Daughter of Time

Postmodernist critique as an antidote to post-truth politics

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Introduction

In 2016, The Oxford English Dictionary chose 'post-truth' as its word of the year. It cites the British referendum on whether the UK should stay in the EU – an issue which would later evolve into Brexit - and the election of Donald Trump as president of the U.S.A. as its reasons for choosing this word. It defines post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, "Word of the Year 2016")

This definition implies two things about the word 'post-truth': that in the context of post-truth, 'truth' is specifically used as a synonym for objective facts, and that the 'post' in 'post-truth' means that society is moving past the idea of 'truth' as synonymous to objective facts. In post-truth, 'truth' is not an expression of what a person perceives as objective or factual reality, but a felt reality – a projection of what a person wants reality to be. This means that when someone with a post-truth worldview encounters facts that do not match their felt reality, or felt 'truth,' they deny these facts rather than adjusting their own 'truth.' This is what the Oxford English Dictionary mean when they say that "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." Post-truth does not indicate that facts are no longer real, but rather that proven facts, and exposed untruths or lies are often no longer a major factor in what someone decides is true. For instance, someone can decide that "the earth is flat" is a 'true' statement, even though all scientific evidence points in another direction.

Based on the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of post-truth, I define the related term 'post-truth politics' as a collection of strategies, politicians and communities that consciously manipulate facts to alter the 'truth' of their audience for political gains. In turn, I define 'manipulating the truth' in this context as creating or influencing arguments that go against facts because they favor the manipulator's interests, for instance by misrepresenting facts or framing facts in a narrative in a way that works in the manipulator's favor.

Manipulating the truth in this manner means that it is in the interest of a post-truth politician's narrative to keep its audience uncritical to the politician's own message by appealing to emotions or personal beliefs while urging its audience to be hostile to the message of its political opponents, regardless of whether objective facts support these stances. Simply put, one can say that the manipulation of truth by post-truth politics fosters and thrives on a lack of critical thinking. Post-truth politicians such as Nigel Farage or Donald Trump manipulate truth to gain a political advantage.

In the context of post-truth politics, it is understandable that many people should think all manipulation of truth follows a similar format, and this idea is also repeated by some academics. One such academic is Lee McIntyre, a philosopher of the social sciences. In his study on post-truth, *Post-Truth* (2018), McIntyre gives an overview of what he thinks post-truth is and where he thinks it came from. He notes a link between post-truth politics and postmodernism. Postmodernism is an extremely broad movement that comprises multiple artistic, academic and historical disciplines, and that can be very loosely characterized by its rejection of the grand narratives proposed by modernism. It is important to note that because of postmodernism's multifariousness and diversity, even the broad definition I give here is problematic. For the purpose of my thesis, I will not go into all of the aspects of postmodernism, but instead focus on a trope often found in postmodernist fiction: the manipulation of historical events, used by McIntyre as synonymous with the manipulation of 'truth'.

Lee McIntyre notes that postmodernism and post-truth politics both manipulate the truth and interprets this similarity as an indication that postmodernism is responsible for post-truth politics. He blames postmodernism for the dismissal of truth claims that paved the way for post-truth politics in the first place. Due to the link he sees between post-truth politics and postmodernism, he presents all manipulations of truth as inherently harmful. However, the idea that all forms of manipulation of truth are harmful is not unambiguously accepted by all academics. A more positive interpretation of the manipulation of truth can be found in the work of literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, who theorized the genre of 'historiographic metafiction' in her study *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). Historiographic metafiction can be loosely defined as a category of (often postmodern) literary texts that interpret history while simultaneously critically assessing and questioning the 'truth' they construct in their interpretation (Hutcheon 5).

More specifically, the manipulation of truth in historiographic metafiction raises questions about who benefits from the supposed objectivity of grand narratives or concepts such as the truth. It attempts to foster a critical and skeptical attitude in its readers towards what truth is and who decides what truth is. This forms a contrast with the manipulation of truth as used in post-truth politics, in which the manipulation of truth is used to keep the intended audience uncritical and unskeptical towards the speaker, their narrative and their intentions.

Historiographical metafiction as defined by Hutcheon includes such 'reflective' texts as well as counterfactual histories; as a postmodern genre, however, it puts more value on showing how history is always manipulated by personal interests than on producing conclusive truths.

To sum up, both post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction manipulate truth for completely different purposes. However, little research has been done on how these manipulations of truth work and how they differ. In this study I will research how truth is manipulated in post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction respectively, and how these manipulations differ and overlap. This will be my central research question for this thesis.

Without such research, it will be difficult to understand how the manipulation of truth can be used to foster or limit critical approaches towards truth. Furthermore, understanding how truth can be manipulated adversely to serve the purposes of post-truth politics may open up the possibility for future research on neutralizing or repurposing the manipulation of truth by post-truth politics.

Chapter 1 consists of a close reading of a speech by Trump and a speech by Farage, two post-truth politicians. I have chosen Trump because of his political importance, his frequent use of misinformation and outright lies, Farage because of his important role in the Brexit campaign. I will analyze their language, narrative structures and the function of their misinformation to understand how post-truth politicians manipulate truth. In Chapter 2 I put my analysis of the first chapter into perspective by supplementing it with an academic view of where post-truth politics came from. Here, I will focus on McIntyre's study, *Post-Truth* (2018). I critically examine McIntyre's criminalization of postmodernism as the cultural movement that provided a fertile breeding ground for post-truth politics. Chapter 3 contrasts McIntyre's notion that all manipulations of truth are harmful with the view of another academic, Linda Hutcheon, as put forward in her study, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). Hutcheon's study

shows that the manipulation of truth in a special postmodernist subgenre of historical fiction which she defines as historiographic metafiction can be used to expose power structures as well as the constructedness of history. In other words, historiographic metafiction shows that the manipulation of truth is not necessarily harmful, and that it may even foster a more nuanced stance towards the concept of truth. I explore this notion through a case study of Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* (1951). *The Daughter of Time*, while predating both postmodernism and Hutcheon's discussion of historiographic metafiction, shows through an expansive reflection on how history is made that our knowledge of the past is both partial and deeply rooted in the intertextuality of historiography. In contrast to historiographic metafiction, *The Daughter of Time* maintains that 'the truth' exists and, in due time, will be uncovered. In my conclusion I compare the differences and similarities in the ways that post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction manipulate truth as analyzed in my previous chapters.

Chapter 1: The Manipulation of Truth by Post-Truth Politicians

Introduction

In order to understand how post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction differ and overlap regarding the ways in which they manipulate truth, it is first necessary to discuss these issues separately. In this chapter, I address the question of how post-truth politics manipulates the truth. I answer this question by analyzing a public speech by Nigel Farage and another by Donald Trump. I chose Farage because he was at the basis of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, or Brexit. The information campaigns conducted by Farage and other Eurosceptics ahead of the Leave/Remain Referendum were characterized by the manipulation of truth and the proclamation of untruths.

As a result, both Brexit and Farage are often seen as essential to the rise of post-truth politics. Farage's vital role in Brexit makes studying one of his speeches delivered around that time very interesting for my research. Since a complete study of the manipulation of the truth surrounding Brexit is beyond my scope, I will focus specifically on Farage's language in one speech. By means of a close reading of this speech which, in my opinion, is representative of Farage's other speeches and his political agenda in general, I analyze how he employs imagery, narrative structure and language to manipulate the truth. I chose Trump because he has become the face of post-truth politics through his frequent use of untruths, lies and other manipulations of the truth during his presidency. I portray Trump's manipulation of truth by means of the 'truthful hyperbole', a specific form of hyperbolic language previously described by himself in his book *The Art of the Deal* (1987), and exemplary of the way in which handles the truth. I will support my argument with some brief examples from Trump's victory speech and an ad from one of his failed business ventures, Trump Steaks. I shall discuss some examples that appear in these passages, interpret their function in Trump's manipulation of the truth, and then explain why Trump uses this form of manipulation. I chose this approach because, unlike the case of Farage, Trump's manipulation of the

truth can only be partially demonstrated through a close reading of one of his speeches. While there are undoubtedly one or more clearly identifiable instances of truth manipulation to be found in any single speech, Trump's more general strategy becomes more apparent when it is highlighted by one of his techniques. Since my focus is on truthful hyperbole and because I have limited space for my research, I will not focus on matters like Trump's tweets, supportive fake accounts, campaign strategies, the psychology behind his choices or those of his voters, the nuances between influencing and manipulation, or in-depth political science backgrounds. These aspects are certainly of interest for follow-up research, but they are too comprehensive and too far beyond the scope of my research to elaborate on in this thesis.

I end this chapter by highlighting the differences and similarities between both Farage's and Trump's truth manipulation and by examining whether I can find a rule of thumb about the strategies of post-truth politicians.

Before starting my analysis, it is first of all necessary to clarify what I mean by 'truth'. What is 'truth' really? This question has been asked since the dawn of time and is still being debated by philosophers in our days. Evidently, then, I will not present a conclusive answer to this question. I can, however, provide more insight into what I mean by 'truth' in the context of this research and what is roughly understood by 'truth' in post-truth politics. It is striking to see that in the current post-truth time there are more and more expressions of distrust with regard to facts, such as the launching of fake news and misleading Facebook campaigns, false tweets, distrust of science and experts, but also disbelief about the corona virus, climate change, and the usefulness of vaccination. What this distrust implies is that it is not 'truth' or 'facts' that are at stake, but trust in the authority of facts and the systems and institutions surrounding them, such as science, medicine, journalism, etc.

As part of my research, I will therefore focus on two definitions of truth. I will initially use the concept 'truth' as equal to scientific knowledge, while acknowledging that all scientific knowledge is provisional.[1]

At the same time, in this chapter, I will explore this definition by discussing what other meaning 'truth' is given in the Farage and Trump strategy, an 'emotional' truth closer to the worldview, trust, and emotions of a targeted audience than to more generally accepted facts.

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[1] I base this definition on Karl Popper's Falsification Principle, which states that any theory should be able to be tested and possibly proven false in order to be scientific (Popper 1935).

Farage

Nigel Farage is a British politician and leader of the Brexit Party since 2019. He is a Eurosceptic and has lobbied for the UK's exit from the European Union since the 1990's. His lobbying culminated in his Brexit campaign leading up to the EU membership referendum in 2016, which resulted in the UK's decision to leave the EU. In what follows, I will analyse the speech of Nigel Farage delivered in the European Parliament at the State of the Union on the 9th of September, 2015. While not an influential speech, I have nevertheless selected it because its content largely overlaps with the agenda of the 2016 Brexit campaign. Furthermore, the speech is concise. This combination results in a text that is typical of Nigel Farage, dense enough to allow an in depth analysis of his talking style, argumentation and narrative structure, and brief enough to look at the speech as a whole. In this speech Farage is addressing Jean-Claude Juncker, who served as President of the European Commission at the time. Farage is commenting on the acceptance of the European Asylum Support Office's proposal to relocate immigrants and refugees from Italy and Greece to other countries in the EU after an unexpectedly large amount of immigrants and refugees had arrived there.

> Mr. President, Mr. Juncker has simply got this wrong. As I warned in April, the European Common Asylum Policy sets its terms so widely as to say that anyone setting foot on EU soil can stay: I said it would lead to a flow of biblical proportions, and indeed that is what we are beginning to see. This has been compounded by Germany saying last week that basically anyone can come. It is a bit too late now to draw up a list, by countries of origin, of who can stay and who cannot stay. All they have to do, as they are doing, is throw their passports into the Mediterranean and say they are coming from Syria (Farage, "State of the Union" 2015).

By using the metaphor of "a flow of biblical proportions" Farage conjures up the image of an apocalyptic and unstoppable flood to describe immigrants and refugees entering the EU. In addition, the idea of a flood suggests that EU infrastructures are drowning due to this 'overflow'.

Notably however, he does not use any actual data to substantiate the idea of an enormous amount of immigrants entering the EU. The data on asylum applications from

2015 suggest that the UK had accepted significantly fewer asylum applications per 100,000 local population than other EU countries: the figure for the UK was 60 per 100,000, compared to 260 per 100,000 as the EU average (BBC, "Migrant Crisis" 2016). However, Farage uses the emotional impact of the imagery of a natural disaster to circumvent the need for data. After all, if his listeners are preoccupied with feelings of fear and imminent danger they are unlikely to feel the need for the data to corroborate his claims.

To put it simply, when the feeling of danger is real, people will act as if the danger itself is real as well. Furthermore, Farage states he had already "warned in April", and through his statement that "indeed that is what we are beginning to see" he confirms his own warning that a major influx of immigrants is happening. However, through his use of the word "beginning" in his sentence he both increases the feeling of an imminent danger and he absolves himself of having to prove his claim concerning a massive influx of illegal immigrants. After all, if this only is the beginning as Farage suggests, the "flow of biblical proportions" is not yet reflected in the numbers. Lastly, he puts the blame for the 'danger' he has created in his speech on Germany. In his statement that Germany has said "basically anyone can come" Farage alludes to Germany's decision to take in over a million refugees in 2015. Farage likely makes this allusion because Juncker was the lead candidate of the EPP, which is amongst others backed by the German political party CDU/CSU, of which Angela Merkel is party leader. Farage uses Germany in this way as being representative of pro-Europeans, and in this way builds up an image of the EU as an institution that allows a (future) dangerous situation, a 'flood' so to speak, to happen to the UK.

