office ... Category Four: Bastard of Predominantly East Baltic or Alpine Origin. Category Five: Bastard of Extra-European Origin.³⁹

Fatherland is also quite conservative in its depiction of the race obsession in that it is set in 1964 with no technology to problematize race. Other stories have no such restraint; indeed, the one exception to the trend of low-tech Nazi regimes discussed earlier is the extent to which Germans use cosmetic surgery and genetic engineering to become

³⁶ The moments are frequently satirical in nature, though it seems to me that the derision the authors direct at Nazi racial classifications applies just as well to our society today — look at the bewildering array of boxes under "Race" on any government document, which manages to take up half the page yet still not offer a choice that matches the ethnic makeup of many of the people filling it out, such as me.

³⁷ Kornbluth, 48.

³⁸ Kornbluth, 51.

³⁹ Harris, 94.

“more Aryan.”⁴⁰ Linaweaver’s protagonist has the following exchange with his son, for instance:

I looked at him. He had blonde [sic] hair and blue eyes. The only trouble was that my son did not have blonde hair and blue eyes. Of course, I knew that the hair could be dyed, but somehow it looked quite authentic. [...]

“This is real blonde hair,” he said proudly. “And the eye color is real as well. I regret that I am not of the true genotype, any more than you are. I was given a hormone treatment to change the color of my hair. A special radiation treatment took care of the eyes.”⁴¹

Finch’s Nazis⁴² also are very interested in “the possibilities opened up by genetic engineering ... DNA, RNA, microbiology, and *literal* supermen”⁴³ explored by these stories. But, not surprisingly, it is Dick who has thought through the way such advances undermine the very concept of race.

The Germans of *The Man in the High Castle* are literal supermen to a limited extent — at any rate, they have better eyesight than anyone else, thanks to their superior diet and Vitamin A supplements⁴⁴ — and they have been more vicious to the Jews than any other Nazis in alternate-world fiction: not only have they exterminated all the Jews in the territory they hold, including America (where Jews traditionally survive in these works), they have even signed an extradition treaty with the only other superpower, Japan, declaring all Jews to be German citizens and thus subject to German law no matter where they live — so no place on (or off) Earth is safe to hide.⁴⁵ But in this particular brave new world, there is another possibility open to fugitive Jews. It is raised when a high-placed but unorthodox German official masquerading as a Swede in order to meet with the Japanese encounters a smug, self-satisfied Nazi businessman, Mr. Lotze by name, on a rocket to San Francisco. To knock the smugness out of him, he says:

“Mr. Lotze, I have never told anyone this. I am a Jew. [...] You would not have known, because I do not in any physical way appear Jewish; I have had my nose

⁴⁰ A commentary on the routine use of such techniques as liposuction and rhinoplasty in today’s society, perhaps? See the discussion on Warrick and Fassbinder in the last section of this paper for more thoughts along these lines.

⁴¹ Linaweaver, 188-9.

⁴² Finch, 230.

⁴³ Linaweaver, 174.

⁴⁴ Dick, 77.

⁴⁵ Dick, 196.

altered, my large greasy pores made smaller, my skin chemically lightened, the shape of my skull changed. In short, physically I cannot be detected. I can and have often walked in the highest circles of Nazi society. No one will ever discover me. [...] And there are other of us. Do you hear? We did not die. We still exist. We live on unseen. [...] The SD can go over my record. You can report me. But I have very high connections. Some of them are Aryan, some are other Jews in top positions in Berlin. Your report will be discounted, and then, presently, I will report you. [...] In fact, I do not like your looks, Mr. Lotze, so I think I will report you anyhow.”⁴⁶

If Aryans can make themselves more Aryan, Jews can too. The categories of *Fatherland* have been rendered fluid. Race is physical; the physique can be altered; a society based on race is a high castle in the air.

Harris himself is more prosaic in his commentary:

...racial fanatics were seldom the blue-eyed Aryan supermen — they, in the words of *Das Schwarzes Korps*, were “too inclined to take their membership in the Volk for granted.” Instead, the swampy frontiers of the German race were patrolled by those less confident of their bloodworthiness. Insecurity breeds good border guards.⁴⁷

It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that for all their posturing about the supremacy of the Nordic race, Germans are not Nordic. They are Teutonic, which is a sort of border zone between the Nordic and other Caucasian subraces. Harris may well have diagnosed a source of anti-Semitism in the German character, if indeed there is such a thing as a national character at all.

