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## POST-MODERNISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

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### ABSTRACT

The emergence of post-modernism in the mid-20th century marked a seismic shift in historical knowledge, challenging long-held assumptions about the relationship between language, truth, and reality. This paper explores the profound impact of post-modernism on the discipline of history, focusing on its influence on the concept of alternate history. Post-modernist thought contends that language constructs our understanding of the world rather than merely representing reality, leading to the recognition that there is no single, objective truth in history. The paper delves into the critiques and alternative frameworks notable historians propose within this post-modernist framework. It begins by examining Alun Munslow's concept of "deconstructing history," which encourages historians to critically analyze historical narratives and acknowledge the subjectivity inherent in interpretation. Keith Jenkins's "own-sakism" is introduced as a response to the post-modernist critique of historical objectivity, advocating for acknowledging and embracing historians' subjectivity. The paper also explores Hayden White's "metahistory," which critiques the narrative structure of history and invites historians to be more self-conscious about narrative choices. It concludes by highlighting the enduring legacy of post-modernism in history, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity, transparency, and critical self-examination in the pursuit of historical knowledge. The paper contends that post-modernism has not only challenged historical objectivity but has also opened up new possibilities for a more inclusive and diverse historiography.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The realm of Indonesian historical discourse has experienced a profound transformation in recent years, marked by a captivating confluence of deconstruction history, alternate history, and the enduring influence of post-modernism (Hidayat, 2019; Purwanto, 2012; Soetomo, 2016). This confluence not only reshapes the landscape of Indonesian historical inquiry but also radiates its transformative influence across the broader discipline of history, challenging established paradigms and redefining the contours of historical understanding (Lemon, 2003).

At the heart of this evolving discourse lies the burgeoning prominence of alternate history within Indonesian academia. Alternate history, as a genre, transcends the traditional boundaries of historical methodologies (Hellekson, 2000; G. Rosenfeld, 2002; Schneider-Mayerson, 2009). It beckons scholars and historians to embark on intellectual odysseys that venture into the uncharted territories of the past (Ayers, 2002; G. D. Rosenfeld, 2005). It introduces an imaginative and speculative dimension into historical narratives, encouraging scholars to explore "what if" and "how if" scenarios that boldly deviate from established historical trajectories (G. Rosenfeld, 2002).

The incorporation of alternate history into Indonesian academic discourse represents a revolutionary departure from conventional historical scholarship. It catalyzes scholars to engage in creative envisioning, contemplating Indonesia's past devoid of the enduring shadows of Western colonization, considering the ramifications of British colonial rule, or speculating on the tantalizing prospect of the Ottoman Empire expanding its sphere of influence into the farthest reaches of Southeast Asia. These speculative inquiries infuse new vitality into the Indonesian historical narrative, prompting a profound reassessment of historical causality, the role of contingency, and the intricate interaction of factors that shape historical events.

While alternate history has found a prospect of intellectual ground within Indonesian academic circles, its influence radiates beyond national borders. This genre, when studied within the context of postmodernism's profound sway, emerges as a powerful challenge to conventional structures of historical understanding (Jenkins, 2003; Lemon, 2003). It confronts the linear narratives of history and asserts that the past is not a fixed, immutable narrative but a tapestry interwoven with countless possibilities.

Alternate history offers a distinctive vantage point for historians worldwide, beckoning them to embark on unconventional yet intellectually rigorous historical voyages (Singles, 2013). These explorations unveil fresh perspectives on the past and illuminate new avenues for historical inquiry. Furthermore, they compel scholars to reflect on the intricacies of historical causation (Rigby, 1995), the role of contingency (Sterelny, 2016), and the dynamic relation between contingent events, human agency, and the broader currents of history.

The intersection of alternate history and post-modernism takes on particular significance within the political landscape of history. History has often been wielded as an authoritative instrument to shape public opinion, with dominant political powers seeking to control and define the narrative

(Bain, 2006; Liñán, 2010). In this context, the emergence of skepticism rooted in post-modernism offers alternate avenues to explore narratives that challenge mainstream historical accounts often dominated by prevailing political authorities.

The critical examination of established historical narratives and the exploration of alternative historical scenarios become vital tools in challenging the authoritative discourse of the powerful. Alternate history, underpinned by post-modernist principles, enables scholars to question and deconstruct dominant historical narratives, offering counterfactual scenarios that unveil the multifaceted nature of historical truth and the role of power in shaping historical interpretations.

Alternate history thrives on imaginative exploration, encouraging scholars to contemplate the divergent historical outcomes that could have emerged from pivotal historical junctures (G. D. Rosenfeld, 2005; Schneider-Mayerson, 2009). It challenges the deterministic view of history and offers a platform to explore the myriad "what if" scenarios latent within historical events (G. Rosenfeld, 2002). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of alternate history within Indonesian historical discourse and its broader implications, it is essential to delve into the foundational principles of this genre.