> As we know, the majority of people who are coming – and the Slovakian Prime Minister has been honest enough to say so – are economic migrants. In addition, we see, as I warned earlier, evidence that ISIS is now using this route to put their jihadists on European soil. We must be mad to take this risk with the cohesion of our societies. If we want to help genuine refugees, if we want to protect our societies, if we want to stop the criminal trafficking gangs from benefiting as they are doing, we must stop the boats coming – as the Australians did – and then we can assess who qualifies for refugee status.

With his comment that "the Slovakian Prime Minister has been honest enough to say so," Farage references the (now former) Slovakian prime minister Fico's decision to reject the European commission's proposal to redistribute the refugees among the EU. Farage uses Fico's decision to justify his remark that asylum seekers are actually just economic immigrants, thus presenting them as not being in any form of 'real' danger. The advantage of Farage presenting this remark as a view shared with Fico, Slovakia's leader at that time, is that by attacking this remark, a critic of Farage would indirectly also attack the stance of Slovakia's Prime Minister, thus risking the wrath of another EU member state. Additionally, he states that the route the supposed economic refugees use is also used as a "route to put [ISIS] jihadists on European soil," thereby suggesting that the asylum seekers/economic refugees would be a threat to both national security and people's personal safety. Furthermore, by lumping together economic refugees with jihadists, he further cements the idea that refugees are dangerous by stating that stopping refugees is necessary in order to "protect our societies" and "stop the criminal trafficking gangs." In other words, Farage presents the influx of refugees as being made up chiefly of economic profiteers, terrorists and criminal trafficking gangs in the span of two sentences. After thus having presented the idea of a threat, he continues by shifting the focus to his political adversaries:

> I noted your comments, Mr. Juncker, because there is a referendum coming in the United Kingdom. I look forward to seeing you in the UK. I know you intend to spend tens of millions of pounds of British taxpayers' money telling us what we should think. I have a feeling that the British people will warm to you on a personal level, but, as to suggesting that getting rid of a few EU regulations is going to change our minds, sorry – unless you give Mr. Cameron back control and discretion over our borders, the Brits, in the course of the next year, will vote to leave.

"I know you intend" suggests that Farage has caught Juncker in a lie or a secret. This suggestion, in combination with the sentence "I know you intend to spend tens of millions of pounds of British taxpayers' money telling us what we should think", dismisses whatever Juncker or his allies may say as propaganda. As stated earlier, Farage portrays Juncker as being representative of Pro-Europeans; thus by casting suspicion on Juncker, Farage casts suspicion on all Pro-European factions. This sets up

a situation where even if Farage is called out for twisting the facts by his (likely Pro-Europeanist) political opponents, he can dismiss these accusations as attempts to control the narrative. But ironically, by doing this Farage can keep control over the political narrative himself.

Looking at Farage's speech as a whole, a central strategy in his manipulation of truth becomes apparent. Farage uses existing events to create a narrative in which the UK is under threat. By omitting the mention of actual numbers, he avoids a situation where he has to defend his claims. He then places the blame for the threat he himself created in his narrative on his political opponents, suggesting that they deceive the people through trickery, lies or propaganda. This has a dual advantage in that it makes calling out the inconsistencies and falsehoods in Farage's narrative seem disingenuous, and it creates the image of a grand conspiracy of an elite that attempts to keep the 'small people' under its thumb, with Farage fighting this elite as a champion of the 'small people.' Farage's speech manipulates the truth by incorporating real world events - the refugee crisis of 2015, to be exact - into a fictional narrative that suits his needs. What I mean by this is that the events Farage builds his narrative on (that is to say, the large influx of primarily Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Europe) are true, but through his specific use of language (e.g. the refugees are presented as economic immigrants, as well as terrorists, gang members and traffickers, and they will overflow the UK) he builds up a narrative that evokes the image of an imminent danger to his followers in the UK. Farage's manipulation of truth works through a distortion of truth, rather than through outright lies or the omission of truth. Through his use of emotionally evocative language, he plays into his listeners' fear and anger, trusting that these feelings will override their critical thinking.

In summary, Farage's narrative hinges on the role emotions play in shaping what people feel to be true, rather than on what is empirically true. This is why he uses emotionally stimulating language: this allows him to influence the way his listeners fill in their 'truth' in a way that suits him. In other words, he ignores the difference between perceived truth and empirical truth. As a consequence, academics who focus on the role of facts in analyzing post-truth politics may miss the mark: it is not the case that facts or the scientific method are explicitly rejected in their entirety, but that ideas and emotions are more relevant in shaping what people see as 'true'.

The empirical truth is of secondary importance to the felt truth in post-truth politics, but that does not necessarily mean that the empirical truth has no importance at

all: Farage's speech indeed relies on an interplay between facts and suggestion, rather than a complete rejection of the facts. That is, Farage does not lie explicitly, nor does he present a picture that goes completely against the facts. His speech builds on news that is also reported by relatively reliable sources (such as BBC news), but distorts as he sees fit what the reliable news channels communicate

Trump

Donald Trump was the forty-fifth president of the United States of America. He won the 2016 presidential race as the Republican candidate against Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and he assumed office on the 20th of January, 2017. Before his presidency, he was primarily known as a reality TV personality and a businessman. His presidency is characterized by various controversies, the common thread usually being his tendency to make false claims and spread misinformation.

Because Trump is so often accused of lying, it is difficult to make a productive analysis of the way he manipulates the truth in the limited space at my disposal. However, there is a striking example of Trump's manipulation of the truth that is well-suited for my analysis: the truthful hyperbole. The hyperbole, or stylistic exaggeration, is a figure of speech frequently used by Trump and typical of his use of language. He uses this figure of speech to emphasize his opinions or emotions. As early as 1987, in his book *The Art of the Deal*, Trump describes how he does business and how he developed his verbal strategies and his style of public speaking. On his use of hyperboles, Trump writes:

> The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big by themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration, and a very effective form of promotion (87).

Trump calls the truthful hyperbole an innocent but effective form of exaggeration that he uses to promote (his message). Promotion is a widely used information technique, for example to market a product or to generate (brand) awareness. Promotion is therefore naturally strongly linked to the idea of doing business. Often it is done by means of

subtle seduction strategies; one tries to seduce someone into purchasing a product, for example. This works differently with Trump. By grossly exaggerating, Trump reinforces his language and sends a powerful message. The message is clear and unambiguous. He often uses superlatives to emphasize his message. This is clearly reflected in the way he promotes his products, such as his (now bankrupt) Trump Steaks. This is the text signed by Trump that appeared on the Trump Steaks homepage:

> For years, people have been telling me how much they enjoy the steaks in my casino and resort restaurants. And it's no wonder why. Of all the beef produced in the U.S., less than 2% is certified prime grade by the USDA. Trump Steaks™ are hand selected to our exacting standards of marbling and leanness. But don't just take my word for it – see for yourself. All the words in the world can't begin to describe the pleasure of biting into one of these succulent, sizzling mouth-watering steaks. Now you can enjoy these great steaks in the comfort of your home, with your family and friends, anytime. Please take a few moments to look through our Trump Steaks™ selections, and do you taste buds a favor. One bite and you'll be back for more.

As mentioned above, Trump stated in *The Art of the Deal* about truthful hyperbole that "I play to people's fantasies" and "people want to believe that something is the biggest and the most spectacular." Even in the relatively short text on Trump Steaks above, these aspects of truthful hyperbole can be found. Trump arouses the reader's imagination by referring to the (very likely very wealthy) guests of his casinos and resorts who enjoy Trump Steaks. He then presents Trump Steaks as something spectacular by saying "all words in the world can't begin to describe the pleasure of biting into one of these succulent, sizzling mouth-watering steaks." Trump describes his steaks as an almost otherworldly experience, now available to the common man. By means of extreme exaggeration, Trump attaches connotations (richness, exceptional taste experience, etc.) to a steak in order to sell his product.

The truthful hyperbole that Trump describes in *The Art of the Deal* is thus operative in his way of doing business. Now I would like to come back to the way Trump describes the effect of his truthful hyperbole. Trump argues that his truthful hyperbole is an "innocent form of exaggeration, and a very effective form of promotion." The tension between exaggeration and innocence - or rather, when

exaggeration is no longer innocent - goes way back. As early as 1892, the Carbolic Smoke Ball Company lost a lawsuit after their ad was deemed misleading by the English Court of Appeal, not as harmless exaggeration. In short, the question of where exaggeration ends and turns into deception has been asked for well over a hundred years and is still relevant today.

The reason I quote the example of truthful hyperbole in connection with Trump Steaks is because almost exactly the same tension between truthful hyperbole and manipulation of the truth can be found in Trump's political speeches. The following is a brief excerpt from Trump's victory speech, held on November 9, 2016. It is striking that this passage uses almost exactly the same techniques:

> [The U.S.A.'s] Tremendous potential. I've gotten to know our country so well — tremendous potential. It's going to be a beautiful thing. Every single American will have the opportunity to realize his or her fullest potential. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. [applause]

As in the example of Trump Steaks, Trump in this passage appeals to the common man through his use of "every single American" and "the forgotten men and women of our country." What is also striking is the ambiguity of the last sentence in particular: who exactly are the 'forgotten men and women?' The ambiguity of this description makes it possible for anyone who considers themselves underprivileged to empathize with this description. Using this description, Trump can appeal to any unfortunate citizen, regardless of whether there are other (or even opposing) needs underlying this misfortune. The word "forgotten" splits the American people into two categories - those who have been forgotten and those who have not been forgotten - and it is likely that those who feel themselves to be 'forgotten' long to stop being forgotten. Interestingly, Trump brings up this word "forgotten" after the phrase "to realize his or her fullest potential." This implies that the 'forgotten' Americans have been forgotten because they have not yet been able to reach their 'fullest potential'.

So the split between 'forgotten' and 'not-forgotten' Americans is a apparently a split between those who have not been able to reach their full potential and those who have been able to do so. There is a similar dichotomy to be found in the Trump Steaks example, between Trump's wealthy guests ("people […] in my casino and resort restaurants") who have had access to Trump Steaks for years, and the common man

who craved the Trump Steak and now finally can buy them ("now you can enjoy these great steaks […] anytime.") This division aims to create the idea that there is a 'something' that the common man has been deprived of up till now, but at last has access to. In both the Trump Steaks ad and the victory speech, this 'something' is a projection of the listener's desires - Trump Steaks advertises steaks, as well as the sense of wealth and luxury. Trump's victory speech advertises the possibility of no longer being forgotten and the possibility of unlocking untapped potential, but actually it appeals to the same feeling as the Trump Steak ad: the possibility for the common man to share the experiences of the elite.

So the divisions between the forgotten and the not-forgotten, those who have not been able to reach their full potential and those who have been able to do so, are in fact a split between the common man and the elite. Implicitly, the various dichotomies in both Trump's victory speech and the Trump Steaks ad are an invitation for the common man to become part of the elite (or at least, the experiences of the elite). That is, if the common man accepts the invitation - which in the case of Trump Steaks means that he or she will buy Trump Steaks, and in the case of the victory speech will support Trump politically.

The idea that truthful hyperbole serves to sell the experiences of the elite to the common man is also reflected in the hyperbolic language of both the victory speech and the Trump Steaks' example. Not long after the aforementioned passage in Trump's victory speech, Trump uses these hyperbolas:

> We have a great economic plan. We will double our growth and have the strongest economy anywhere in the world. At the same time, we will get along with all other nations willing to get along with us. We will be. [applause]

This passage consists almost entirely of exaggerations ("we will double our growth," "the strongest economy anywhere in the World," "we will get along with all other nations"), but what is especially striking is that only the final result (doubled growth, strongest economy in the world, etc.) is described, and not how this result will be achieved. This is because the practical, factual aspect, the how, doesn't matter: what Trump describes in this passage is a thematic continuation of the previous passage. Trump is selling a dream here, not a plan or an idea, which becomes even clearer in the passage that follows:

> We'll have great relationships. We expect to have great, great relationships. No
> dream is too big, no challenge is too great.

Trump repeatedly uses the word "great" and literally urges his listener to follow his or her dreams with the phrase "no dream is too big, no challenge is too great," a phrase that would have been just as appropriate as an advertisement for any of Trump's resorts, casinos, or other products. The exaggerations in these passages serve to make the feeling Trump is trying to sell in this speech seem even bigger and better than it is. This is almost entirely consistent with the hyperbole in Trump Steaks:

> All the words in the world can't begin to describe the pleasure of biting into one
> of these succulent, sizzling mouth-watering steaks.

The reason for this overlap between Trump's products and Trump's language in politics is simple: in both his politics and in the case of Trump steaks, Trump is advertising. Trump is trying to sell a product, whether the product is a Trump Steak or a 'truth' that overlaps with the desires of his customers / voters. [2]A striking (and ironic) difference is that the language used in Trump Steaks is more concrete than the language used in Trump's victory speech.