Sex

For all their preoccupation with the Nazis’ pagan mysticism and race obsession, the writers in this survey seem to share a remarkable lack of interest in Nazi sexuality. Or, rather, while the writers themselves may have given the matter some thought, it appears astonishingly infrequently as a theme. This is highlighted in the case of *Hitler Victorious*, in that eleven essentially sexless tales follow a short essay by Norman Spinrad (author of *The Iron Dream*, a remarkable alternate history in which Adolf Hitler becomes a science fiction writer, but which is inappropriate for inclusion here for the

⁴⁶ Dick, 42-3.

⁴⁷ Harris, 94-5.

simple reason that it isn't about a Nazi victory in WWII) in which the primary focus is in fact on the sexuality of the Third Reich:

Interestingly enough, both Christianity and Nazism suppress natural expressions of the sexual drive for the purpose of capturing this energy to serve their own ends. Christianity channels this bottled-up libidinal drive for orgasmic release into a focus on itself as the only path to true transcendent ecstasy. Nazism channels it into psycho-sexually charged fetishistic militarism and violence in the service of the expansionist state.

Thus the forthrightly phallic Nazi salute, the tight black uniforms of the SS, the silver death's heads, the twin lightning bolts, the barbarian torchlit splendor, the stirring martial music, the "SS Werewolf Division," the whole obsessive and twisted Satanism of the Nazi symbol systems, as the supermen in their chrome-and-black S&M gear thrust their right arms erect and, with assholes tight and fire gleaming in their eyes, march off to bugger the world.⁴⁸

While this is certainly a compelling interpretation of the historical Third Reich, to use this passage as an image for the regime presented in any of the stories in the volume that follows would make for a poor fit.

The same could be said for *Fatherland* and *The Man in the High Castle*. The latter is especially frustrating in this regard in that, like *Hitler Victorious*, it contains a commentary on Nazi sexuality, this time through the medium of a character's thoughts:

Their trouble, she decided, is with sex; they did something foul with it back in the 'thirties, and it had gotten worse. Hitler started it with his — what was she? His sister? Aunt? Niece? And his family was inbred already; his mother and father were cousins. They're all committing incest, going back to the original sin of lusting for their own mothers. That's why they, those elite SS fairies, have that angelic simper, that blond babylike innocence; they're saving themselves for Mama. Or for each other.⁴⁹

Dick diagnoses the Nazis quite differently from Spinrad, tracing their dysfunctional psychology back to incest rather than wild-eyed homosexual rapacity, but again, this model does not manifest itself in the way the Nazis are *portrayed* — it's simply commentary.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Norman Spinrad, "Introduction: Hitler Victorious," *Hitler Victorious*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Dick, 36.

⁵⁰ This category of contention seems singularly difficult to document: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, of course, but to prove that a given element does *not* appear in a text would seemingly require the entire text to be cited. This is hardly a workable solution.

As it turns out, the most interesting depiction of the quirks of Nazi sexuality appears in perhaps the least respectable of all the works included in this survey: *The Sound of His Horn*, a slim pulp SF novel from 1960 written by John W. Wall under the pseudonym “Sarban.” The premise of this novel (or, perhaps more accurately, novella) is that the Nazis, having no wars left to fight, have taken to dressing naked young women in elaborate headdresses to make them resemble birds or jungle cats, and hunting them as game.⁵¹ Once caught, the guests are given carving knives and the captured prey is served up on platters for their delectation.⁵² This is a game not of rape but of murder, another data point to support Klaus Theweleit’s observation that heterosexual rape didn’t seem to play a role in the Nazis’ psychological makeup, that “a onetime desire to love has mutated into a desire to kill.”⁵³ This may not be evident of keen psychological insight on Sarban’s part, however: the commentary supplied by his characters toward the end of the novel reads simply, “[the Nazis] understand nothing at all about girls.”⁵⁴

Trajectory

Thus far I have limited myself to discussing the way this particular community of writers *diagnoses* fascism, what they identify as making fascism fascist. But what makes this subgenre of fiction interesting isn’t the way it portrays fascism — if that were the case, it would have been just as well to choose historical fiction, or straight historical narrative, or even primary sources from the period in which fascism flourished. What makes this genre interesting is its willingness to imagine where Nazism would have led and put it on the record.

So what’s the consensus?

There is none. There’s actually a quite remarkable division.

The postwar Nazi regimes depicted in alternate history fiction generally fall into one of two camps; I believe it is fair to label these the mundane and the apocalyptic.

⁵¹ Sarban, *The Sound of His Horn* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1960), 69-70.