In alternate history, established historical narratives are reimagined through counterfactual scenarios, resulting in narratives that boldly diverge from known historical paths (G. Rosenfeld, 2002; Singles, 2013). These speculative narratives serve as intellectual exercises that impel scholars to critically assess historical causality and the role of contingency in shaping historical trajectories (Munslow, 2018). Central to this evolving discourse lies the profound influence of post-modernism on historical scholarship. Post-modernism questions conventional assumptions about the relationship between language, truth, and reality. It posits that language actively constructs our understanding of the past, rather than serving as a passive mirror reflecting it. This recognition leads to the acknowledgment that there is no single, objective truth in history.

Understanding the interaction between post-modernism and alternate history is paramount for comprehending the nuances and complexities of this emerging discourse within the Indonesian historical context and the broader discipline of history. It invites historians to engage in a more reflexive and self-aware approach to historical discipline, recognizing that alternate history, like mainstream historical narratives, is a product of its cultural, social, and intellectual milieu (Bain, 2006). Post-modernism encourages historians to embrace subjectivity, deconstruct established historical narratives, and critically examine the sources and biases that shape historical accounts (Jenkins, 1997; White, 1980). This critical lens has far-reaching implications for the practice of alternate history, as it prompts scholars to recognize the constructed nature of historical narratives and consider the multiplicity of perspectives that influence historical interpretations.

## **II. METHODS**

In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between post-modernism, alternate history, and their impact on the field of history, a conscientious exploration of existing scholarly works is essential. This literature review serves as a vital component within the methods section of this article, laying the foundation for the research methodology employed in examining the interplay of these intellectual currents (Grant & Booth, 2009). The primary purpose of this literature review is to situate the present research within the broader academic landscape (Knopf, 2006). It accomplishes this by surveying and analyzing a diverse body of scholarly literature that addresses key aspects of post-modernism, alternate history, and their convergence. This review serves as both a compass and a sounding board, guiding the research methodology while fostering a dialogue with established academic discourse.

The scope of this literature review extends across interdisciplinary boundaries, encompassing works from history, philosophy, and literary studies. It discusses scholarly articles, books, essays, and theoretical treatises that investigate post-modernist thought, the evolution of historical methodologies, the emergence of alternate history as a genre, and the critical intersections between these domains. The literature review probes the foundational concepts of post-modernism as they relate to the discipline of history. It explores notions of subjectivity, the construction of historical narratives, and the rejection of singular, objective truths. Prominent thinkers such as Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1982), Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1993), and Hayden White (White, 1980) form the cornerstone of this exploration.

The literature review identifies key intersections between post-modernist thought and alternate history. In this regard, the literature review explores several notable historical frameworks inspired by post-modernism philosophy, such as Munslow's "deconstructing history (Munslow, 2006)," Keith Jenkins's "own-sakism," (Jenkins, 2003), and Hayden White's critique on historical narrative (White, 1980). From this point of view, it delves into scholarly discussions on how post-modernism has influenced the creation and interpretation of alternate histories. An examination of literature that investigates the potential of alternate history, informed by post-modernist principles, to challenge and deconstruct dominant historical narratives (Booth et al., 2009; Jenkins, 1997; Matthews, 2021; Wolfreys, 1998). This section discusses how alternate history can offer counter-narratives and perspectives that question established authoritative historical discourse.

The literature review not only informs the conceptual framework of this research but also guides the selection of research methods. It provides valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of existing approaches, highlighting gaps in the current scholarship that warrant further investigation. By engaging with diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks, this literature review sets the stage for a rigorous and multidimensional analysis of post-modernism, alternate history, and its implications for the field of history. As this article advances, the findings of this literature review will

be interwoven with empirical research and critical analysis to deepen our understanding of how these intellectual currents have shaped and continue to shape the discourse of history.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Basic Principles of Post-Modernism and Its Impact on History**

The emergence of post-modernism is a complex intellectual and cultural phenomenon that developed in the mid-20th century as a reaction against the dominant ideas and modes of thinking of the modernist period (Grenz, 1996). It represents a departure from the principles of modernism, which included a faith in progress, rationality, universal truths, and a belief in the ability of human reason to understand and control the world (Lemon, 2003). Post-modernism challenged these assumptions and introduced a more sceptical and fragmented view of reality. In addition, the post-modernism also shares some similarities with post-structuralism and sometimes they are interchangeable, both are distinct intellectual movements with their own characteristics which emerged in the latter half of the 20th century and share some philosophical foundations.

