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**Summary of PhD Thesis  
NEW HISTORICISM AND LITERATURE**

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** New Historicism, virtual and counterfactual history, allohistories, magic realism, discourses of history, deconstruction of history, historiographic metafiction, specific narrative structures, rhetorical devices.

As suggested by the title, our research is an inquiry into the validity of a theoretically constructed framework for the study of literature which emerged at the threshold between the eighth and ninth decades of the last century: New Historicism. This inquiry implies both a theoretical and an applied dimension, that is, an assessment of the epistemological tenability of new historicist premises, assumptions and line of argument completed by the successful application of this grid on texts, in the sense of securing an interpretation which sounds appropriate and edifying.

The necessity of this approach seems to us to arise out of the paradoxical situation that, although the masterpieces of Romanian fiction published after the war are in the magic realist or metahistoriographic key, the Romanian critics who used the New Historicist grid in their interpretation are just a few, and not the most authoritative figures in shaping the canon. However, the major novels and stories authored by Vintilă Horia, D.R. Popescu, Ștefan Bănuțescu, A.E. Baconski, Fănuș Neagu, Ana Blandiana, Vasile Andru, Nichita Danilov, Alexandru Ecovoiu, Petru Cimpoșu, Ioan Petru Culianu, Octavian Soviany, Florin Manolescu, Horia Bădescu, and several others go under the heading of historiographic metafiction – a term coined by Linda Hutcheon which has got into current use.

Apparently, the notion of method represents a link between early and late modernity, as the term shows up in two famous landmarks of this timespan: *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason* (1637) by René Descartes and *Truth and Method* (1960) by Hans Georg Gadamer. One and the same notion, however, is given a totally different interpretation. For Descartes, method is infallible in reaching the truth, as it appeals to unfailing disciplines of mathematics and mechanics, whereas Gadamer, as a representative of postwar phenomenology, denies method the capacity to reach stable and universal truths. Nevertheless, a theory is embedded even in hermeneutic suspicion or deconstructionist philosophy of meaning, and it underwrites typical approaches to texts. Setting out from the belief that theory cannot be avoided, we have decided, after a preliminary coverage of the corpus, that New Historicism is the postwar school of critical thinking which provides the most elegant theoretical argument and which allows us to cast

a new light on classical literary works, as well as to plumb into the complexity of present-day literary texts.

Unlike pre-war criticism, characterized by a relative uniformity of critical literary practice, such as the formalist school prevailing in the fourth and fifth decade, postwar criticism followed several tracks, the numerous schools sharing only the feature of interdisciplinarity. Psychoanalytic, deconstructionist, feminist, materialist, etc. criticism was the outcome of a cross of literary studies and non-literary disciplines. The picture of the postwar schools of literary thought is, however, understood in different ways, the surveys listing them all but classifying them according to various taxonomic criteria. Before presenting our own view of the uses of New Historicism, we are going to take a critical look at two such taxonomies which can be set in polarity, illustrating the two divergent tendencies, that of reducing the new literary school that came into full bloom in the 1980s to the traditional historical approach, and that of forcing the implications of New Historicism as shaped by Michel Foucault, Louis Montrose, Stephen Greenblatt, Hillis Miller into a starburst of partial foci, such as studies of space, memory, trauma etc.: *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2004) by Mario Klarer, and *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Julian Wolfreys, respectively.

The position we embrace is discussed in Subchapter I.3.1. (*Postmodernism and the Idea of History*).

Theoretical New Historicism has a fictional correlative, which Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction”, and which we consider to be defining of major, canonical literary works of the later twentieth century. This term replaces that of “magical realism”, meaning an overlay of reality and imagination (actually, a superposition of these two contrary states), adding an essential element which is the metafictional or narrator plot: unlike the chronodiegesis, where the fictional universe is assumed to be real, the metanarrative is self-reflexive, giving the figural author (the author as figure in his book) the possibility to comment on his choices, on the character of the plot or characters etc.

Two theoretical contributions made by Romanian critics (Dana Percec and Andreea Deciu) are also mentioned, as they illustrate the local critical response to major signifying practices which carry the “magic realism” tag, while actually being canonical examples of historiographical metafiction, as the self-reflexive element is present as well.

**Chapter One** explains our option for New Historicism in a way that avoids the comfort of simply casting our approach within a methodological frame assumed to meet our elective affinities.