This is easy to explain: it is more difficult to be prosecuted for hyperbolic language in politics than in the business world. As the verdict in the Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball trial pointed out, unfounded hyperbolic language in advertising may be regarded as a form of false advertising. In the case of politics, Trump can simply present the hyperbole as his personal opinion. Due to forgiving advertising laws specific to the United States it is unlikely that he could be prosecuted for this. In other words, truthful hyperbole in politics is a relatively safe tactic that, as in the corporate world, can potentially lead to big profits. What is especially significant, however, is the effect of the combination of dichotomy and hyperbola. Whereas the dichotomy serves to create an invitation, the hyperbola serves to make the offer seem even more fantastic than it is. The dichotomy and hyperbole thus serve to promote and sell a product, regardless of

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[2] For a similar view, see Rob Wijnberg's article "Hoe Waarheid een Product Werd (How Truth Became a Product)" (2014).

whether it is a commercial product (Trump Steaks), or a political 'product' (political support for Trump).

In this section, I have discussed the truthful hyperbole and how this technique relates to Trump's strategy. But what exactly is the position of truth in this triangle between Trump, truthful hyperbole and the truth? Trump does not use 'truth' as a synonym for empirically observable truth or facts, but as a synonym for desired reality. Trump's strategy revolves around selling this desired reality, or what people want to be the truth, to his customers/voters. As long as Trump's voters continue to vote for him, he will continue to persuade them that their desired reality is also the 'truth,' regardless of whether this truth matches the empirically observable reality. In short, this 'truth' is the product Trump has been selling in his political career. This manipulation of truth, then, can be seen as the cornerstone of his political success, and possibly his entire political strategy.

Farage and Trump

In my analysis of Farage's speech I mentioned that emotionally inflammatory language plays an important role. However, when Farage's language is viewed through the lens of Trump's manipulation of truth as a sales strategy, it becomes clear that both Farage and Trump present their message as a product. To be specific, both Farage and Trump are selling a desired 'truth' to their consumers / voters - they are politicians who play into the supposed 'truth' of their target audience. If the target audience votes for Farage or Trump, the audience's 'truth' is confirmed, regardless of whether this changes the empirically observable truth. Obviously, the 'truth' to Farage, Trump or their target audience is not factual 'truth,' - there are no observations about what causes the problems they identify (e.g. immigrant flow, unemployment, etc.) and Farage and Trump make no suggestions as to how they intend to (practically) solve these problems.

To Farage and Trump, the 'truth' they sell is not an indication of an actual 'truth,' but an emotional truth - what people feel is true, or what people want to be true. In short, the 'truth' that Farage and Trump appeal to is a combination of worldview and dreams for the future. This emotional truth that is relatively unrelated to facts can be used or manipulated by them in the way that suits them best. Facts merely serve the 'truth' they sell, and facts that do not support this 'truth' can be ignored. The 'truth' of Farage and Trump is malleable, and in the process in which they make their truth,

emotions and beliefs are more important than facts. Through their emotionally inflammatory language, they create an atmosphere that feeds fear and discontentment.

They then respond to this by selling themselves and/or their message as the solution to the problem. They sell it as something the voter needs. In other words, their manipulation of the truth mainly serves to satisfy the needs of their constituencies and constituents. They ensure that their message corresponds to what the voter would like to hear. With this the truth becomes a product, a product that must be marketed.

In the political game of Farage, Trump and other post-truth politicians, politics has become a consumer product, where post-truth politicians use the aforementioned communication techniques to evoke feelings of fear, insecurity and uncertainty, creating a need for safety and/or assurance, and present themselves as the answer to satisfy these needs. Facts hardly play a role at all in their rhetoric and are made subordinate to opinions. This accounts for the situation that, despite fact-checking by mainstream media, Trump's supporters remain loyal to him. They do not care about whether he is manipulating the truth and do not consult the media that investigate it. This disinterest in fact-checking is explained by the fact that they live in their own filter bubble; they already know they agree with Trump et al. and only consume information that confirms their existing worldview. Facts that go against this worldview are ignored: after all, Trump caters for a need that is not related to facts. The filter bubble is reinforced by the fact that they keep repeating random bits of information that they accept as true and that are consistent with their own ideas in their communication with others.

This results in a circulation of information in which the same message has been repeated and shared so many times that it has become unstoppable. Ultimately, the message is accepted as truth, reaffirming and strengthening the 'truth' of the post-truth politician.

Conclusion

Julian Baggini justly writes in his *A Short History of Truth* (2017) that "if we didn't believe that truth mattered, we wouldn't be talking about post-truth at all" (14). Truths can be, and often are, difficult to understand, discover, explain, and verify. They are also staggeringly easy to hide, distort, misuse or twist. Sometimes it cannot even be said with any certainty what different truths there are, and how these truths relate to facts.

In this thesis I signal a tendency where fact-checking the truth does not help sufficiently against post-truth politics. Although in general people do not search for lies,

they often want to believe, out of discontent, fear, and uncertainty, that what is being said is true as long as it is consistent with their own ideas and worldview. In post-truth politics, the manipulation of the truth often takes place through marketing/advertising techniques. In other words, post-truth politicians regard truth as a product to sell, with themselves reaping the profit. This is a disconcerting development in politics, which I hope to have demonstrated through the examples of Farage and Trump.

Chapter 2: Factors Contributing to the Rise of Post-Truth

Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze Lee McIntyre's *Post-Truth*, a study which attempts to answer the question of what post-truth is and where it has come from. McIntyre defines post-truth as follows: "Post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not. And this is a recipe for political domination" (13). In *Post-Truth*, McIntyre attempts to explain why post-truth occurs and how it can be challenged. He argues that the rise of post-truth has been caused by several factors, such as the rise of science denial (17), cognitive biases (35), the decline of traditional media and the decline in the importance of objectivity as a goal in the media (63), new media's role in the spread of fake news (89) and the philosophical influence of postmodernism on the concept of truth (123). In this chapter, I will provide an overview of these factors and how they have contributed to the existence of post-truth according to McIntyre. This will allow me to further contextualize how post-truth politicians such as Farage and Trump manipulate the truth, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Denial of Science

Scientific denialism predates post-truth by several decades and, according to McIntyre, post-truth and scientific denialism share the common trait of deliberately undermining facts for personal gain. For this reason, McIntyre considers scientific denialism a precursor of post-truth.

McIntyre distinguishes two concepts within scientific denialists' skepticism with regard to science. The first is the idea that scientists are biased and that this bias impacts their research in such a way that its results cannot be trusted (18). The second idea is that it is impossible to prove a theory to be completely true, and that a theory that is almost certainly true should not be accepted as being actually true until no single gap in our knowledge remains; or as McIntyre puts it: "until a theory is absolutely proven, they

believe, a competing theory could always be true" (20). Scientific denialists take advantage of any 'gap of knowledge' to reject those theories which they disagree with. Robert Crease, a professor of philosophy, explains this as follows:

> Science denial involves accepting science and expert advice for most things — I consult engineers when I buy a house, I listen to the weather people when making a decision about how to dress — but when it comes to specific findings I don't like, I reject them as wrong. That's essentially what THE WORKSHOP AND THE WORLD is about — the different ways this happens, and how to respond (Forbes 2019).

However, this leaves us with the question of where the beliefs of science deniers originate from and why they hold these beliefs. According to McIntyre, scientific denialism is rooted in corporate interests, and specifically in the way that corporate lobbyists exert an influence over the public perception of certain (often politicized) topics, thereby turning their economic agendas into ideological agendas. In his discussion of how corporate lobbying has resulted in the denial of science, McIntyre uses the history of how the tobacco industry lobbied to obfuscate the dangers of smoking as an example[3]. In the 1950s, when it was becoming increasingly clear that smoking posed a significant health risk, the tobacco industry began to respond and lobby. Various actors in the tobacco industry came together to sponsor the Tobacco Industry Research Committee, founded in 1958, whose sole purpose was to convince the public there were no health risks associated with smoking. Their strategy was successful and the health risks of smoking remained controversial for several decades, until scientific evidence for the health risks of smoking became too abundant for the tobacco industry to ignore any longer. The general opinion is that economic interests were the main drive behind the tobacco industry's scheme of deception: distorting the facts resulted in greater profits than honesty would have. The tobacco industry's tactics showed that even in the face of legal action, disputing scientific evidence can be economically profitable. Furthermore, the history of the tobacco lobby served as an example for other industries.

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[3] For more extensive research on the history of lobbying by the tobacco industry see *Lies, Incorporated* by Ari Rabin-Havt and Media Matters.

McIntyre notes how the oil and gas industry has applied the same strategy in response to the scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change (29). Fossil fuels have been shown to be the leading cause of anthropogenic climate change, and therefore action to prevent or combat climate change would likely involve a shift away from non-renewable energy sources. In other words, scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change poses a risk to the profits of the oil and gas industry. The oil and gas industry recognized this risk and responded by doing what the tobacco industry had done previously: they turned their financial interests into an ideological issue by making climate change a subject of scientific controversy, even though the vast majority of scientists are now in agreement on the causes of climate change. McIntyre summarizes the strategy of the denial of science by corporate lobbies as follows:

> Find and fund your own experts, use this to suggest to the media that there are two sides to the story, push your side through public relations and governmental lobbying, and capitalize on the resulting public confusion to question whatever scientific result you wish to dispute (24).

In other words, corporate lobbies mask their financial interests while politicizing a scientific issue by bringing controversial perspectives into the picture. This changes the scientific debate into an ideological debate. The result is that facts and scientific evidence cease to play a decisive role in that debate and end up being obscured by a chorus of competing claims. McIntyre describes the end result of the oil and gas industry scheme in the U.S. anno 1988 as follows:

> The bottom line is that despite the complete disclosure of [the American Petroleum Institute's] battle plan [against the science of climate change] less than a week after it was made, it was still wildly successful. The "facts" didn't matter. The media were by now well trained to reflexively present "both sides of the story" on any "controversial" scientific issue. As a result, the public remains confused. And our new president [Trump] (among other prominent Republicans such as Sen. James Inhofe and Sen. Ted Cruz) continues to proclaim that climate change is a hoax (33).

Both the tobacco lobby and the oil and gas lobby have used the guise of 'scientific' research to obscure their propaganda campaigns. When we consider the history of corporate lobbying and how various lobbies have used 'science' to distort the facts, it is unsurprising that people have become skeptical about scientific statements. On the relationship between lobbying, science denial and post-truth, McIntyre states that:

> The tactics that we see employed in the post-truth world of today were learned in the earlier campaigns of truth deniers who wanted to fight the scientific consensus and won (34).

As such it can be said that the origins of post-truth can, at least in part, be traced back to the science denial tactics used by corporate lobbyists, which played a major role in the growth of science denial that has emerged since then.

Cognitive Bias

Another factor that has contributed to post-truth according to McIntyre is cognitive bias in the human mind. Cognitive bias is the systematic tendency of human beings to make errors when processing or interpreting information. This results in judgments and decisions that deviate from the norm or are illogical. Various types of cognitive bias can warp the process of what people end up 'believing' and 'not believing', and some of those cognitive biases can allow spurious beliefs to gain a foothold in people's minds.

One important phenomenon that can lead people to incorrect conclusions is cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person is confronted with information that contradicts his or her existing beliefs, ideas or values. This contradiction results in psychological discomfort. To minimize this discomfort, people will try to find ways to resolve the contradiction. The first way of doing this is to adjust your own beliefs to reflect the facts now in front of you. However, for various reasons, people are not always able to adjust their existing beliefs fully and as a result they may be inclined to maintain certain beliefs despite ample evidence that those beliefs are incorrect. This is where cognitive biases come into play.

McIntyre first discusses two cognitive biases that are of particular importance to post-truth: social conformity and confirmation bias (42). Social conformity, also known as conformity bias, refers to the propensity of people to use the actions of others as a

reference for appropriate behavior, rather than depending on their own independent critical thinking. An example of social conformity bias would be the following: if I myself have reasonable doubts about politician X in an election, but my friends and family are all unanimously supportive of politician X, I may dismiss my own reservations and go along with the prevailing view of those around me. In this example, due to social conformity, I reject my own conclusions (even though these are sound and logical) in favor of the majority opinion, thus exhibiting cognitive bias that may be exploited by a post-truth politician.

Confirmation bias, meanwhile, is the propensity to process information in such a manner that one's existing beliefs, ideas or values are validated or supported. If social conformity means rejecting one's own considered conclusions due to outside pressure, confirmation bias means rejecting critical thinking due to inside pressure. In the example given above of politician X: if I hold a favorable opinion of politician X, confirmation bias means that I will only tend to remember (or even, only tend to read) news articles that show politician X in a good light and I will tend to forget or ignore any information that does not confirm my existing opinion of politician X.