One of the most significant connections between post-modernism and post-structuralism is the concept of deconstruction, which was developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction challenges the idea of stable structures and fixed meanings in language and text (Derrida, 1993; Wolfreys, 1998). It questions the stability of meaning and emphasizes the role of language in shaping our understanding of reality. Derrida's deconstruction method became central to post-modernist thought, emphasizing the instability and indeterminacy of language and texts (Hassan, 1985). While post-modernism and post-structuralism share some philosophical ideas, such as the critique of stable meanings and the importance of language, they differ in their focus and application. Post-structuralism is a subset of post-modernist thought, with a more specialized emphasis on language, discourse, and power relations. Both movements have had a significant impact on various academic disciplines and have influenced contemporary cultural and intellectual discourse.

The emergence of postmodernism in the mid-20th century was a watershed moment in the development of the discipline of history. At its core, postmodernism posed a radical challenge to the established assumptions that had long underpinned historical practice (Hutcheon, 2003b; Lemon, n.d.; Munslow, 2006). It focused its critique on the intricate relationship between language, truth, and reality. Postmodernist thought contended that language is not a passive tool simply reflecting an objective reality; instead, it actively shapes and constructs our perception of the world. This insight, that there can be no single, objective truth about the world, has profound implications for the practice of history, demanding a thorough review of mainstream historical methodologies (Jenkins, 2003; Munslow, 2006; White, 1980). The extended impact of postmodernism on the history discipline has been profound and far-reaching. It has not only challenged the foundations of historical practice but has also opened up new avenues for understanding the past and its construction.

Moreover, postmodernism has had a transformative impact on the history discipline, challenging established assumptions and methodologies. It has opened up the discipline to a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the past (Lemon, n.d.), embracing the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and narratives that shape our historical knowledge (Hutcheon, 2003b; Matthews, 2021). In doing so, postmodernism has contributed to the creation of alternate histories that question conventional interpretations and offer new ways of thinking about the past (Rosenfeld, 2002).

Postmodernism challenges the notion of historical objectivity (Boldt, 2014; Lemon, n.d.; Munslow, 2006), asserting that historical narratives are not objective, neutral accounts of the past but are influenced by the perspectives and biases of historians themselves. This has led to a critical re-evaluation of traditional historical methodologies that claim to offer a single, objective truth.

## **2. Challenge on the Objectivity and Recognition of Subjectivity**

Postmodernism challenges the established notions of historical objectivity, leading to a fundamental reevaluation of long-held assumptions and practices in the field of history. It underscores the inherent subjectivity within historical interpretation, highlighting historians' active role in shaping historical knowledge through the influence of their socio-cultural contexts. This recognition of subjectivity has, in turn, prompted historians to adopt a more self-aware and reflexive approach to their work.

Postmodernism argues that language is not a transparent or neutral medium for representing reality. Instead, it contends that language actively constructs our understanding of reality. Language is shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts, and it carries with it inherent biases and limitations (Derrida, 1993, 2016; Foucault, 1982). Postmodernists assert that historians use language to create historical narratives (Munslow, 2018; White, 1980), and in doing so, they introduce subjectivity and interpretation into their accounts (Hutcheon, 2003b). Postmodernism highlights the subjectivity of historians themselves. Historians are not objective observers but are individuals situated within their own socio-cultural contexts, in this case their perspectives, biases, and worldviews inevitably influence their interpretations of historical events (Jenkins, 2009). Postmodernists argue that language is a crucial medium through which subjectivity is expressed and constructed. Language is not a neutral tool for conveying objective truths but is laden with cultural and historical meanings. Postmodernists engage in the deconstruction of language to reveal how it reflects and shapes subjectivity, making people aware of how language constructs reality.

Postmodernism, as a theoretical framework, places a strong emphasis on the contextual nature of knowledge. It asserts that knowledge is not a universal entity but is deeply embedded within specific socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts (Jenkins, 1997; Wolfreys, 1998). This perspective prompts scholars to investigate the production, dissemination, and interpretation of knowledge within diverse contexts, acknowledging that these contexts play a pivotal role in shaping the subjectivity of knowledge (Hassan, 1985; Hutcheon, 2003b). Moreover, postmodernism underscores

the significance of historical context and inherent bias in the construction of historical narratives (Hutcheon, 2003b). It contends that historians, like all individuals, are influenced by the social, cultural, and political context in which they operate. Consequently, these contextual factors can introduce biases into historical interpretations, leading to the reflection of the prevailing values and biases of the time in which historical accounts are authored.