⁵² Sarban, 77-8.

⁵³ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. by Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 155.

This is more than a simple matter of placing each scenario somewhere on a spectrum of nightmarishness. The tenability of human life on a planet dominated by fascism is very much an open question. Would a victory in World War II have established Nazi Germany as a superpower not unlike the superpowers that did emerge from the conflict, the United States and the Soviet Union? Or would it have set off a chain reaction leading inevitably to the end of the species? Philip K. Dick seems to lean toward the latter opinion in *The Man in the High Castle*, while Robert Harris's *Fatherland* seems to hold the former outlook. It is this, the mundane model of a victorious Third Reich, that I will take up first.

Fatherland is far from alone in depicting a postwar Nazi Germany as little more than a colorful variation on the police state. Though it turns out to have roots in Teutonic mysticism, the Third Reich of “The Fall of Frenchy Steiner” bears a strong resemblance to communist Eastern Europe, with its shabbily dressed, underfed citizens stealthily trying to stay out of trouble in a world where “if something’s not forbidden, it’s compulsory”⁵⁵ — hardly a utopia, but closer to *1984* than to *The Man in the High Castle*. Other projected Nazi regimes are mellower still. Sheila Finch’s “Reichs-Peace” goes so far as to offer this astonishing development: “As early as 1946 Germany had begun to make its peace with the expatriated Jews, offering generous settlements and a public display of contrition.”⁵⁶ This is not a ruse: Finch’s Hitler receives treatment for bipolar disorder and becomes an authoritarian but sane world leader.⁵⁷ It is not a utopic scenario by any means, but the fact that it isn’t dystopic is itself startling.

Even the stories featuring more nightmarish Reichs often betray a confidence that a collapse is inevitable. In Linaweaver’s “Moon of Ice,” for instance, the hardline fascists are dismayed to find that moderate elements in the government have undermined the rigidity of Nazi policy:

“Rulings that came out of New Berlin were despicable, loosening up the censorship laws and not strictly reinforcing the racial standards. Do you know that a taint of Jewishness is considered to be sexually arousing in Germany’s more decadent cabarets of today? Even the euthanasia policy for old and unfit

⁵⁴ Sarban, 107.

⁵⁵ Bailey, 61.

⁵⁶ Finch, 224.

⁵⁷ Finch, 228.

citizens was never more than words on paper, after the Catholics and Lutherans interfered. The Party was corrupted from within. It let the dream die.”⁵⁸

Moreover, many authors are more than willing to submit that a protest movement could and would have sprung up within a victorious Germany. Linaweaver again:

Adolf Hitler achieved the exact opposite of all his long-term goals, and he did this by winning World War II. Economic reality subverted National Socialism. [...] A thriving black market ensured that all would benefit from the new plenty, and ideology be damned. [...] Today Germany is seeing a flowering of historical revisionists who are debunking the Hitler myth. They are showing his feet of clay. They are asking why Germany used a nuclear weapon against a civilian population, while President Dewey restricted his atomic bombs to Japanese military targets in the open sea. Even a thick-headed German may get the point after a while. The Reich’s youth protests against the treatment of Russians by Rosenberg’s Cultural bureaus, and they are no longer shot, no longer arrested ... and who knows but that they may accomplish something?⁵⁹

The protest motif carries over into other narratives as well. The British protagonist of *The Sound of His Horn* is pleased to learn from one of the “gamebirds” that youth protest movements are quietly beginning to make headway against the entrenched regime: “My job had been to fight Nazism in a man-of-war, but it was just as much a battle when she and her like fought it by perverting a slogan at a Student Rally.”⁶⁰ And then there is *Fatherland*.

Harris’s novel, running nearly four hundred pages rather than the twenty to fifty of most of the short stories discussed here, may well present the archetypal case of the mundane form of victorious Third Reichs. It too features a counterculture:

The male undergraduates, like this one, let their hair grow a few centimeters over their collars; some of the women wore jeans — God only know where they got them. White Rose, the student resistance movement that had flowered briefly in the 1940s until its leaders were executed, was suddenly alive again. [...] Members of White Rose grumbled about conscription, listened to banned music, circulated seditious magazines...⁶¹

The parallels to America in the 1960s (*Fatherland* is set in 1964) could hardly be more obvious. Which brings up a question I alluded to earlier: if the conventional wisdom is

⁵⁸ Linaweaver, 209.

⁵⁹ Linaweaver, 218.

⁶⁰ Sarban, 102.