If people who are exhibiting both these cognitive biases are confronted with cognitive dissonance caused by information that contradicts their existing set of beliefs, they can easily circumvent any psychological discomfort that this causes by either simply accepting the beliefs of their peers without engaging in critical thinking (e.g. social conformity), or they can disregard anything that contradicts their existing set of beliefs (e.g. confirmation bias). In other words, these two mechanisms lead to an environment where, instead of critical thinking, emotion plays a greater role in shaping a person's beliefs.

According to McIntyre, while both social conformity and confirmation bias contribute to post-truth, confirmation bias in particular is inextricably linked to post-truth due to its relationship with a psychological phenomenon that is known as motivated reasoning. McIntyre defines motivated reasoning as:

> […] a state of mind in which we find ourselves willing (perhaps at an unconscious level) to shed our beliefs in light of our opinions; confirmation bias is the mechanism by which we may try to accomplish this, by interpreting information so that it confirms our preexisting beliefs (45).

More generally, motivated reasoning is a phenomenon whereby people seek justifications for their beliefs or those views that they find desirable in order to resolve the psychological discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance, instead of critically assessing where the truth is most likely to be located. As stated by McIntyre in the passage above, confirmation bias is one of the cognitive biases that is commonly associated with motivated reasoning. However, two other cognitive biases are associated with motivated reasoning and are common in post-truth according to McIntyre: the backfire effect and the Dunning-Kruger effect.

The backfire effect is a cognitive bias that was proposed in 2010 by Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, two political scientists. McIntyre explains Nyhan and Reifler's research as follows:

> […] they found that when partisans were presented with evidence that one of their politically expedient beliefs was wrong, they would reject the evidence and "double down" on their mistaken belief. Worse, in some cases the presentation of refutatory evidence caused some subjects to increase the strength of their mistaken beliefs (48).

Although the backfire effect, it is argued, causes people to reject evidence that contradicts their beliefs and may even make those beliefs stronger, McIntyre also notes that repeated exposure to corrective information will eventually erode those strong beliefs:

> Even the strongest partisans will eventually reach a "tipping point" and change their beliefs after they are continually exposed to corrective evidence (51).

It should be noted, however, that more recent studies (dating from 2015-2019) have not found evidence for the backfire effect (Sippitt 2019). As such, the evidence with regard to the backfire effect as a cognitive bias remains inconclusive.

The second cognitive bias related to motivated reasoning is the Dunning-Kruger effect. The Dunning-Kruger effect, also known as the overconfidence bias, refers to a mechanism whereby people with a low level of skill or knowledge in a certain field overestimate their own capabilities. People affected by the Dunning-Kruger effect do this in an attempt to deceive themselves, not due to an urge to impress or deceive others.

They are unable to acknowledge that they do not excel in a particular area. Much like confirmation bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect is a result of an internal pressure to excel, rather than external pressure. McIntyre notes that the Dunning-Kruger effect may extend to the political sphere:

> But is it therefore any surprise that to the extent we are emotionally attached to our political beliefs – and in fact may even see them as part of our identity – we will be reluctant to admit that we were wrong and may even be willing to put our own "gut instinct" up against the facts of experts? (53)

Strong identification with a particular political party means that the weaknesses and failures of the party become – by extension – the weaknesses and failures of the person exhibiting the Dunning-Kruger effect. To give an example: if I consider politician X to be an extension of my own identity, I may tend to overestimate the knowledge and abilities of politician X if I am exhibiting the Dunning-Kruger effect. After all, if he or she is 'excellent' and I identify with him or her very strongly, his or her 'excellence' will also reflect on me. However, if someone else finds fault within the beliefs or actions of politician X, I may well interpret this as a threat to my own beliefs and identity. To avoid any psychological discomfort, I will therefore tend to overestimate politician X.

The complex interplay between cognitive dissonance, social conformity, conformity bias, motivated reasoning, backfire effect and the Dunning-Kruger effect can create an environment in which people simply believe what is easiest for them to believe. More often than not, those beliefs will be shared with family, friends and idols. McIntyre summarizes the relationship between cognitive biases and post-truth as follows:

> If we are already motivated to want to believe certain things, it doesn't take much to tip us over to believing them, especially if others we care about already do so. Our inherent cognitive biases make us ripe for manipulation and exploitation by those who have an agenda to push, especially if they can discredit all other sources of information. Just as there is no escape from

cognitive bias, a news silo[4] is no defense against post-truth. For the danger is that at some level they are connected. We are all beholden to our sources of information. But we are especially vulnerable when they tell us exactly what we want to hear (62).

The sum of these cognitive biases is a psychological state that is susceptible to exploitation by those who want to take advantage of those cognitive biases. In the context of post-truth, not only do these cognitive biases make people susceptible to deception, but they also prevent people from being able to recognize their own susceptibility. This may cause people to be willing victims of the deceptions of those who want to exploit them, such as post-truth politicians.[5]

The Decline of Traditional Media

The third major contributor to the rise of post-truth according to McIntyre is the decline of traditional media. McIntyre refers to the declining importance of newspapers and television in how Americans receive their news. According to him, in the 1950s most households paid for one or two daily newspapers (63). By 2010, the percentage of American households paying for a newspaper had dropped to 37% (64). This is a sign that newspapers are no longer a primary source of news for Americans. A similar decline can be seen in the number of Americans who rely on the half-hour news segments on nationwide television broadcasts as their primary news source. McIntyre states that in the 1950s and 1960s virtually all news shows operated at a loss and were generally added to the line-up of the networks in order to satisfy the Federal Communications Commission's requirements that the stations were "in the public's interest, convenience or necessity" (Radio Act of 1927). If networks failed to adhere to the requirements set by the FCC, they risked losing their license to continue broadcasting. As a result, networks usually invested a decent amount of money to ensure the quality of the investigative reporting of their news broadcasts, even though these news shows were not directly profitable, simply because low-quality news could potentially lead to the demise of the entire network.

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[4] A 'News silo' refers to a form of intellectual isolation that is caused by only consuming information that reinforces the beliefs that one already holds.

[5] For a similar view, see Hugo Mercier's study *Not Born Yesterday*. Mercier suggests that people's beliefs in misinformation or lies are not a product of gullibility, but of explicit resistance to new ideas.

Because of the high quality of television news reporting, the 1950s and 1960s are referred to as the golden age of broadcasting (McIntyre 65). While certain aspects of the golden age of broadcasting lingered for some time, the advent of late-night news shows, such as *Nightline*, showed that there was a market for more news broadcasting than the previous norm of a single half-hour news segment per day. Furthermore, the success of CNN, from its launch in 1980 onwards, showed that twenty-four hour news programming could be profitable, even if the investigative quality of this news was lower than the news programs made by traditional broadcast networks (67).[6]

The emergence of twenty-four hour news programming coincided with another development: the rise of deliberately partisan news coverage. Partisan news finds its origin in the controversy over the role of the media in the Vietnam war. As the war raged on, right-wing Americans became increasingly frustrated over the highly critical reporting of the Vietnam war by the majority of the media. In response to what they saw as highly biased reporting, right-wing Americans wanted news coverage that reflected their values as well. However, this demand was only catered to sparingly until the appearance of Rush Limbaugh's partisan right-wing radio shows (1988). In contrast to mainstream media, Limbaugh's show did not seek to provide a neutral perspective on what was happening in the world, but simply to reiterate what a certain section of society already felt was true:

> People listened to Limbaugh's show not to learn new "facts", but because they felt alienated from what they perceived to be the political bias of the news coverage they were getting from newspapers and TV (McIntyre 68).

'News coverage' was only of secondary importance on Limbaugh's shows. The real underlying need of his listeners stemmed from their sense of alienation from the mainstream media and their desire for affirmation of their own world views. Limbaugh's shows satisfied that need by showing its listeners that other people shared their views:

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[6] For additional information on the economic reasons for the decline of traditional media, see *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered The World* by James Ball.

Limbaugh's show allowed people to have their own voices heard and participate in a community. Before anyone in the media was even talking about confirmation bias, Rush Limbaugh had already discovered it. And it made him a Juggernaut (69).

Rush Limbaugh's shows proved that partisan news coverage could be successful on the radio, but it was the television network Fox News which proved that the formula was equally, if not more effective on television. Fox News, founded in 1996, combined the profitability of a twenty-four hour news channel with the popularity of partisan news coverage and it was a great success. The combination of round-the-clock news programming, low-quality, partisan journalism and the accessibility of television as a medium has turned partisan news networks such as Fox News into super-spreaders of fake news.

While the success of partisan news networks was a major contributor to the rise of fake news, mainstream media also made their own contribution as they responded to the success of the partisan networks. In an attempt to differentiate themselves from the partisan news networks, mainstream networks such as CNN and 'prestige press' newspapers sought to emphasize their objectivity by reporting on controversial topics from multiple perspectives in an attempt to show that their reporting was fair and balanced (75). While this may sound like a sound journalistic strategy in theory, it had the opposite effect: placing scientists on the same level as conspiracy theorists, while raising certain conspiracy theorists up to the level of scientists. The unsurprising result was that it became increasingly difficult to discern accurate information from misinformation:

Journalists took the bait and started to cover both sides of "controversial" issues like climate change and vaccines, even if the controversy had been generated only by those who had something financial or political at stake. And the consequence for the general public was utter confusion over what amounted to a media-abetted campaign of disinformation (McIntyre 77).

The end result of the changes that traditional media have faced over the past decades is that it has become increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish between biased

news and unbiased news. This has led some people to mistrust *all* news sources; and from there, it is just a short step to giving up on any critical assessment of the quality of your news sources altogether:

> Since the audience for news now consists of so many partisans, the line between traditional and alternative media has blurred, and many now prefer to get their news from sources that adhere to questionable values for truth telling. Indeed, many cannot even tell these days which sources are biased. And if one believes that all media are biased, perhaps it makes less difference to choose an information source that is biased in one's favor (86).

Because audiences are becoming increasingly indifferent to – or defeatist about – the possibility of ever arriving at 'the truth,' they are giving up on getting high-quality journalism or news reporting altogether. This means that they are even more likely to believe in and help to spread fake news, thus contributing to post-truth themselves.

New Media

The fourth major contributor to the rise of post-truth that McIntyre mentions is new media. The term 'new media' includes all forms of communication that are digitally distributed, such as social media, blogs and websites providing content such as news, opinion or entertainment. McIntyre notes that in tandem with the decline of the 'traditional' media, large numbers of people have drifted to social media platforms, where they have been able to join communities that share a similar outlook with the people they know and trust.

The most notable of these platforms is Facebook, which allows people to connect with others – whom they may or may not know 'in real life' – and to share content on their own personal page. Due to its algorithm, Facebook displays the content and news stories that are the most likely to be positively received by its users; as a result, Facebook's algorithms show users content that confirms their existing opinions and beliefs, regardless of whether or not that content is true. Facebook, like other social media platforms that work along similar lines, therefore reinforces the motivated reasoning and confirmation bias that people are already susceptible to, and social media

has enabled content and 'news stories' to be disseminated to huge numbers of people with unprecedented speed – but without any concern at all for the veracity of that news:

> We could click on "news" stories that told us what we wanted to hear (whether they had been vetted for accuracy or not) as opposed to some of the factual content from mainstream media that may have been less palatable. Without knowing that they were doing so, people could feed their desire for confirmation bias (not to mention score some free news content) directly, without bothering to patronize traditional news sources (McIntyre 93).

The result of social media's role as a news source is the emergence of what McIntyre calls 'news silos,' which in the context of social media more generally are known as filter bubbles: the situation in which an internet user becomes increasingly intellectually isolated due to algorithms that only show him or her information that caters to his or her existing personal beliefs. This process places users inside their own cultural or ideological 'bubble,' making it less likely that they will come into contact with information that contradicts or challenges their world view, thus preventing any cognitive dissonance that could lead them to change their beliefs. The filter bubble problem is exacerbated when the user is 'bubbled' inside a news ecosystem that is intended to deceive, often motivated by political and/or financial gain: fake news. Even if the user approaches the articles shown by the algorithm with a critical attitude, it is often hard to distinguish genuine news from fake news:

> There are so many "news" sources these days that it is nearly impossible to tell which of them are reliable and which are not without some careful vetting. Then there is the problem that some of the sources have taken on clever disguises to try to make themselves look as legitimate as possible. […] With the presentation of traditionally vetted, fact-checked stories right alongside lies and propaganda, how can one tell what is true anymore? Indeed, what a perfect storm for the exploitation of our ignorance and cognitive biases by those with an agenda to put forward (97).