In addition to these critical insights, postmodernism advocates for reflexivity and self-awareness in scholarly practice. Scholars are encouraged to engage in a rigorous examination of their own subjectivity, biases, and positionalities concerning their research. This self-awareness serves as a crucial tool in mitigating the potential for uncritically perpetuating dominant discourses. It fosters a scholarly environment conducive to more nuanced, self-reflective research practices that are attuned to the complexities of knowledge production and interpretation.

The postmodernism movement embraces the recognition of subjectivity by challenging the traditional notion of objectivity and emphasizing that all human knowledge, including historical and cultural understanding, is inherently shaped by individual subjectivity and socio-cultural context. Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute objectivity, which suggests that there is a single, universal, and unbiased truth that can be discovered or represented (Hassan, 1985; Lemon, n.d.). Instead, postmodernists argue that all knowledge is mediated through the subjectivity of the knower (Jenkins, 1997). This means that even in the pursuit of supposedly objective disciplines like history, objectivity is an unattainable ideal.

Postmodernism stands as a powerful advocate for the recognition of the multiplicity of perspectives and voices within the realm of history. It boldly challenges the conventional notion that a singular, universally valid historical narrative exists and instead highlights the capacity for different groups and individuals to construct their own historical accounts based on their unique life experiences and viewpoints. This steadfast recognition of diverse perspectives not only dismantles the concept of a single, objective truth in history but also underscores the profound impact of subjectivity on historical interpretation. It acknowledges that individuals bring with them a rich tapestry of perspectives, biases, and experiences when they engage in the interpretation of the world. This subjectivity is an intricate tapestry woven from their distinct life journeys, cultural backgrounds, social contexts, and personal beliefs. Such recognition underscores the existence of multiple valid interpretations of the same historical phenomena, all rooted in individual subjectivities.

Furthermore, postmodernism actively promotes the idea that there exists a multitude of valid perspectives when examining any given issue, event, or concept in history (Hutcheon, 2003b; Jenkins, 1997; Lemon, n.d.). Instead of the quest for a single, authoritative viewpoint, postmodernism encourages the exploration of this rich tapestry of diverse viewpoints. It supports the acknowledgement that different individuals and groups may hold interpretations that are equally valid yet distinct, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of historical events and concepts.

Thus, postmodernism encompasses the recognition of subjectivity as it challenges the notion of absolute objectivity. It highlights the importance of individual perspectives, contextualization, and the deconstruction of language. This perspective promotes pluralism of viewpoints, encourages interdisciplinary engagement, and fosters reflexivity. The impact of recognizing subjectivity extends across various academic disciplines, including history, literature, sociology, and philosophy, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in knowledge production and interpretation. Specifically in history, postmodernism challenges the objectivity of historical narratives, asserting that history is a constructed narrative shaped by the subjectivity of historians, the influence of language, and the multiplicity of perspectives. This challenge prompts historians to grapple with issues of transparency, subjectivity, and the limitations of historical objectivity, ultimately promoting a more self-aware and reflexive approach to historical scholarship.

### **3. Acknowledgment of Narrative Complexity**

Postmodernism has led historians to embrace narrative complexity. Instead of adhering to linear and teleological (perspective or argument that emphasizes the idea of purpose, design, or ultimate goals) historical narratives, historians now explore multiple perspectives, ambiguities, and the coexistence of diverse voices in historical accounts. The postmodernism movement introduces narrative complexity by challenging the traditional, linear, and ultimate narratives found in historical and literary works. Postmodernism encourages a more nuanced and multifaceted approach to storytelling and historical representation.

Postmodernism draws attention to the narrative nature of historical writing. Historians often construct historical narratives following specific narrative structures and conventions borrowed from literature and storytelling (Jenkins, 1997; White, 1980). These narrative choices shape the way historical events are organized, interpreted, and imbued with meaning. Postmodernists argue that narratives are not passive containers of facts but active agents in the construction of historical meaning.

Jean-François Lyotard's concept of "the end of grand narratives" is a central idea in postmodernist thought (Lyotard, 1993; Seidman, 1994). It challenges the traditional metanarratives or grand narratives that have historically been used to explain and legitimize various aspects of human existence, including science, history, and politics. Lyotard argues that grand narratives, also known as metanarratives, are overarching, totalizing stories that claim to provide a comprehensive and universal explanation of reality (Browning, 2000). Examples of such narratives include Marxism's historical determinism, Enlightenment's belief in progress, or religious narratives explaining the meaning of life. Lyotard expresses skepticism about the validity and authority of these narratives.

Postmodernism rejects the idea of "grand narratives" or overarching, all-encompassing stories that claim to provide a single, universal truth or explanation (Lyotard & Brügger, 2001). Instead, postmodernists argue that such narratives oversimplify complex historical and cultural phenomena.