⁶¹ Harris, 152-3.

correct in asserting that utopian literature (and, by extension, alternate world fiction) is primarily a form of commentary on the real world, is it then overly literal and misguided to try to discern a message about fascism per se? Is Harris talking about a potential 1964 or the actual 1992? What do we make of moments like the following:

In the West, twelve nations — Portugal, Spain, France, Ireland, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland — had been corralled by Germany, under the Treaty of Rome, into a European trading bloc. German was the official second language in all schools. People drove German cars, listened to German radios, watched German televisions, worked in German-owned factories, moaned about the behavior of German tourists in German-dominated holiday resorts, while German teams won every international sporting competition...⁶²

Is this meant to be a contrast to the Europe of today — or, substituting “Japanese” for “German,” contemporary America — or is Harris drawing our attention to the fact that there is no contrast? If Harris himself is to be believed, the answer is the latter: “There are things that the Germans would have achieved if they’d won in 1945 which have come true in 1992, in particular the economic domination, and so on. The collapse of Bolshevism. The strength of Germany in Eastern Europe. [...] One by one, Hitler’s war goals have been recognized. You can’t overlook the historic similarities.”⁶³

Such an attitude reflects the underlying assumption of all mundane scenarios of Nazi conquest: that a fascist superpower would be first and foremost a superpower, analogous to the USA or the USSR, subject to the same internal and external pressures, its fascist character little more than cultural decoration, something to add a few gruesome anecdotes to the history books but constrained to the paths demarcated in them. Mundane Reichs inevitably succumb to entropy — if not through the opposition of the populace, then through internal corruption, or, as in “Moon of Ice” and *Fatherland*, both. The plot of *Fatherland* hinges on the corruption of the Nazis: the protagonist stays a step ahead of the secret police thanks to favors from friends,⁶⁴ favors in exchange for promises of favors in return,⁶⁵ and outright bribery.⁶⁶ Harris is

⁶² Harris, 198.

⁶³ Quoted in Bardo Fassbender, “A Novel, Germany’s Past, and the Dilemmas of Civilised Germans,” *Contemporary Review* (Surrey, England: November 1994), 243.

⁶⁴ Harris, 241.

⁶⁵ Harris, 297.

convinced that a fundamental tenet of human nature is that people are more loyal to their friends and to themselves than to an ideology or a regime. Of course, such thinking either rejects or fails to take into account the fascist claim that it is creating a new kind of human nature.

This type of thinking also leads *Fatherland* to a conclusion that is either satisfying or nonsensical, depending on whether the reader in question shares Harris's apparent view of human nature. The plot of the novel, briefly, is that a mid-level police officer in the Reich goes on a routine homicide call, finds that the victim was at one point a high-ranking Nazi official, and when the inevitable cover-up begins, conducts his own investigation; what he eventually discovers is the Holocaust. The extermination of the Jews has been hidden from the populace — the public has been told that the Jews have been “driven east,” and no one ever mentions them. (This also means the end of overt anti-Semitic rhetoric, as railing against the Jews might prompt the German populace to wonder what actually happened to them.) When the Holocaust is exposed, Harris maintains, it spells the end for Nazi Germany as this alternate world knows it: “[F]ive years from now, or fifty years, this society will fall apart. You can't build on a mass grave.”⁶⁷ This, too, seems to fit in nicely with the mundane model of postwar Nazism — and simultaneously reveals the weakness of that model. For it assumes two things: one, that Germans *were* unaware of the death camps — a debatable assumption at best — and two, that people will rise in outrage against a nation founded on genocide. But there is real-world evidence that this is not the case: if it were, the United States of America would long have been overthrown by a populace outraged at the extermination of the indigenous peoples who previously inhabited the continent. But this act of large-scale genocide is hardly a secret: less than half a century ago, it was regularly celebrated in Westerns, both in the cinema and every day on television. For Harris to submit that the Nazi regime could not have propagandized the public into fierce nationalistic pride at its successful elimination of the Jews seems like supreme naïveté, and casts doubts upon the mundane model itself.

⁶⁶ Harris, 299.

⁶⁷ Harris, 329.