Instead, we are proceeding along the lines of a compare and contrast discussion of rival perspectives, not only on New Historicism but on the basics of literary theory and criticism.

Although the two surveys of contemporary critical theories are didactic in nature, their theoretical assumptions come under our critical examination precisely because they lay the bases of the students' appropriation of academic protocols.

Whereas Mario Klarer does mention New Historicism defining it in a way which, we think, deserves several amendments, Julian Wolfreys, Editor of *Introducing Criticism in the 21st Century* (the Second, 2015 Edition of the original 2002; *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*) replaces what he calls the dominant "historicist, contextualist and sociological approach" in universities with a mix of "Space, Place and Memory" Studies including Affect Theory, Space and Place studies, Trauma, Testimony and Memory studies. We can also include here the chapter on Materialities, Immaterialities, (A)materialities, and Realities. The historicist picture is actually decomposed into space which is conceived of, not as static container, but as produced by historical praxis, and permanently emerging as both space of representation (projective, modelled on symbolic configurations) and as representation of space, that is, as an interface of the physical (Materialities), the imaginary (Irrealities), the cultural ((A) materialities), and the actual (Realities of the digital age). A spatialized history of traumatic events and memories will be the outcome of history's and humanity's entry into language, which, therefore, is not an objective record but a representation coloured by affect and emotional response to historical experience.

The definition of New Historicism the way we see it, as a cross of historical time and discourse (access to the past through language), is discussed in subchapter 1.3. (1.3.1-I.3.5).

Mario Klarer's *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (Routledge: New York, 2004) is a book that focuses on the idea that literary interpretations always reflect a certain institutional, cultural, and historical context. In the author's view, the different orientations in the study of texts are represented by consecutive or parallel schools, which sometimes compete with each other. Literary studies are characterized by a multitude of approaches and methods. Literary theory has developed as an independent discipline influenced by philosophy, it analyses the philosophical and methodological premises of literary criticism. While literary criticism is interested in the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of primary sources, literary theory tries to explain the methods used in the interpretation of primary texts. Thus, literary theory functions as a theoretical and philosophical consciousness of textual studies / literary criticism, constantly reflecting on its own development and methodology.

Among the various methods of interpretation, the author selects four basic approaches according to which most theoretical schools can be classified: text-based approaches, author-based approaches, reader-based approaches and context-based approaches.

The other critical orientation which might diminish the identity, or the importance of New Historicism is the collection of essays published by Julian Wolfreys, without, as he admits in the Introduction, exhausting the typology of theoretical approaches. Without, we would like to add, providing a unitary criterion for selection which, in this case, remains arbitrary and open (not only to criticism but to additions ...). Thus, whereas Ecocriticism and Chaos Theory offer a scientific perspective, Ethical or Deleuzian Criticism are set in a philosophical perspective, Gender Criticism in a social one, Affect, Trauma and Memory, in a psychological one, and Space and Place Criticism in none of the above ... Previous classification were consistent: deconstructionist philosophy fed into psychoanalysis (deconstruction of the subject), historicism (deconstruction of history), poststructuralism (deconstruction of meaning and reference), feminism (deconstruction of biological identity), etc. Let us, however, go below the surface of the Contents.

In 2002 Julian Wolfreys edited a collection of essays entitled *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, which can also be used as a textbook, as it provides model interpretations of texts in light of some recent theory, bibliography, questions for follow up, and suggestions of further reading. Far from returning to pre-war terminology of literary criticism, such as Klarer's *author, reader, text, context*, the critical theories emerging in the new century reinforce the interdisciplinary character that took literary criticism to cultural studies and now to interrogations around epistemological foci whose origin is extra-literary: physics (chaos theory), sociology (diaspora studies, gender studies), philosophy (amaterial criticism, ethical criticism), ecology (ecocriticism), space studies (spatial criticism) ... Here is the complete list: Diaspora Criticism, Gender and Transgender Criticism, Women of Color and Feminist Criticism, Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory and Criticism, Ethical Criticism, Trauma and Testimonial Criticism, Ecocriticism, Spatial Criticism, Cybercriticism, Deleuzian Criticism, Levinas and Criticism, Spectral Criticism and (A)material Criticism. This hybrid kind of criticism mirrors the collapse of disciplinary boundaries in postmodernism and the replacement of formal logic (the logic of identity) with polyvalent logic. They also reflect on our society which seems to have become spectral through loss of identitarian narratives in the globalized age, the dematerialization of work processes (employing globally interfaced computers, performed from home, in virtual reality, etc.), of architecture (with its glass walls opening into the environment), of culture reduced to consumption of empty images and projecting a sort of hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard). People feel

haunted by texts, by images thrown up by the fashion industry and the culture of pop art and entertainment.