As Lyotard (1993) argued that the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. This rejection opens the door to exploring multiple, interconnected, and sometimes contradictory narratives. Postmodernism emphasizes that there are multiple perspectives, voices, and truths that can coexist within a single narrative or historical account. Rather than seeking a single, definitive interpretation, postmodernism welcomes a diversity of viewpoints, experiences, and interpretations that contribute to a more complex understanding of the subject (Seidman, 1994). Lyotard encourages a critical stance toward grand narratives. He suggests that people should approach metanarratives with incredulity, meaning they should not take them for granted as unquestionable truths. This attitude allows for the deconstruction and scrutiny of grand narratives.

Lyotard proposes that rather than relying on grand narratives, individuals and communities should turn to "petits récits" or small narratives (Baier, 2023). These are local, specific stories and experiences that may not offer universal explanations but are valid in their particular contexts. Small narratives emphasize the diversity of human experiences. Postmodern narratives often employ fragmentation and non-linear storytelling techniques. They may present events, characters, or perspectives out of chronological order or use non-traditional narrative structures (Currie, 2010). This fragmentation reflects the fragmented nature of contemporary experience and challenges the linear, cause-and-effect approach to storytelling (Paans, 2020).

#### **4. Influence of Language**

Postmodernism underscores the role of language in shaping historical narratives. Language is seen as an active force in constructing historical meaning, and historians are urged to be mindful of how language can reinforce or challenge prevailing historical narratives. The influence of language is a central principle of postmodernism, and it plays a crucial role in shaping postmodern thought and its approach to various disciplines, including literature, philosophy, cultural studies, and history.

Postmodernism contends that language is not a passive or neutral medium that simply reflects or represents reality (Derrida, 1993, 2016; Lemon, n.d.). Instead, it is an active and constructive force that actively shapes our understanding of the world (Foucault, 1982). Language constructs meaning, and it does so through cultural, social, and historical contexts. Moreover, postmodernism often explores the relationship between language and power. Language can be a tool of domination and control, as those in power often shape the language used to describe and categorize social and cultural phenomena (Derrida, 1993; Foucault, 1982). Postmodernists examine how language constructs and reinforces power structures, as well as how it can be subverted to challenge those structures. Both Derrida and Foucault argued that the notion of stable structures and fixed meanings was problematic. Instead, they proposed that language, culture, and knowledge were not based on stable foundations but were marked by inherent instability and ambiguity.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida, one of key figures in postmodern thought, introduced the concept of deconstruction, which centers on language. Deconstruction involves examining the binary oppositions and hierarchies present in language and texts (Munslow, 2006; Newman, 2001). Derrida argued that these oppositions (e.g., good/evil, presence/absence) are not fixed but are maintained through language (Derrida, 2016; Wolfreys, 1998). Deconstruction seeks to disrupt these hierarchies and reveal the inherent instability and indeterminacy of language. The key idea here is that language and texts are not transparent or stable vehicles for conveying meaning. Instead, they are complex and often contradictory constructs that can be interpreted in multiple ways. This post-structuralists view emphasized that language was not a neutral tool but was entangled in power dynamics and cultural contexts, leading to the realization that there could be multiple valid interpretations of the same text or concept.

Postmodernism draws on structuralist and semiotic theories, which argue that language operates through signs and signifiers. In this view, a sign is composed of a signifier “the word or symbol” and the signified “the concept or meaning it represents” (De Saussure, 1916). However, postmodernists explore how these signs are arbitrary and culturally determined, highlighting that the relationship between signifiers and signified is not fixed but subject to change and interpretation (Greene, 1994).

The influence of language on the principles of postmodernism is profound. Postmodern thought underscores that language is not a transparent or neutral tool but a complex and powerful system that shapes our understanding of reality, subjectivity, power dynamics, and the nature of knowledge itself. This linguistic focus has had a far-reaching impact on various fields of study and has led to critical examinations of the ways in which language operates in society and culture.

#### The Importance of Interdisciplinary Approach

Postmodernism has fostered interdisciplinary collaboration between history and other fields, particularly literary theory, philosophy, and cultural studies (Grenz, 1996; Hutcheon, 2003b). This has enriched historical discipline by drawing on a wider range of analytical tools and perspectives. Postmodernism embraces an interdisciplinary approach in the history discipline by encouraging historians to draw on insights and methodologies from a wide range of fields and disciplines (Jenkins, 2003; Jenkins & Munslow, 2004). This approach challenges the traditional boundaries of historical research and interpretation and seeks to enrich historical scholarship by incorporating diverse perspectives and analytical tools.