Which brings us to the apocalyptic model we find in Dick's *High Castle*. The Nazi society Dick presents is in no danger of being overthrown upon the discovery of the Holocaust; this is a society that has turned the African continent into a uninhabitable wasteland and gained nothing but approbation from its citizenry. These Nazis are not going to be redeemed by the triumph of their inner human nature: they *are* a new kind of people, and as the Japanese government analysts point out, "notice of resemblance to deterioration of affectivity in pathological schizophrenia should be made."⁶⁸ And this regime is not about to offer reparations as in "Reichs-Peace" or adopt a policy of détente as in *Fatherland*. Its foreign policy is simple: Dick's Reich plans "an enormous nuclear attack on the Home Islands, without advance warning of any kind."⁶⁹ There is no resistance movement whatsoever in the book. The only hope of staving off apocalypse is for the most malignant faction of the Nazi power structure, that headed by "Hitman" Heydrich, to seize power before the Goebbels faction consolidates its power and launches the attack. And Heydrich only opposes the attack because the mop-up operation would be conducted by Rosenberg, his bitter enemy.

This is not a generic superpower with an incidental swastika flag. Dick repeatedly stresses the incomprehensibility of the Nazi mindset, the degree to which it is utterly divorced from sane human thought: "We cannot enter the monstrous schizophrenic morass of Nazi internecine intrigue; our minds cannot adapt."⁷⁰ Later: "German totalitarian society resembles some faulty form of life, worse than natural thing. [...] Almost like decomposing nightmare parody of problems customarily faced in the course of existence."⁷¹

This may seem like nothing more than invective, but the urgency is palpable: Nazi Germany was not simply generic authoritarianism in fancy uniforms, but a cancer that would have consumed all life on earth. Am I being too literal in discerning this as the primary message of the novel? Many critics seem to think so. They draw their ammunition from the novel-within-the-novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*: this novel, read by many of the characters in *High Castle*, is about an alternate universe in which the

⁶⁸ Dick, 94.

⁶⁹ Dick, 188.

⁷⁰ Dick, 190-1.

Axis lost the war. At the end of the book, one character does an *I Ching* reading and is told by the oracle that the book is true: Germany and Japan *did* lose the war.⁷² What does this mean? Kim Stanley Robinson asserts that since *The Man in the High Castle* is a mirror of our world, it means that the alternate-history novel in *our* world, *High Castle* itself, is true. In short:

The Nazis won World War Two. That is to say, the spirit of fascism is still strong in the world... The international corporations that supported Hitler and survived the war are still powerful — more powerful than ever — as are the forces of racism, the practice of genocide, hyped-up nationalism in the service of military expansions, and massive disregard for the Earth and nature at large... The Allies “won” the war, then, but fascism prevailed.⁷³

Patricia Warrick agrees with this assessment:

In the world of *High Castle*, the Nazis really won the war, but in the science fiction world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (representing inner truth), they really lost it. If the reader moves back a step, he realizes that in the real world of human construct, the United States and its allies won the war, so the inner truth, contained in Dick’s science fiction, is that they really lost it. [...] The winner of any war is locked into the necessity of continuing to fight to maintain his superior power position. The effort eventually destroys him. On a moral level, he has already been destroyed because of the horrendous acts he committed to win. The winner paradoxically is the loser.⁷⁴

If Harris was talking about modern Europe and the world of today rather than Nazi Germany, can we not, along with Robinson and Warrick, say the same about Dick? It is possible. But the urgency in Dick’s voice belies more than an urge to call America on its faults. I think Dick really is talking about apocalypse, and the fact that Nazi Germany could have won WWII represents exactly how close we have come.

I have argued that to claim that the discovery of the Holocaust would have motivated Germans to overthrow the Third Reich is to hold to an altogether too optimistic view of human nature; many would counter that to take seriously the threat of self-inflicted extinction represents too pessimistic a view. I disagree. People commit suicide; so can societies, so can species. “Suppose eventually they, the Nazis, destroy it

⁷¹ Dick, 200.

⁷² Dick, 257.

⁷³ Robinson, 43.

⁷⁴ Patricia S. Warrick, *Mind in Motion: the Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 57.

all?” Dick writes. “Leave it a sterile ash? They could; they have the hydrogen bomb. And no doubt they would; their thinking tends toward that *Götterdämmerung*. They may well crave it, be actively seeking it, a final holocaust for everyone.”⁷⁵ The USA and USSR have had the hydrogen bomb for decades, an optimist might argue, and we’re all still here. True, I say, but not by necessity. The reason that apocalypse seems impossible to us is that had it happened, we would not be here to ponder just how possible it proved to be. Alternate history is a way of pondering the eventuality that did not happen. And of reminding us that evil doesn’t collapse on cue, that happy outcomes don’t just fall into our laps — we must work for them.

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⁷⁵ Dick, 243-4.

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