It is with Thomas Carlyle that the canonical historians of postmodernism linked up in the latter half of the last century. We have identified three distinct trails of the meditation upon history:

The general drive of the age, the “deconstructive consciousness”, is set over and against the “empiricist or reconstructionist emphasis upon the historian as the impartial observer who conveys ‘the facts’” by Alun Munslow in his 1997 *Deconstructing History*. (Munslow 1997: 3). On the contrary, deconstructionist philosophy of history (although we have seen that Thomas Carlyle had already effected the linguistic/narrativist turn) proceeds on the assumption that history is actually “the creation and eventual imposition by historians of a particular narrative form on the past: a process that directly affects the whole project, not merely the writing up stage” (*Ibid.*).

Postmodernist historiography no longer cherishes illusions of accurate recovery of past events and appropriate judgements passed on the protagonists of national sagas. As a matter of fact, the deconstruction of the historical subject has gone so far as to consider, as in Foucault’s case (*Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, 1975) that power has become invisible, that there is no identifiable agency in the progress of events. From science, historiography has stepped down to the status of narrative shared in common with any work of fiction. The venues of history have turned to mental spaces, hypothetic scripts accommodating the lives of people across national borders, irrespective of political and administrative divisions.

Niall Ferguson is the historian who deals in hypothetical constructs and even in counterfactual or alternative histories. The history of the world as record of past events is replaced with a story about the rich heiresses and Cinderella, that is, the rich Western countries and the insignificant “Rest,” which, as Hamlet says, is silence on the big scene of world history.

The author of this book aims to answer the question: “How did it happen that, starting with 1500, a number of small states at the western end of the Eurasian continent came to dominate the rest of the world, including countries with a much larger population and, in some respects, much more sophisticated in Eastern Eurasia?” (Ferguson, p.11)

Ferguson launches into speculations operating with concepts which are not commonly employed by classical historiography, such as mental space, the agency of desire, the war of civilizations, etc.

As we have seen, Niall Ferguson alleges that a historian is actually producing a narrative, while Hayden White published a persuasive argument (*Tropics of Discourse*, 1978) supportive of the rhetorical relevance of historiography. Ovidiu Pecian, a distinguished Professor of History, affiliated with the Babes-Bolyai University, and a writer who got several awards from literary

societies has managed to fuse history and fiction into a type of discourse which a reviewer (Doru Pop, See Annex 2) unambiguously associates with New Historicism. Pecican feels that one cannot get a full picture of a community's historical experience without appealing also to that community's imaginative processing of its existence. His book on *Legends of Cluj (Clujul în legende, 2010)* is the fruit of such an attempt of bridging documented reality and fiction.

Ovidiu Pecican is a historian of the relativist school, who sees his discipline as being permanently in the making, depending on the discovery of other historical traces, as he says in the Introduction to his alternative history, *Lumea care n-a fost (The World that Never Was, 2018)*. The statement is true in itself, but Pecican engages here in a playful, mock academic comment on the possibility of getting a more relevant picture of the past through insights into the private lives of the people who lived back then. Before the eighteenth century historiography used to focus on the major figures of the age – kings, leaders of men – and the momentous events in the life of the nation. It was the luminaries (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Johann Martin Chladenius) who turned away from front-stage figures exploring the elements of civilization, such as institutions, manners, legislation, civil life: Pecican explores an insignificant history, a level of the infrahistorical, in an ideational approach to the new historicism. History does not speak to us (in capital letters), but small stories.” (Doru Pop: web). Pecican is also convinced that what counts in mankind's history are not “cancelariile voievodale și câmpurile de luptă” (royal chanceries and battlefields) but the polyphony of commoners' voices. This polyphony is not the kind of music whose score is known. It is a quasi music, that is, an invention of records which are assigned a real existence, they being analogous to other documents of the age in point of language, style, and historical context.