Postmodernism challenges the idea that academic disciplines should be isolated from one another. Instead, it promotes the idea that different disciplines can inform and complement each other. Historians are encouraged to engage with scholars from fields such as literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, art history, and cultural studies to gain new perspectives on historical phenomena (Iggers, 2005). Postmodernism often encourages interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration. By drawing from various fields such as literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, and

cultural studies, postmodernism recognizes that different disciplines bring their own perspectives and methods, contributing to a richer understanding of subjectivity and its role in knowledge production.

As the result of the influence of linguistic and semiotic theories, which are interdisciplinary by nature. Historians influenced by postmodernism often incorporate semiotic analysis and linguistic approaches to examine historical texts and narratives more deeply (Hutcheon, 2003a; Ryan et al., 2004). These theories explore how language and signs shape human understanding. In addition, postmodernism is deeply influenced by literary theory, especially deconstruction and narrative theory. Historians often borrow concepts and methodologies from literary theory to analyze historical texts, narratives, and the construction of historical knowledge. Moreover, postmodernism has strong ties to cultural studies, a multidisciplinary field that explores the intersections of culture, society, and power. In this case, historians interested in postmodern thought may engage with cultural studies scholars to examine historical events and phenomena within broader cultural contexts, considering issues of identity, representation, and ideology (Hassan, 1985; Hutcheon, 2003a).

### **5. Deconstructing History: Alun Munslow's Challenge**

Within the realm of postmodernist historiography, Alun Munslow emerges as a significant figure challenging the traditional view of history as an impartial and objective repository of past events (Lemon, n.d.). Munslow (2006) asserts that history itself is a construct, intricately influenced by contextual factors like race, gender, economy, and culture, among others. From this postmodern perspective, the very concept of "reality" becomes elusive, as different individuals and groups construct their own historical narratives based on their unique perspectives and interests (Jenkins & Munslow, 2004).

Munslow presents his arguments, primarily centered on the rejection of 'empiricism' as a means to attain 'true' or 'objective' knowledge about the world, whether in the past or the present, aligning with the familiar postmodernist viewpoint (Lemon, 2003; Munslow, 2006). He critiques the traditional or 'mainstream' historian, labeling them as empiricists who believe in a historical reality that exists independently of the historian's mind. According to this perspective, subject and object are treated as distinct entities, much like the presumed separation between mind and knowledge. Furthermore, Munslow delves deeper into the nature of narrative as a medium for conveying historical knowledge. He questions whether, in reality, the past can be regarded as a narrative. Munslow contends that although the practice of (narrative) history is undeniably a literary pursuit, it doesn't necessarily negate the possibility that people in the past also constructed narratives to explain their own lives. Consequently, there might be some form of narrative correspondence between the way past events were experienced and how historians later construct their historical accounts.

Munslow's concept of "deconstructing history" advocates for a profound act of self-examination among historians (Munslow, 2006). It compels them to critically scrutinize the sources, narratives, and biases inherent in historical accounts. This approach demands transparency concerning the

subjectivity woven into the fabric of historical interpretation. Moreover, it underscores that historians are not mere observers detached from their narratives; instead, they actively participate in constructing historical knowledge. This shift has far-reaching implications, necessitating a re-evaluation of the traditional historian's role as an impartial and objective chronicler of past events. Munslow (2006) emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness, urging historians to recognize that they, like all individuals, are shaped by their socio-cultural contexts. This recognition underscores that historical narratives are inextricably linked to the contexts in which they are created.

Alun Munslow's work in "Deconstructing History" has had an impact on the field of alternate history, particularly in terms of encouraging a critical examination of the construction of historical narratives. Munslow's work promotes the deconstruction of traditional historical narratives, emphasizing how historical accounts are constructed and shaped by the biases, perspectives, and ideologies of historians (Munslow, 2018). In the context of alternate history, this approach encourages scholars and writers to critically examine the construction of their counterfactual narratives, revealing the underlying assumptions and biases that inform their alternative historical scenarios.

In alternate history, this encourages authors to recognize and explore the subjectivity inherent in their creations. Writers of alternate history can be more aware of how their own perspectives and beliefs influence the development of alternative historical scenarios. Munslow's approach highlights the multiplicity of perspectives within historical narratives (Munslow, 2006). This notion can be applied to alternate history by encouraging the exploration of diverse viewpoints within counterfactual scenarios. Instead of presenting a single, authoritative alternate history, authors can consider and incorporate various interpretations and viewpoints, enriching the narrative.

Munslow's work encourages historians to challenge established historical assumptions and question dominant historical narratives. In the realm of alternate history, this means challenging conventional historical assumptions and exploring alternative trajectories that challenge historical inevitability or determinism. Munslow's approach also encourages historians to reflect on their own historiographical practices. In the context of alternate history, this reflection can lead authors to consider how they engage with historical sources, how they construct their narratives, and how they engage with the broader historiographical discourse.