But what has caused the recent rise in fake news? One reason is the simple profit motive: clicks on articles generate advertising revenue. More internet users are likely to

click on an article with a sensational or outrageous headline; the veracity of that content is a secondary consideration. The more clicks these articles get, the more revenue will be generated for the purveyors of that content. These kinds of articles are better known as 'clickbait.' The success of clickbait has led to clickbait 'factories': companies based in lower-income countries where people are hired to produce clickbait articles en masse to maximize revenues. While some 'fake news factories' emerge purely in order to make money from advertising revenue, others have a political purpose. For instance, there are Russian 'troll farms,' which are fake news factories dedicated to spreading politically inflammatory articles and comments with the objective of exacerbating political discord in other countries and furthering the agenda of the Russian government. Additionally, there are individual creators of fake news who do this for personal reasons. McIntyre gives the example of Cameron Harris, a Trump supporter who was the author of the fake news article "Tens of Thousands of Fraudulent Clinton Votes Found in Ohio Warehouse", one of the most widely viewed fake news articles of the general elections of 2016:

> Harris invented a janitor, purloined a picture of British ballot boxes from the Internet, and cooked up the whole thing right from his kitchen table. And the story was shared with six million people! […] Harris claimed that his only motive was money. He made about 5,000 dollars in a few days but said that the most important thing was that he learned something [about how easily people believe something.] When Harris's role in the story came out, he was immediately fired from his job and expressed remorse for what he'd done, though he justified it by saying that fake news had been created on "both sides" (107).

McIntyre's example shows that because of social media's wide reach and easy access, and the speed with which information can spread on social media, just about anybody can make a significant contribution to the spread of fake news.

The political aspect of fake news is reminiscent of a different type of misinformation that is intended to further a particular political agenda: propaganda. Propaganda is used to influence audiences in order to advance a political cause. While propaganda is typically associated with governments, it can just as well be produced by groups of citizens, media organizations or companies – or, as in the case of Harris,

individuals. Both 'fake news' and propaganda manipulate their audiences to further an agenda. This raises the question: is fake news a type of propaganda? However, although fake news may have some overlap with propaganda, this does not necessarily mean that fake news *is* propaganda. On propaganda, McIntyre states that:

> Propaganda is not necessarily an attempt to convince someone of something that is untrue, nor should one think that all propagandistic claims are made insincerely. […] The goal of propaganda is not to convince someone that you are right, but to demonstrate that you have authority over the truth itself (113).

Unlike fake news, propaganda is not necessarily 'fake' or deceptive in nature, but it is more difficult to distinguish propaganda's attempts to assert authority over the truth from the way in which fake news distorts the truth. Can the manipulation of the truth in fake news be considered an attempt to show that one has authority over the truth? McIntyre suggests that it can. McIntyre quotes Jason Stanley, author of *How Propaganda Works*, who notes that authoritarian politics frequently make use of propaganda to control or sow confusion over the truth (113). Spreading fake news could be viewed as such a tactic, especially in the context of the presidency of Donald Trump, who frequently seeks to use fake news to his advantage. McIntyre connects Stanley's words to an idea proposed by Holocaust historian Timothy Snyder, who commented in a radio interview that post-truth may be a precursor to fascism (Illing). McIntyre states:

> This [idea of post-truth as pre-fascism] may seem a heavy conclusion to draw from something as facile as fake news. But with today's social media to facilitate the spread of misinformation faster than a propagandist's dream, shouldn't we at least be awake to this possibility? (116)

McIntyre notes that if one assumes that the purpose of all fake news is financial gain, the idea of fake news as a form of (incipient) propaganda seems unlikely. However, the example of Cameron Harris, who fabricated the 'Fraudulent Clinton Votes' story, shows that the boundary between financial gain and political intent is often blurred in practice. In my opinion, political fake news that is spread to sow political discord could indeed be viewed as a form of propaganda, which lends credence to McIntyre's idea that fake news is an attempt to control the truth. In the context of post-truth as a form of pre-

fascism, McIntyre suggests that fake news can perhaps be seen as a form of pre-propaganda, an early sign of pre-fascism:

> If post-truth really is pre-fascism, maybe fake news is merely an early tactic, whose purpose is to soften us up for what comes later. Fake news confuses us and makes us doubt whether any source can be trusted. Once we don't know what to believe anymore, this can be exploited. Perhaps true propaganda comes later – once it doesn't matter whether we believe it – because we already know who is in charge (117).

Regardless of whether or not fake news should be considered an incipient form of propaganda, the fact remains that the massive reach of social media and the interconnectedness that it has brought about have been a major contributor to the spread of fake news. As such, social media can be considered as one of the causes of the rise of post-truth.

Postmodernism

According to McIntyre, the most significant contributor to the rise of post-truth is postmodernism. However, before we can discover why McIntyre holds this belief, we must first consider what postmodernism is.

The postmodernist movement emerged in the mid to late 20th century and reached its peak influence in the 1980s and 1990s. Postmodernism dissociates itself, both temporally and ideologically, from its precursor: modernism. That dissociation was expressed through attempts to criticize and deconstruct the idea of absolute and objective systems and the grand narratives that were so prominent in modernism and structuralism. As a result, postmodernism is associated with criticism of the status quo and attempts to address inequality and bigotry in systems that were previously considered absolute, and it also is associated with relativism, where – in its most extreme forms – empirical knowledge has no place at all. Due to their often highly theoretical and/or conceptual nature, postmodernist texts often use dense, vague and experimental language, a frequent point of criticism among skeptics of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a highly diverse academic and artistic movement with a broad scale of influence in a range of different disciplines. Academically, postmodernism has

had a larger influence on the soft sciences, particularly on disciplines that adopt theorizing discourses such as philosophy, gender theory and literary theory. In terms of the arts, the influence of postmodernism has been similarly wide-ranging, including (but not limited to) architecture, dance, contemporary art, literature and theater. Notable characteristics of postmodernism are the frequent use of irony, skepticism of the idea of any objective reality and distrust of a variety of narratives and systems based on authority, although different disciplines feature different expressions of postmodernism. As a result, what may be defined as 'postmodernism' in one discipline can be almost unrecognizable as such from the 'postmodernist' perspective of another discipline. It is difficult to say what connects the abstract, minimalistic dance choreography of Lucinda Childs' *Dance* (1979) with the deeply intertextual, flowery language of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), and yet both these works of art are considered postmodern. McIntyre summarizes the history of postmodernism as follows:

> When one speaks of postmodernism over the last thirty years one is probably talking about a movement that grew out of literary criticism in many colleges and universities in the 1980s, as a result of Jean-Francois Lyotard's influential 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. There is a rich history of postmodernist thought by many other thinkers […] that is important as well, but I will have a chance here only to sketch out a few foundational ideas. One was Derrida's theory of "deconstructing" literature, whereby we cannot rely on the idea that an author knew what he or she "meant" in a text so we must break it apart and examine it as a function of the political, social, historical, and cultural assumptions behind it (124).

The theory of deconstruction had consequences for the idea of truth as well. If all one's utterances are a reflection of one's political, social, historical and cultural assumptions, that will extend to one's concept of truth as well:

> Suddenly, the idea that there was a right or a wrong answer to what a text (whether written or behavioral) "meant" was thrown into question. Indeed the notion of truth itself was now under scrutiny, for one had to recognize that in the act of deconstruction, the critic was bringing his or her own values, history, and assumptions to the interpretation as well. This meant that there could be many

answers, rather than just one, for any deconstruction. The postmodernist approach is one in which everything is questioned and little is taken at face value. There is no right answer, only narrative (125).

From this summary, McIntyre arrives at two ideological pillars within postmodernism: the first is that "there is no such thing as objective truth" (126) and the second that "any profession of truth is nothing more than a reflection of the political ideology of the person who is making it." (126) McIntyre arrives at this second pillar by summarizing the work of Michel Foucault as follows:

> [All knowledge claims] are a bullying tactic used by the powerful to force those who are weaker to accept their ideological views. Since there is no such thing as "truth," anyone who claims to "know" something is really just trying to oppress us, not educate us. Having power allows us to control what is true, not the other way around. If there are many perspectives, then insisting that we accept any particular one is a form of fascism (126).

McIntyre states that the moment when postmodernism started to have a significant influence on the concept of truth marked the emergence of the strong programme in sociology. The strong programme is a process of self-reflexivity developed in order to minimize biases in research. McIntyre defines the strong programme as:

> The strong programme said that all theories – whether true or false – should be thought of as the product of ideology. If one does not believe that there is such a thing as truth, then it is an open question why scientists favor certain theories over others; to say that it is because of evidence just won't do (129).

The influence of the strong programme and postmodern ideas, which also began to affect the hard sciences, provoked a critical response from scientists. One of the most notable criticisms concerned the Sokal affair. Alan Sokal, a professor in mathematical physics, submitted an article to an academic journal of postmodern cultural studies entitled *Social Text*. The article was deliberately filled with wild leaps in logic, absurd analogies, and a use of quantum physics that did not make sense. And yet, not only was the article accepted for publication in *Social Text*, it was published in a special issue

dedicated to arguing against common criticisms of postmodern thought. Sokal had in fact submitted the article as an experiment to show that postmodern authors used scientific language without understanding science itself. For many scientists, the Sokal affair was proof of postmodernism's lack of scientific merit.

McIntyre believes that the Sokal affair inadvertently showcased the way in which postmodern techniques can be used to undermine the truth to audiences by manipulators seeking to use these techniques for their own gain:

> Although it was an embarrassing moment for postmodernism, it also gave wide publicity to their views and made them available to others who might not have seen them otherwise. And some of those voyeurs were on the right (133).

McIntyre puts forward the idea that right-wing thinkers based their strategies of truth denial on postmodernist deconstructions of truth. He states:

> Right-wing ideologues, who had a beef against certain scientific claims (like evolution), found within postmodernism the techniques they needed to undermine the idea that scientific theories were superior (133).

However, to me it seems unlikely that many post-truth figureheads would be consumers of postmodern theory and literature. Indeed McIntyre argues that there does not have to be a direct link between postmodernism and post-truth politics for postmodern ideas to have been taken up in post-truth politics (141). His theory is that postmodern ideas have trickled down into the methods of the right through right-wing 'grapevines'. In this manner, the right may have appropriated the idea of truth as a relative concept and turned it into an anti-science stance, or as McIntyre puts it:

> The idea of "fighting the science" and claiming that "the truth is uncertain" was also used in the fight over acid rain, the ozone hole, and many others to follow (136).

According to McIntyre, the influence of postmodernism on pseudoscience can be seen in the notion of Intelligent Design. Intelligent Design, also known as ID, is a form of creationism that uses pseudoscience to justify the idea that life on earth exists because of an intelligent greater power (i.e. God), rather than natural processes such as evolution. Intelligent Design, he claims, paradoxically found its way into American classrooms through the use of postmodernist deconstruction, casting doubt on science

that contradicts the Bible, such as evolution theory (136). The self-proclaimed father of Intelligent Design, Philip E. Johnson, has cited postmodern theory as an inspiration for his wedge strategy, whereby doubt is continuously cast onto all empirical evidence until only the immaterial – or in this case more specifically, a particular interpretation of the Bible – remains (Johnson 1999). While Johnson names no specific postmodern thinkers who have influenced him, Johnson's complete rejection of empirical reality is not dissimilar to the view of radical relativists, such as Feyerabend. However, what sets Johnson apart from these radical relativists is his clear intent to manipulate: as suggested by the use of the word 'wedge' in 'wedge strategy,' Johnson's strategy for bringing creationism into the mainstream was not based on any sincere belief in the pseudoscience that he proposed, but it was rather an attempt to manipulate truth to achieve his goals. In other words, the core beliefs of Johnson's ideology are shaped by those strategies that will increase their power and influence. Of course, the result appears to be similar to the way that post-truth politics function.

As such, it is not unreasonable to assume that the repurposing of postmodern ideas by the proponents of 'ID' have inspired similar tactics in other movements. Specifically, McIntyre sees a link between 'ID' and the science deniers who emerged later:

> It could not be clearer that postmodernist thought had an influence on ID theory. It is also not in doubt that ID theory provided the blueprint for how climate change deniers would later fight their own battles: attack the existing science, identify and fund your own expert, push the idea that the issue is "controversial," get your own side out through the media and lobbying, and watch the public react (139).

The second argument that McIntyre makes in favor of the idea that postmodernism has influenced post-truth politics through right-wing thinkers consists of what McIntyre calls 'mea culpas' from Bruno Latour, one of the founders of social constructivism (141), and Michael Berube, a literary critic (143). Latour and Berube have expressed regrets about the way in which postmodern ideas have been appropriated by the Right. In his article "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" Latour explains that he sees a similarity between the arguments that Republicans make to dismiss climate change and the skeptical stance that he himself has taken in his postmodern deconstruction of truth (Latour 2004). Berube, meanwhile, states in his article "The Science Wars Redux" that

he sees a similarity between climate change denial and science studies, while simultaneously arguing that good has also come from these critiques (Berube 2011). In other words, Latour and Berube both note the similarities between the postmodernist deconstruction of truth and the conservative dismissal of truth, both assume postmodernism to be the root cause of this similarity, and both express regret over this assumed influence. McIntyre considers these regrets to be evidence for the relationship between postmodernism and post-truth:

> Is there any evidence of this [idea that right-wingers are using some of the same arguments and techniques of postmodernism to attack the truth of other scientific claims that clash with their conservative ideology]? Here we should turn to some of the "mea culpas" from postmodernists themselves, who have been horrified to see how some of their ideas have been used for right-wing purposes (141).