Pecican follows here in the footsteps of D.R. Popescu, who, in his 2012 novel, *Simonetta Berlusconi. Călugărul Filippo Lippi și călugărița Lucrezia Buti (Simonetta Berlusconi. A Monk Called Filippo Lippi and a Nun Named Lucrezia Buti)*, opens his novel, whose action is set at the time of the Renaissance, with a pseudo-introduction in academic style claiming the novel to be a manuscript found in Vienna by Cecilia Zammit, a graduate of the Sorbona School for Art History. D.R. Popescu employs postmodern concepts self-consciously, the mock-exegetic pages including the hesitation of the historian whose findings are not completely elucidating the mystery surrounding the artefact, a cast of characters belonging to different historical ages (the Renaissance and the present), the so-called transhistorical parties, postmodern textual tropes, such as the scribe. Andrei Cârțu's authorship is doubtful, the origin of writing always being uncertain. Cârțu is a calligrapher, a scriptor (scribe, as Roland Barthes calls this function of authoring, which is not out



of nothing but as a tissue of quotations, a text emerging at the intersection of other texts (intertext).<sup>1</sup> Pecican's textual trope for this emptiness at the heart of a text which is subject to many interpretations and rewriting (often of rewriting wrong) is the palimpsest. The texts sent down to us let us suspect the existence of others in the gaps among them –new ones might be discovered some day, and, besides, there is a layering of meanings attributed to them by successive generations. Being a professional in the field, Pecican reverses Ferguson's description of history as a narrative, rhetorically constructed. This time we are reading a novel written in the manner of a piece of historiography, with academic jargon and characteristic topoi (incomplete manuscripts, deteriorated manuscript, authored or anonymous, list of documents, author index, index of obsolete words, etc.)

History as narrative, turning away from the material universe and folding in upon itself in an act of language, is further understood as a matter of tropes by Hayden White (*Metahistory*, 1975) and of determinism by Ferguson, but not a determinism of causes and effects in the progress of mankind through time; this determinism is actually the set of rules and constraints governing the making of stories:” the teleology of the traditional narrative form”. (Ferguson 1997: 65) Yet can we say that the fiction falling under the headings of historiographic metafiction or magic realism, where there is a historicist view of history as succession of styles rather than as organic development from one age to another, is characterized by a teleological design? The answer is no. The oxymoronic names suggest an uneasy blending of opposites. Franz Roh is considered the art historian and artist who coined the phrase, magic realism, and who defined the new style as the encounter of the real and the unreal, as a return to reality, but one that very reality had something in it which made it look strange, unfamiliar, *unheimlich* (Freud's term in *Das Unheimliche*, 1919) for that which ought to be familiar, heimlich, yet is perceived as strange by the sick, psychotic mind. It was only that the artists of the early twentieth century, living in the contexts of political turmoil, economic crisis, preparations for a world conflagration, in the devastated postwar society, disputed between extremists of the right and of the left claimed that reality was indeed abnormal filling everybody with anxiety.

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<sup>1</sup>[...] linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I: language knows a “subject,” not a “person,” and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language “work,” that is, to exhaust it. The Death of the Author 4 The Death of the Author — The absence of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a real “alienation:” the Author diminishing like a tiny figure at the far end of the literary stage) is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or — what is the same thing — the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the Author absents himself) (Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, Ubu Web: 3-4)

In her books *Historiographic Metafiction. Parody and the Intertextuality of History* (1989), and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon sets out to identify the context in which the postmodern historical sense situates himself:

"What we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality. In fiction this means that it is usually metafiction that is equated with the postmodern. Given the scarcity of precise definitions of this problematic period designation, such an equation is often accepted without question. What I would like to argue is that, in the interests of precision and consistency, we must add something else to this definition: an equally self-conscious dimension of history. My model here is postmodern architecture, that resolutely parodic recalling of the history of architectural forms and functions." (Hutcheon 1989: 3)

In American postmodernism, the "different" is going to be defined in specific terms such as those implying the concept of nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Intertextual parody of acknowledged classics is one potential way of re-appropriating and reformulating the dominant white, male, middle-class, European culture. It could not be rejected. It indicates its dependence by the usage of the canon, but it stresses its rebellion through satirical abuse of it. As Edward Said has been arguing recently ("Culture"), there is a relationship of mutual interdependence between the histories of the dominators and the dominated. It is generally believed that intercultural learning "starts with learners achieving various degrees of cultural awareness or cultural understanding." Cultural awareness/understanding, in turn, is conceived as requiring some form of critical thinking or (self-)reflection which can roughly be described as "a process through which one is examining one's cultural assumptions when confronted with a different world view" (A.E. Jacobsen 2016:190).