## **6. "Own-Sakism" and Keith Jenkins's Reinterpretation**

"Own-Sakism" is a concept introduced by historian Keith Jenkins. It is a term that represents a perspective within the broader framework of postmodernist historiography (Jenkins, 1997; Lemon, n.d.). Keith Jenkins is known for his influential work in the field of history and historiography (Jenkins, 2003, 2009), particularly in challenging traditional historical approaches and advocating for a more self-aware and reflexive mode of historical inquiry.

Keith Jenkins builds upon Munslow's foundation by introducing the concept of "own-sakism," which directly addresses the postmodernist critique of historical objectivity. "Own-sakism" advocates

that historians openly acknowledge their subjectivity and, more importantly, embrace it as a crucial and constructive aspect of their work. This notion implores historians to recognize that their unique perspectives, biases, and lived experiences inevitably shape their historical interpretations.

Jenkins (2003) makes a profound assertion here: “that the acknowledgment of subjectivity should not be seen as a limitation but as an empowering force within the historical narrative.” By recognizing the role of personal perspective in historical scholarship, historians can engage in a more open, honest, and transparent dialogue about their interpretations of the past. This approach challenges the traditional historical narrative, often presented as an authoritative and objective account of events. Instead, it fosters a more inclusive and pluralistic historiography that acknowledges and celebrates the multiplicity of voices and perspectives contributing to our understanding of history.

The significance of "own-sakism" extends beyond mere acknowledgment of subjectivity; it underscores the necessity of reflexive historians (Jenkins, 2003, 2009). By examining the complex relation between personal biases and historical interpretations, historians can construct narratives that are not only more inclusive but also more aware of the inherent complexities within the historical endeavor.

## **7. Hayden White's Metahistory: Critiquing the Narrative Structure**

Hayden White approaches postmodernist historiography from a slightly different angle, directing his focus towards the narrative structure of history itself. White (1980) contends that traditional historical narratives tend to adhere to specific storytelling conventions that unintentionally impose a false sense of coherence and order on the past. These narratives often adopt a linear and teleological (perspective or argument that emphasizes the idea of purpose, design, or ultimate goals) progression, presenting events as having a clear and deterministic cause-and-effect relationship. White (1980) argues that such narratives, while providing a veneer of comprehensibility, oversimplify the inherent complexities of history and downplay the pivotal role of language and rhetoric in shaping historical accounts.

Hayden White's "Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe" is a seminal work in the field of history and literary theory, published in 1973. In this book, White presents a comprehensive critique of the narrative structure of historical writing and offers a profound examination of the ways in which history is constructed through storytelling. His core idea revolves around the notion that historical narratives are not objective representations of past events but are shaped by the linguistic and narrative structures used by historians (White, 2014).

This paradigm shift invites historians to explore alternative modes of presenting the past. These alternatives may involve embracing the inherent ambiguity and multiplicity of historical events, thereby fostering a more nuanced and holistic understanding of history. White's metahistory underscores that narratives are not neutral representations but active agents in the construction of historical meaning.

White's core idea, which serves as the foundation of his theory, is that historical writing is inherently a literary endeavor. He argues that historians construct historical narratives using narrative tropes, structures, and conventions that are borrowed from literature and storytelling (White, 1980). In other words, history is not a straightforward presentation of facts and events but a narrative crafted through language and rhetoric. White asserts that historians unconsciously employ certain narrative forms, such as romance, tragedy, or comedy, to shape their accounts of the past (White, 1980). White questions traditional historical explanations that seek to identify causal relationships between events (Kansteiner, 1993). He argues that these explanations are often based on narrative conventions rather than objective analysis, thus highlighting the inherent subjectivity in historical writing.

White's concept of "emplotment" refers to the way historians' structure historical events into meaningful narratives (White, 1980). This concept is relevant to alternate history because it prompts writers to consider how they organize and frame their counterfactual scenarios. Writers can experiment with different emplotment strategies to create alternative historical narratives.

He emphasizes the significance of narrative structures in shaping historical accounts. White (1980) contends that historians often employ specific narrative forms that dictate the way events are organized, interpreted, and given meaning. For example, a historian might use a "tragic" structure to depict a historical event as a sequence of unfortunate events leading to a catastrophic outcome (White, 1980). In addition, White argues that historians use tropes and figurative language (e.g., metaphor, metonymy) to imbue historical narratives with meaning. These rhetorical devices are not merely stylistic choices but play a fundamental role in constructing historical interpretations.