McIntyre's final argument for the notion that postmodernism has influenced post-truth politics through right-wing thinkers features the case of Mike Cernovich, a blogger and online personality who is most famous for spreading the Pizzagate conspiracy theory – a smear campaign directed at several prominent Democrat politicians based on wild accusations of child sex slavery. Although he does not identify as an alt-right figure, Cernovich is usually considered to be closely associated with the alt-right or the 'alt-light.' George Hawley, an assistant professor of Political Science at the University of Alabama who specializes in the alt-right and history of conservatism, defines the alt-light in his book *Making Sense of The Alt-Right* as a section of the alt-right that is less committed to identity politics and white nationalism (Hawley 213).

I would argue that regardless of specifics, Cernovich can easily be labeled as a participant in post-truth politics due to his promotion of fake news and conspiracy theories. But what is most notable about Cernovich is that he cites postmodernist theory as a direct influence on his own post-truth politics. In an interview published in *The New Yorker*, Cernovich states:

> Look, I read postmodernist theory in college. If everything is a narrative, then we need alternatives to the dominant narrative. I don't look like a guy who reads Lacan, do I? (Marantz)

Since it seems unlikely that many post-truth politicians would have been influenced by postmodern theory directly, McIntyre theorizes that there must be an indirect link between postmodernism and post-truth politics through the channel of right-wing thinkers. Puzzlingly, the example of Cernovich appears to contradict that idea, as he states that he was in fact influenced by postmodernist theory directly. This conundrum could be an indication that the relationship between postmodernism and post-truth is more complex than the examples of postmodernism's influence on post-truth outlined here would indicate.

Conclusion

McIntyre's work *Post-Truth* sets out how the rise of post-truth can be attributed to a complex set of factors, such as decades of lobbying that has facilitated a rise in science denialism, natural human cognitive biases that post-truth politicians have been able to take advantage of, a decrease in the quality of news reporting in traditional media, the rise of social media which has allowed biased or fake news stories to spread at great speed and on an unprecedented scale, and lastly the indirect influence that postmodernist deconstruction has had on the far right.

While McIntyre points out a range of factors that have contributed to post-truth, he considers the ideological root of post-truth to be postmodernism. His argument rests on the idea that both postmodernism and post-truth politics allow for distortions of the truth, an observation that leads him to conclude that post-truth politics was triggered by the advent of postmodernism. However, there are several gaps in McIntyre's theory that postmodernism was the ideological forebear of post-truth.

Firstly, McIntyre takes issue with the critical stance on the concept of truth that is sometimes taken by postmodern thinkers. But this begs the question: why does McIntyre specifically accuse postmodernism of being the ideological forebear of post-truth, rather than the philosophy of relativism in general? Secondly, while McIntyre presents individual cases in which postmodernism has influenced movements that are associated with science denialism, he provides no evidence that postmodern ideas have 'trickled down' to post-truth politics via conservative thinkers in the way that he suggests they have. Thirdly, McIntyre cites several individual cases in which

postmodernism has influenced the right, but provides no evidence that these individual cases are indicative of a trend.

        In my next chapter, I will discuss Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism as outlined in her study *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, in which she shows that certain manipulations of truth can be used to cultivate a critical perspective on what truth is and who gets to decide what truth is. I will contrast Hutcheon's perspective with McIntyre's in order to discuss the problems and strengths of their respective views on the manipulation of truth. In this discussion, I will also elaborate further on the problems with McIntyre's suggestion that postmodernism is the ideological forebear of post-truth.

Chapter 3: The Manipulation of Truth in Historiographic Metafiction

Introduction

In my previous chapter, I explained that Lee McIntyre views postmodernism as one of the root causes of post-truth. His view is based on the idea that postmodernism's deconstruction of science, authority and truth has provided an ideological inspiration for the truth-denial that characterizes today's post-truth politics. In this chapter, I will add more nuance to postmodernism's manipulation of truth and the effect it may have had on the concept of truth. To do this, I will analyze how truth is manipulated in historiographic metafiction, a postmodern genre of fiction writing. I will use Linda Hutcheon's extensive research on historiographic metafiction in her study *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) as the basis for my analysis.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages (5)." Historiographic metafiction draws attention to the idea that historical truth is a product of historiography, and that what society considers historical truth is always based on other texts and inherently partial. I will use Josephine Tey's detective novel *The Daughter of Time* (1951) as a case study to illustrate how questioning and reflecting on history can encourage readers to take a critical approach to the concepts of history and truth.

Historiographic metafiction

To answer the question of how historiographic metafiction manipulates the truth, I will first clarify what historiographic metafiction is and how it relates to truth. To do this, I will summarize how Hutcheon explains the genre and its relationship with the truth in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. In this work, Hutcheon explores and deconstructs the commonplace distinction between fact and fiction. She does this through one of the forms that the combination of fact and fiction can take in literary form: the historical novel. Historiography hinges on the idea that truth and history are intrinsically linked;

that there was a past, and that this past is knowable. According to this pre-modernist understanding of historiography, the 'real' exists in contrast to the fiction novel: that which is made up and therefore (in theory) does not interact with what is real. From this perspective, fiction and reality exist on separate planes from each other. Hutcheon draws attention to the issues thrown up by the notion that historiography and fiction are fully separate through her analysis of historiographic metafiction, highlighting the way in which the genre complicates this divide through "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) [which] made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past (5)."

Historiographic metafiction attempts to summon an awareness of history and fiction as constructs through the use of certain techniques and tropes. One such technique is the use of narrative elements that are historically substantiated alongside narrative elements that are purely fictional, such as meetings and relationships between fictional characters and historical characters, as happens in E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* (1975). *Ragtime* is a historical fiction set in the early 20th century. It features the colliding stories of historical characters, such as Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit and J.P. Morgan, along with those of several fictional characters who represent specific social groups from that time period, notably an upper middle-class white family, a black ragtime musician turned revolutionary and a Jewish immigrant. The use of this technique blurs the line between fiction and history, and prompts the reader to reflect on how to distinguish between 'made-up' history and 'real' history.

Another commonly used technique is the use of anachronistic elements in stories that are otherwise historically accurate, as in John Fowles' novel The *French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a historical fiction novel set in 1867. The novel centers on the love triangle between the male protagonist Charles Smithson, his fiancée Ernestina Freeman and the female protagonist Sarah Woodruff, with whom Charles becomes enamored in the course of the novel. Even though the novel is set in the Victorian era, the narrator frequently uses anachronisms (such as television, radio or political events of the 20th century) to comment on the plot or the characters. These anachronisms break the suspension of disbelief and force readers to acknowledge that they are reading a work of fiction, causing them to reflect on what actually separates the 'fake' fictional aspects from the 'true' historical aspects of the work. According to Hutcheon, techniques such as these prompt readers to

reconsider the way they perceive history and the way both history and fiction relate to truth:

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity (93).

By presenting readers with incongruities and leading them to reflect on those incongruities, historiographic metafiction reveals that both history and fiction are both, in fact, products of discourse. In the case of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, this is done through a combination of several techniques, notably the aforementioned anachronisms, but also the frequent meta-commentary of the narrator, who frequently voices his displeasure at the characters' actions and reveals himself to be the voice of the author halfway through the novel. These techniques culminate in the last few chapters of the novel, which feature multiple alternative endings. In one of these endings, the author inserts himself into the novel as a character to turn back time, undoing the first ending and allowing the reader to engage with other possible outcomes. This results in two similar endings of equal status, in one of which it is implied that the main characters Charles and Sarah may stay involved with one another, and in the other that they do not want anything more to do with each other. These techniques draw attention to the novel's constructed nature, and serve to remind the reader that they are reading a work of fiction, something that has been crafted and fashioned deliberately, rather than being a reflection of a historical past. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* thus emphasizes that the novel is in fact a contemporary product masquerading as a historical text.

However, the consequences of this unmasking go beyond the confines of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* itself and extend to the entire genre of the historical novel: while the self-reflexivity, meta-narration and anachronisms used in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* serve to highlight the novel's own constructedness, it also reveals that all historical novels, including those that encourage the suspension of disbelief through their historical accuracy, are products of a contemporary discourse. Furthermore, the novel shows that there is no such thing as a division between 'real'

and 'fake' in fiction, but that the historical and fictional aspects of a novel are both expressions of the same discourse.

A reader who reflects on the full implications of this revelation will soon realize that this applies to 'history' more generally: all the historical sources from which we gather our understanding of history are the products of a very specific viewpoint, interpreted through the lens of contemporary discourse, and cannot therefore provide a 'true,' 'objective' or 'impartial' reflection of a historical event. This is what Hutcheon means when she states that historiographic metafiction asserts that both fiction and history are discourse (93).

Similarly, the novel *Ragtime* draws attention the idea that both fiction and history are discourse, but takes a different approach in the way it does this than *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. *Ragtime* features fictional encounters between historical figures who never actually met or interacted at all (such as the interaction between J.P. Morgan and Henry Ford) as well as relationships between fictional characters and historical figures (such as the involvement between socialite and silent film actress Evelyn Nesbitt and a fictional Jewish immigrant named Tateh and his daughter). *Ragtime* blurs the division between history and fiction, prompting the reader to look up what is 'real' and what is 'made-up.' However, the fact that this difference is frequently far from apparent shows that the division between fiction and history is not as self-evident as is often assumed. *Ragtime* shows that the way culture constructs historical figures is often indistinguishable from pure fiction. By problematizing the dividing line between fiction and history, *Ragtime* urges the reader to reflect on what makes history 'real' and who decides what counts as history.

While *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Ragtime* use contrasting techniques, both these novels, as well as other works of historiographic metafiction, experiment with readers' preconceived notions of what history and fiction should be, deliberately obfuscating the line between fact and fiction. It is through this distortion and manipulation of historical facts that historiographic metafiction manipulates the truth.

However, as is shown by *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Ragtime*, the manipulation in historiographic metafiction is always embedded in an effort to highlight the arbitrary nature of the distinction between 'fact,' 'fiction,' and 'history'. Historiographic metafiction manipulates the truth in order to problematize the concept of truth, and the genre's ability to problematize the truth becomes clearer when the

critical scope is widened beyond the historical dimension to include the way humanity interacts with what is real more generally. Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction reveals not just that history and fiction are discourse-bound, but also that humanity's entire relationship with what is real can only be accessed through discourse. She states:

> Historiographic metafiction self-consciously suggests [that there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference], but then uses it to signal the discursive nature of all reference – both literary and historiographical. The referent is always already inscribed in the discourses of our culture. This is no cause for despair; it is the text's major link with the "world," one that acknowledges its identity as construct, rather than as simulacrum of some "real" outside. Once again, this does not deny that the past "real" existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past. We can only know it through its traces, its relics (119).

In this passage, Hutcheon specifically uses the word 'real' to refer to empirical reality, rather than 'truth,' because these two concepts are distinct in her theory. This contrasts with the views of academics who are critical towards postmodernism, such as McIntyre, who interpret 'truth' and 'empirical reality' as one and the same thing. Hutcheon's assertion that there is a reality, as well as her distinction between the concepts of (empirical) 'reality' and 'truth,' also clashes with the views of several other postmodern academics, such as Baudrillard's idea (as developed in *Simulacra and Simulations*) that in postmodern society, the 'real' has been completely replaced by signs, and with Feyerabend's rejection of the abstract concept of truth in his work *Killing Time*. According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction shows that access to an unproblematic empirical reality is impossible because humanity can only access information through representation (125). However, this does not mean there is no 'outside' reality, or that facts do not exist; simply that humanity's knowledge of this 'outside' reality is fundamentally dependent on discourse and can therefore never be accessed directly. What humanity accepts as truth will therefore always be a product of discourse, rather than a direct reflection of the empirical 'reality.'

      While a superficial reading of historiographic metafiction's revelation of 'truth' as a product of discourse could be interpreted as a way of suggesting that the concept of

truth is unimportant or that it should be abandoned altogether, Hutcheon suggests that this is not the case. According to her, the postmodern novel (and the historiographic novel in particular) does not deny the existence (or the importance) of truth, but it rather challenges the idea of truth as a singular, unproblematic concept. Hutcheon states:

> Postmodern novels like *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Famous Last Words*, and *A Maggot* openly assert that there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just others' truths. Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. The postmodern paradoxes here are complex. The interaction of the historiographic and the metafiction foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both "authentic" representation and "inauthentic" copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality (109).

By contesting the concept of a singular truth, historiographic metafiction reshapes the meaning of truth in several different ways. It rejects the modernist concept of truth as a grand narrative, truth as an expression of the authority to make truth claims, and instead it embraces the idea that the concept of truth is ultimately always an expression of a person's viewpoint.

While Hutcheon's statement that there is "rarely falseness per se, just other's truths" may initially be interpreted as an uncritical 'anything goes' approach to facts, it seems unlikely that this was her intent, since she frequently underlines the importance of self-reflexivity and critical thinking in a deconstructive mode throughout the whole of *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. She thus makes it clear that it is possible to view history and truth as the products of discourse, while still critically assessing the arguments and evidence around a truth claim.

Hutcheon's theory of a poetics of postmodernism suggests that a postmodern approach to history implies a process of continuous critical thinking, while simultaneously being aware that the artifacts being interpreted are the product of a particular discourse, *and* being aware that the historian who does that interpreting is also processing the artifact through a specific discourse. In other words, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*'s approach to history is a process that involves the continuous

construction and deconstruction of interpretation. In Hutcheon's words: "the very act of questioning is one of inscribing (and then contesting) that which is being queried (224)".

This double move leads to a paradox: the awareness that contemporary discourses are influencing interpretations actually leads to a greater level of objectivity than would be the case if the influence of discourse was denied (or overlooked) completely. However, in Hutcheon's view, this paradox is not a problem, but rather an inevitable part of studying history through the lens of postmodernism, and it is also what prevents postmodernism from becoming the next dominant ideology. She states:

> The visible paradoxes of the postmodern do not mask any hidden unity which analysis can reveal. Its irreconcilable incompatibilities are the very bases upon which the problematized discourses of postmodernism emerge. The differences that these contradictions foreground should not be dissipated. While unresolved paradoxes may be unsatisfying to those in need of absolute and final answers, to postmodernist thinkers and artists they have been the source of intellectual energy that has provoked new articulations of the postmodern condition (21).

The effects of Hutcheon's theory of historiography apply to historiographic metafiction as well, meaning that the paradoxical elements in the manner in which historiographic metafiction problematizes the truth allow for a fluid and dynamic method of deconstructing the concept of truth. This is the how historiographic metafiction opens up the concept of truth to new meanings and perspectives, without forcing a new mode of interpretation onto it.

This leaves us with a question: where does historiographic metafiction's reconceptualization of truth take us? According to Hutcheon, this postmodernist approach opens up concepts like 'truth' and 'history' to the perspectives of people whose access to these concepts had been removed, denied or altered. Hutcheon states:

> The linguistic and the political, the rhetorical and the repressive – these are the connections postmodernism places in confrontation with that humanist faith in language and its ability to represent the subject or "truth," past or present, historical or fictional (187).

Historiographic metafiction exposes the fact that concepts such as 'truth' and 'history' are built on the exclusion of those who do not fit into the prevailing/predominant norm, be they female, people of color, LGTBQ, or others, and points this out by telling stories that fall outside the traditional, empirical definition of truth. This includes the perspectives and experiences of people who have not been able to tell their own stories due to cultural erasure or for whom facts do not accurately represent their lived experiences. When historiographic metafiction manipulates 'the truth,' it draws attention to incompleteness of the narrative on which this 'truth' is built, and addresses this problem by reconstructing truth as diffuse and multiple. By including perspectives that were previously excluded, the previously incomplete version of 'truth' becomes broader, more inclusive and more true. In this way, historiographic metafiction encourages readers to approach history, and by extension the reader's relationship with truth more broadly, with a greater sense of self-reflection and scrutiny. While truth will never reach a stage where it is complete enough to be a singular concept, a self-reflexive, critical approach to the *concept* of truth does lead to a more complete and nuanced version of it, in which readers are made more aware of how their own subjective perspectives change the way in which they interpret information.

The Daughter of Time

So far, I have argued that historiographic metafiction's ability to open the door to a more nuanced perspective is deeply intertwined with its conceptualization of truth as a diffuse and plural concept. I will now explore this idea further by examining Josephine Tey's detective novel, *The Daughter of Time*.

The plot of *The Daughter of Time* follows police officer Alan Grant's investigation of King Richard III of England, undertaken as a pastime during Grant's stay in hospital, and specifically the allegation that Richard murdered his two nephews – the 'Princes in the Tower.' Throughout the novel, Grant collects various texts on Richard III and after reviewing this information, he concludes that Richard III's alleged murder of the princes was a fabrication of the Tudors, the rival royal house that had deposed Richard III from the throne. Published in 1951, the novel predates both postmodernism and Hutcheon's selection of historiographic metafiction. Nevertheless *The Daughter of Time* shows similarities with historiographic metafiction in the novel's thematic focus on history and how history is made. It prompts the questions of who

decides what is (historical) truth, and who stands to benefit from a particular version of history. Pamela J. Butler, writing for the American Branch of the Richard III Society, summarizes Tey's novel and its core message as follows:

> Grant's research is very similar to a modern day criminal investigation, except that the witnesses are long dead and left behind little tangible evidence. Grant cross-compares facts from the various sources to try to forge a logical scenario. He discovers that once an erroneous account is published, it is often unquestioningly accepted as true. Historians subsequent to Sir Thomas More (in particular, Hall and Holinshed) appear to have accepted More's account as indisputable, when in fact he could have only obtained his information secondhand (most likely from the highly-prejudiced Bishop Morton.) In today's courtroom, such "evidence" would be inadmissible as "hearsay." Josephine Tey/Gordon Daviot addresses the question, in this book and others: "How much of history is solidly grounded in fact, and how much is it malleable for the sake of political expediency?" In *The Daughter of Time,* Inspector Grant eventually tries to dig up sources contemporaneous with Richard III to eliminate the Tudor bias. In writing *Richard III,* Shakespeare's goal was to write a compelling drama, and historical accuracy was sacrificed for the sake of plot. Because it was widely believed in those days that Richard III had had his nephews murdered, he was a logical villain; Shakespeare only needed to superimpose exaggerated physical deformities and a Machiavellian-inspired personality to create an unforgettable character (Butler 2002).

Grant approaches this historical story as if he were conducting a criminal investigation, and this different perspective reveals issues with the concept of history itself. Butler suggests that the question that lies at the heart of *The Daughter of Time* is how much of history is 'fact' and how much of it serves a political purpose; however, I would argue that another key aspect of Tey's novel is the emphasis it places on the difference between the concepts of 'truth' and 'history.' One of the ways in which this difference manifests itself is through Grant's investigation into Thomas More, Lord Chancellor under the Tudor king Henry VIII, who would have had an interest in discrediting Richard III. Tey writes:

More had never known Richard III at all. He had indeed grown up under a Tudor administration. [Thomas More's *The History of Richard III*] was the Bible of the whole historical world on the subject of Richard III – it was from that account that Holinshed had taken his material, and from that that Shakespeare had written his – and except that More believed what he wrote to be true it was of no more value than what the soldier said. It was what his cousin Laura called 'snow on their boots'. A 'gospel-true' event seen by someone other than the teller. That More had a critical mind and an admirable integrity did not make the story acceptable evidence. A great many otherwise admirable minds had accepted that story of the Russian troops passing though Britain. Grand had dealt too long with the human intelligence to accept as truth someone's report of someone's report of what that someone remembered to have been told (84).

In this passage, it becomes clear that More's *The History of Richard III* (1513), on which most other subsequent historical works on Richard III have been based, is not nearly as factually sound as has been commonly thought. More's work was long considered reliable because it was assumed to be a contemporary account; however, Grant discovers that More was only five years old when the princes were allegedly murdered, and only eight years old when Richard III died. This means that the work is a product of hearsay – and worse, a product of hearsay influenced by Richard III's political enemies, the Tudors. Tey presents the idea that More, despite his qualities as a scholar, is not an authority of truth: he may have been a gifted historian, but he was not a witness to the historical events that he wrote about.

This idea that truth is not based on authority is a recurring theme throughout the novel and becomes particularly evident through taking a closer look at the title of *The Daughter of Time*. The phrase 'the daughter of time' refers to the proverb 'truth is the daughter of time,' sometimes extended to 'truth is the daughter of time, not authority.' It means that the truth will become clear as time passes, and that authorities who claim the truth for themselves should be treated with skepticism. This message is further reflected in Grant's exploration of the influence that More's account has had on subsequent historians: it becomes clear that many historians over the centuries have simply accepted More's conclusions without any critical assessment of the quality of his work, due to a misplaced trust in More as a 'witness to history' and his reputation as an eminent scholar. The conclusions drawn by historians uncritical of More were in turn

used as a basis by other historians. This has resulted in a version of Richard III that is a product of a web of historiographical intertextuality, with More's biased *The History of Richard III* at its core:

> And it is on [John Morton, Henry VII's Archbishop of Canterbury's] account of Richard that all the later ones were built. It is that story that Holinshed fashioned his history, and on that story that Shakespeare fashioned his character (Tey 100).

As Inspector Grant becomes more aware of how political intrigue and the intertextuality of historiography have shaped the history of Richard III, he realizes that a similar phenomenon seems to be at play in relation to more recent events. To illustrate this, Grant uses the example of a tale told about the military shooting of civilians in the Welsh town of Tonypandy:

> If you go to South Wales you will hear that, in 1910, the Government used troops to shoot down Welsh miners who were striking for their rights. You'll probably hear that Winston Churchill, who was Home Secretary at the time, was responsible. South Wales, you will be told, will never forget Tonypandy! (109)

The Tonypandy Riot is collectively remembered as a dramatic event: an example of the British government's violent oppression of the Welsh, in the public mind. However, as Grant explains later, this has little bearing on the events as they actually happened:

> "The only bloodshed in the whole affair was a bloody nose or two. The Home Secretary was severely criticized in the House of Commons incidentally for his "unprecedented intervention." That was Tonypandy. That is the shooting-down by troops that Wales will never forget" (110).

As Grant's account makes clear, there are two versions of what happened in Tonypandy: the factual version and the mythological version. From that point on in the novel, Grant frequently uses the phrase 'Tonypandy' to refer to stories that are repeated because of their dramatic value rather than their value as truth. The phrase functions as a cynical reminder that history is often more a product of what people want it to be than

an accurate reflection of what actually happened. Grant applies this insight from Tonypandy to the whole of history:

> "The point is that every single man who was there knows that the story is nonsense, and yet it has never been contradicted. It will never be overtaken now. It is a completely untrue story grown to legend while the men who knew it to be untrue look on and said nothing."
>
> "Yes. That's very interesting; very. History as it is made" (110).

The phrase "history as it is made" shows that Grant has come to understand how history is not an expression of historical truth, but rather a product of historiography, which is in turn firmly rooted in other historiography. While *The Daughter of Time* stops short of applying this idea to the entirety of history, it nevertheless rejects the idea of history as an infallible, neutral concept.

Much like Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, *The Daughter of Time* deconstructs the idea of objective history. Tey's novel challenges the historical status quo that has put Richard III down as a malevolent king and a murderer, arguing that this image could well be the product of the Tudor propaganda of subsequent decades. Using the example of Richard III, *The Daughter of Time* thus shows that history is biased and deeply rooted in historiography.

Despite these similarities with historiographic metafiction, however, the novel takes a radically different view on the nature of truth. Being a detective novel, the premise of *The Daughter of Time* hinges on the idea of a mystery that will be solved in the course of the novel. As a result, the novel relies on the idea that the truth is there to be uncovered, and can be found through competent research (typically by finding new evidence) and logical thinking. This assumption reveals two things about the way truth is constructed in *The Daughter of Time*. Firstly, truth is to be understood as equal to historical facts. Those facts may have become misrepresented in historiography over time, but that factual past remains as the 'pure' truth of the matter in the narrative. Secondly, the truth can always be uncovered; or in other words, the truth as a concept is directly accessible, no matter how much time may pass. Hutcheon, by contrast, states that the historical truth is fundamentally unreachable: she argues that there was a past, but that our ability to know that past is limited, since all historical knowledge is biased and mediated through other sources.

Using the examples of Tonypandy and Richard III, *The Daughter of Time* shows that some historical events are deeply rooted in historiography and are often manipulated due to political considerations, but the novel shies away from fully exploring the implications of the insight that biased perspectives may have influenced the *whole* of history. The novel states that "the real history is written in forms not meant as history. In Wardrobe accounts, in Privy Purse expenses, in personal letters, in estate books" (112), but the book does not mention that even historical artifacts like these reveal a limited perspective on history – that of people who had money to spend, the purchasing power to buy items, or the ability to write and read letters. This is evident if we view the case of Tonypandy from a different frame of mind. The intended message of this anecdote seems to be that sentiments can have a greater influence on how people remember (or represent) history than facts: history is what people want history to be. But if this example is seen as an expression of Hutcheon's construction of truth, the Tonypandy incident can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the oppression of the Welsh by the English. 'Tonypandy' may not be based on facts, but can still serve as a mythological 'truth' and an expression of the fear and anger felt in Wales towards the government in London, due to its previous history of cultural and linguistic oppression. Another example of the way that the novel stops short of exploring the full implications of its own approach to history can be seen in the way that it ends. While *The Daughter of Time*'s plot centers around the idea that the customary view of Richard III is mainly the result of intertextual historiography and a poor examination of the evidence, the novel never examines the possibility that Grant's own conclusion – that Richard III is innocent of the crimes he was widely accused of – could equally well be a product of only having access to specific historiography and limited evidence. In my view, these issues in *The Daughter of Time* indicate that the idea of a unproblematic, singular truth is incompatible with a critical approach to history.