White's analysis of narrative structure in historical writing encourages scholars and writers of alternate history to consider how they construct narratives. His emphasis on the storytelling aspect of history highlights the role of narrative conventions in shaping historical accounts. In alternate history, this prompts authors to be conscious of the narrative structures they employ when crafting counterfactual scenarios.

Like others post-modernist historian, White underscores the pivotal role of language in historical representation. He asserts that language is not a neutral tool but carries inherent biases and ideologies that influence the way historians frame their narratives. White's critique also challenged the long-standing notion of historical objectivity (Kansteiner, 1993). He demonstrated that even the most seemingly objective historical narratives are constructed through subjective choices in narrative structure and language use (Kansteiner, 1993). This forced historians to confront the subjectivity inherent in their practice. White's work prompted historians to become more aware of the narrative choices they make when constructing historical accounts. Historians began to critically assess how their chosen narratives influenced their interpretations, encouraging greater self-awareness and transparency in historical writing.

White's exploration of the rhetoric of historical writing underscores the importance of language and interpretation in shaping historical narratives. In alternate history, this perspective encourages writers to pay attention to the rhetorical devices and language choices they make when presenting alternative historical scenarios. It prompts a critical examination of how language can influence readers' interpretations.

In order to comprehensively narrate the past, White encourages historians to explore alternative ways of presenting the past. This led to a more diverse range of historiographical approaches that embraced ambiguity, multiplicity, and complexity in historical narratives by bridging the gap between history and literary theory, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration (White, 2014). Historians increasingly drew on insights from literary criticism and narrative theory to enrich their own practice.

Hayden White's "Metahistory" fundamentally challenged the traditional narrative structure of historical writing, emphasizing the literary and rhetorical nature of history. His work has had a lasting impact on the history discipline by highlighting the role of subjectivity and language in historical representation, prompting historians to critically assess their narratives, and encouraging a more diverse and self-aware approach to historical scientific approach. Moreover, the profound impact of White's ideas is also encompassing the emergence of alternate history.

Furthermore, White's work often emphasizes the historiographical context in which historical writing occurs. In the context of alternate history, this encourages authors to situate their counterfactual scenarios within a broader historiographical discourse. They can explore how their alternative narratives relate to existing historical interpretations and debates. White's critique of historical paradigms and metanarratives aligns with the spirit of alternate history, which often involves challenging or reimagining historical trajectories and paradigms. Alternate history writers may draw inspiration from White's critique to question dominant historical narratives and offer alternative perspectives.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The emergence of postmodernism in the mid-20th century marked a pivotal moment in the development of the history discipline. Its profound impact has challenged and reshaped the foundational assumptions that long underpinned historical practice, fostering a more critical and self-aware approach to the study of the past. As a result of postmodernism's influence, historians have become increasingly attuned to the complexities of knowledge production, interpretation, and representation.

Alun Munslow's concept of "Deconstructing History" has encouraged historians to scrutinize their own methodologies, highlighting the subjectivity inherent in historical interpretation and the role of language in shaping historical narratives. Keith Jenkins's "own-sakism" has further prompted scholars to engage reflexively with their historical practice, acknowledging the influence of their own

subjectivities and biases. Hayden White's critique of traditional historical narratives has challenged the idea of a single, objective truth in history, emphasizing the role of narrative structures and rhetoric in shaping historical accounts.

These concepts, in conjunction with the broader postmodernist framework, have paved the way for the emergence of alternate history as a distinct and innovative genre within the history discipline. Alternate history, with its exploration of counterfactual scenarios and diverse perspectives, epitomizes the postmodern challenge to established historical paradigms. It underscores the multiplicity of historical narratives and the recognition of subjectivity in historical interpretation.

In the realm of alternate history, historians and writers are invited to deconstruct traditional historical narratives, engage with their own subjectivities, and experiment with narrative structures. They draw inspiration from the postmodernist critique to reimagine historical trajectories, challenge dominant paradigms, and construct alternative narratives that prompt readers to question established historical truths. As the legacy of postmodernism continues to shape the history discipline, it is essential to recognize the enduring influence of Alun Munslow, Keith Jenkins, and Hayden White in fostering a critical and reflexive approach to history. Their contributions have not only enriched historical scholarship but have also played a pivotal role in the evolution of alternate history, a genre that exemplifies the postmodernist challenge to the boundaries of historical knowledge.

In the end, the convergence of postmodernist thought with the genre of alternate history offers a compelling testament to the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of historical inquiry. It reminds us that the study of the past is not static but is continually reshaped by the intellectual currents of our time, pushing the boundaries of what history can be and prompting us to reconsider the narratives that have defined our understanding of the world.

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