McIntyre

I will now return to the subject of McIntyre. As stated in my previous chapter, McIntyre presents the truth as singular: there is only one truth and it is equal to empirical facts. According to this view, questioning facts is the same as questioning truth, which, for McIntyre, equates science denial. He suggests that doubting facts is therefore dangerous to the idea of truth. Like McIntyre, *The Daughter of Time* advances the idea that there is

a singular truth which can be uncovered through meticulous research. However, in contrast to McIntyre, *The Daughter of Time* shows that questioning authority and concepts (such as history and truth) are important steps to reaching that truth. Indeed, Hutcheon's approach to truth and *The Daughter of Time*'s approach to scrutinizing history are similar in this respect, indicating that a postmodern approach to questioning truth may not actually threaten the truth in the way that McIntyre suggests.

This suggestion is confirmed by taking a closer look at McIntyre's accusation that postmodernism is an ideological forebear to post-truth, since there seems to be insufficient evidence for his idea that questioning and critically assessing science harms the idea of truth itself. Quite the contrary, as Pavol Hardoš asserts in his review of *Post-Truth* in *Organon*:

> In [the] search for truth we must be aware of this possibility and add this warning into our calculus of trust over particular claimants and their claims to authority. This is a profound insight that we credit Foucault and other scholars with. Without it our understanding of objective reality would be much poorer. We cannot be blind to the truth that knowledge claims are potentially also ideological. This is not necessarily a rejection of objective reality, this is a reminder of the warranted distrust towards those who have historically claimed to own the truth (314).

Hardoš's statement that self-reflexive, critical thinking is something that actually contributes to our understanding of objective reality is also reflected in Hutcheon's theory. Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction shows that a reconceptualization of truth does not undermine science or the idea of facts in any way. A rejection of the meaning of truth as referring *only* to empirical reality does not mean that truth is rejected altogether. Hardoš elaborates on this idea as follows:

> Any recognition of the plurality of discourses and perspectives about the world would do that, yet this post-modern reflection on the lack of a monopolized control over meta-narratives does not commit one to a full-blown relativist standpoint. Indeed, not all post-modernist constructivism in science is the enemy of the quest for truth—on the contrary, one cannot get to truth without realizing the extent of subjectivity when we ask research questions, build concepts,

choose the tools, & model the world and how this—often unconscious—dealing with the world around us can color our perceptions of the world (Hardoš 314).

McIntyre approaches both truth and post-truth as singular, unproblematic concepts, in contrast to Hutcheon's poetics of postmodernism, which, as I have argued, allows for a multifaceted, non-linear approach to the truth. However, a closer look at how McIntyre defines 'truth' in his study shows how this rejection of plural perspectives may be a problem in McIntyre's own approach in his theorization of post-truth. Throughout his study, McIntyre uses an oversimplified and inconsistent definition of truth, which is a problem because his research into post-truth is based on the core belief that truth is a singular concept. In another review by Brian Martin for the *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, Martin explains the problems that this causes for McIntyre's study:

> Strangely, for McIntyre the meaning of post-truth seems to vary. He opens with the Oxford definition. In the preface, McIntyre writes, "Thus what is striking about the idea of post-truth is not just that truth is being challenged, *but that it is being challenged as a mechanism for asserting political dominance*" (xiv), which is not quite the same as saying facts are subordinate to emotions. (158) Later, he writes, "Rather, what seems new in the post-truth era is a challenge not just to the idea of *knowing* reality but to the existence of reality itself. […] But when our leaders—or a plurality of our society—are in denial over basic facts, the consequences can be world shattering" (10). Seemingly, for McIntyre, rejecting "basic facts" is the same as denying the existence of reality. Soon after, he writes, "If one looks at the Oxford definition, and how all of this has played out in recent public debate, one gets the sense that post-truth is not so much a claim that truth *does not exist* as that *facts are subordinate to our political point of view*" (11). After describing challenges to scientific orthodoxy, McIntyre writes "…the notion of truth itself has now been thrown into question" (27). He seems to equate questioning scientific orthodoxy with questioning truth "itself" (Martin 157).

When we take into account Martin's analysis of McIntyre's different definitions of truth, McIntyre's accusation that postmodernism is a root cause of post-truth politics

seems to be characterized by an attempt to reduce diffuse, multi-faceted concepts such as postmodernism, truth and post-truth to ideologically motivated distortions. The reason for this strategy was likely simply to keep the argumentation of *Post-Truth* as concise as possible. However, its net effect is to misrepresent the concepts that are central to the questions McIntyre asks, and the answers he puts forward. As Hardoš notes in his review of *Post-Truth*: "It is far too easy to blame an ill-defined, elusive concept such as post-modernism for post-truth" (313). Rather than acknowledging the difficulty of providing proof of postmodernism's relationship with post-truth, McIntyre neglects to provide any good arguments at all regarding why postmodernism should be considered an ideological forebear to post-truth.

Conclusion

Historiographic metafiction draws attention to the idea that history is always susceptible to manipulation through the historiography on which it is based, and therefore encourages a more critical and skeptical approach to what is true and who decides what is true. In historiographic metafiction, this idea is reflected through the manipulation of historical facts, for instance by blurring the lines between fiction and history, or by breaking the suspension of disbelief using anachronisms. By manipulating truth, historiographic metafiction reveals history to be the product of discourse, rather than a reflection of empirical reality.

  The Daughter of Time maintains the ideal that there is a singular truth that can be reached, but it nevertheless underscores the importance of reflecting on and questioning history in order to arrive at that truth. However, a closer look at Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and *The Daughter of Time* shows that their approaches to achieving a more nuanced, critical perspective on truth are virtually identical. *The Daughter of Time* underwrites the significance placed on reflection and questioning history in Hutcheon's conceptualization of historiographic metafiction, although Tey's novel rejects the idea of a plural truth. Although both texts are thus based on divergent views on the nature of truth, both show that questioning authority and broader concepts (such as history and truth) is important in the process of refining 'truth'; McIntyre, by contrast, rejects the idea that 'truth' is a human construct, and therefore fallible. *The Daughter of Time* offers the perspective that despite historiographic manipulations, it is possible to get closer to the idea of a singular truth that McIntyre upholds. However,

The Daughter of Time also suggests that strategies which McIntyre would presumably consider 'science denial' – such as criticizing or questioning 'facts' – are a vital factor in reaching that truth.

  The similarities between the conscious manipulation of truth in historiographic metafiction and the painstaking reflection on the processes by which historical truth is achieved in *The Daughter of Time* suggest that the ways in which truth gets distorted in historiographic metafiction and in post-truth politics are fundamentally dissimilar. I will elaborate on this further in the conclusion of my thesis.

Conclusion

By analyzing the way the truth is manipulated in speeches made by post-truth politicians and historiographic metafiction, and through an examination of the root causes of post-truth politics, this thesis has shown that while post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction both manipulate the truth, there are significant differences between them regarding their intent, execution, and end-results.

My analysis has shown that post-truth politicians take advantage of growing mistrust of what has become known as "the mainstream media", science, and government, a sly move which has resulted in science denialism, understandable cognitive biases, a decline in the quality of news reporting in the traditional media, and the rise of social media. This combination of factors has in turn led to an increase in mistrust of the authorities and uncertainty about who and what information the general public should trust. In response to this uncertainty, some people have started to define truth as whatever they *want* to be true. Post-truth politicians take advantage of this mindset in order to increase their political influence. These politicians mislead their audience about controversial issues in order to create a narrative in which they and their political allies can provide the solutions to these issues. The mannerisms, strategies and language they use to accomplish this are virtually identical to those used in marketing and advertising. Similarly, any narrative originating from "the mainstream media" and "mainstream politics" is dismissed as if it were a rival product sold by a competitor.

In effect, as I have argued, post-truth politicians present the ideas of "the mainstream media" and "mainstream politics" as inferior products, and their own worldview as the superior product. To post-truth politicians, ideology is simply a product to be marketed. This becomes clear as soon as those post-truth 'solutions', such as Trump's Mexican-American wall, are scrutinized in more detail: it seems their 'solutions' are not so much practical measures that would solve the most urgent problems according to their worldview, such as (illegal) immigration, but rather projections of the truths of that worldview. Their target audience is thus kept in a state of permanent emotional and mental distress because their worldview is continuously being bombarded by contradictory information from mainstream media and politicians.

In my view the manipulated truth pushed by post-truth politicians is intended to give their audience a space to express that mental discomfort, rather than to solve any actual societal issues. Therefore, it does not matter whether or not post-truth politicians actually solve the problems that they place at the center of their political agenda, because what they are selling is a mental and emotional mindset – not an actual solution to political or societal problems.

In contrast to the manipulation of truth in post-truth politics, historiographic metafiction uses the manipulation of truth to critically analyze and reconceptualize the concept of truth. It does not reject the concept of truth but constructs a truth that encompasses more than just empirical reality. My case study of *The Daughter of Time* has shown that the highly critical approach to history that *The Daughter of Time* shares with historiographic metafiction is necessary in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of history and how it is made. In my view, one of the main benefits of the manipulation of truth in historiographic metafiction is that it has a similar effect on the history it scrutinizes.

What this suggests is that while post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction are similar in the sense that they both manipulate truth, the manner in which they do so is fundamentally different. While both historiographic metafiction and post-truth politics are highly critical of the concepts that they respectively scrutinize and attack, the nature of these criticisms is very different. Historiographic metafiction manipulates truth to encourage self-reflexivity in relation to ideas and concepts like truth and history. Linda Hutcheon links this aspect to a tendency in postmodernism, through its emphasis on multiplicity and the need for self-reflexivity, to prevent itself from becoming culturally dominant. In historiographic metafiction, truth is thus manipulated in an attempt to dismantle power structures. This contrasts with the manipulation of truth in post-truth politics, where politicians combine marketing techniques with manipulated versions of truth in order to increase their own political influence. In post-truth politics, truth claims are made to shape the narrative in such a way that post-truth politicians can construct power structures for their own benefit. At the same time, this dissimilarity between the way in which post-truth politics and historiographic metafiction manipulate the truth suggests that the notion that the manipulation of truth is always harmful is not fully justified, since it may also be used to create a more nuanced, multi-facetted understanding of truth.

However, due to the limited scale of this study, further research that reaches beyond the scope of my own is needed. In order to gain a more complete understanding of both post-truth politics and the way post-truth politics manipulates the truth, it is necessary for future research to look at other works of literature, different literary genres, other cultural disciplines, and research material outside comparative literature.

As I am writing this thesis, the US and the rest of the world are still reeling from an attempted insurrection at the US Capitol, apparently incited by Donald Trump and carried out by some of his most loyal followers. Following an address by Trump, hundreds of his supporters stormed the Capitol after hearing (once again) the former President's claims that the election had been "stolen" by the Democrats. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, they acted on his suggestion to protest at the Capitol because they completely and utterly believed that his claims were true. While some have derided these people for being stupid, or naïve, I would urge everyone reading this to instead consider *why* these people were so utterly convinced that this was the truth. This cannot have been because factual information was difficult to find, or that there were gaps or contradictions in that information, but rather because these people desperately wanted to believe in the fabrications presented by the leader of their movement.

The central issue of post-truth politics is not that the truth is manipulated, but that people *want* the truth to be manipulated, and that they accept that manipulation so completely. The worldview of these people is so utterly detached from the information available from mainstream media that factual information does not necessarily have a place in their 'truth' at all. There is a radical disruption between what they see as the truth and what everybody else claims it to be. In an age in which we are interconnected like never before, it is now easy for them to find others who share the same worldview and the same 'truth'. As we saw in the attempted coup, the results can be powerfully destructive.

Counterintuitively, another form of manipulation of the truth may yield a strategy whereby the worldview of people like these can both be accepted and refuted. The manipulation of truth in historiographic metafiction shows that it is possible to approach truth in a critical, yet multi-faceted manner. This approach encourages self-reflexivity without necessarily rejecting any beliefs outright. Perhaps it is through a politics of paradoxically accepting *and* refuting truth that we could come to deconstruct the beliefs of 'post-truthers' without either refuting them outright – which would only make people who hold extreme ideas believe in those ideas even more fervently – or

accepting them as tenable worldviews – which would imply that these extremist thoughts are justified.

Meanwhile, 'post-truthers' could be taught to apply a method of critical thinking and self-reflexivity to their worldview without being overwhelmed by emotional and mental distress. An approach such as this would allow them to confront their own beliefs without necessarily having to reject the identity they have built around those beliefs. While it is unlikely that such an approach would lead to the end of post-truth politics altogether, it could be used as a stepping stone towards a fully-fledged method of addressing post-truth.

It is unclear what the future of post-truth politics will be. Much as I would like to believe that with the election of President Joe Biden and increased vigilance against "fake news" the end of post-truth politics has begun, I sincerely doubt this. Admittedly the new administration in Washington condemns the manipulation of the truth by post-truth politicians more strongly, and social media such as Twitter and Facebook have begun to remove factually incorrect statements from their platforms, but these measures do nothing to address the underlying question *why* people want a manipulated 'truth.' Whether we are entering a new age of post-truth politics, or whether post-truth politics will take an entirely new form to suit the changing political and social environment remains to be seen. However, what is clear is that until the root causes of this desire for a manufactured 'truth' are addressed and resolved, the world will have to live with post-truth politics for the foreseeable future.

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