**The Second Chapter** of our thesis focuses on New Historicism that emerged in the 80s of the last century, through the contribution of Stephen Greenblatt, the American critic who coined the name of the new school of critical theory and whose 1980 study, "Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare", introduces the defining operational concepts of the theoretical and applied approach proposed by the movement. Stephen Greenblatt is a professor of humanities at Harvard University, with a highly regarded academic and editorial background, the coordinator of Norton's anthologies of English literature and Shakespeare's, and the founder of the New School of Literature and Historicism. Maria Ștefănescu in the article "Introductory Commentary on the New Historicism", published in *Transilvania*, no. 10/2007, states that, "exploring the path of investigation indicated by Greenblatt, critics such as Louis A. Montrose, Catherine Gallagher, DA

Miller, Joel Fineman and Walter Benn Michaels, although heterogeneous in the particularities of the reading approach, converge on the premise that, far from existing in a tight separation, literature and society interact and shape each other” (Introductory Commentary on New Historicism in *Transilvania*, 2007, p.80).

As John Brannigan observes, “it is a constant feature of new historian approaches to tend to study a considerable number of texts belonging to the same historical epoch and to postulate, or argue, that each epoch establishes its own way of manifesting itself: power” (Brannigan, 2001, p.174).

In terms of text analysis, critics of the new historian orientation aspire to identify the way in which literature influences and is influenced by the social, cultural and ideological context in which it fits, either by correlating several texts of different invoices belonging to the same era or by focusing on a particular literary work, most often considered exemplary in that culture.

An example of the new historical analyses devoted to a single literary work is provided by DA Miller's essay, "Disciplines in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family and Bleak House" (1983). The thesis that the critic argues is that Charles's novel Dickens, "House of Shadows," represents and gives visibility to the prison system in Victorian England, confirming, on the other hand, to readers the feeling of security generated by belonging to the family and / or the free society outside the detention space and warning them, on the other hand, the dangers of rebellion and nonconformism.

In the author's opinion, the criticism that have been brought to the new historicism from outside and, occasionally, from within the orientation refer both to the theoretical premises that substantiate it and to the practice of text analysis. On the first point, Carolyn Porter observed in a 1988 article, "Are We Being Historical Yet?", That the new historicism rejects the 'great Enlightenment narrative' of social and individual progress on which the old historicism is based, but only for to replace it with its own globalizing narrative: the understanding of all historical events as being determined by the intervention of ubiquitous and inescapable power structures.

The long-awaited non-fiction book by historians and philologists, for which Stephen Greenblatt received the Pulitzer Prize in 2012, *Clinamen. How the Renaissance Began (The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, 2011), was published by the Humanitas Publishing House in 2014. In the spirit of this investigative method, Stephen Greenblatt goes side by side to complete the details of an essential moment in the history of culture. We go back to 1417, in the footsteps of a humanist, former apostolic secretary of a dethroned pope, who discovers among the lost manuscripts of antiquity, hidden in the monasteries' desks, *On the nature of things* by Lucretius.

The influence of this poem, which has disappeared for centuries, will be essential to the production of the cultural mutation we know today as the Renaissance. The appreciation also passed in the pages of the big dailies and weekly. It is possible for a poem to change the world, asks the Newsweek columnist: "Stephen Greenblatt tells us how the ancient text that shook the foundations of Renaissance Europe and inspired shockingly modern ideas came to us." The new historicism is neither popularization nor schematization, it is the new breath that will allow us to keep a minimum relationship of the people we are with the ideas that were.

Greenblatt's approach too is of this kind: events are set against the whole historical background in an attempt to find reasonable hypotheses about the behaviour of social actors, trying to place themselves in the position of those who acted then in order to identify motives for acting the way they did. The historicist's view is thus a double one, meant to reach a balance between our understanding of the past historical praxis and theirs.

Professor Dana-Andreea Percec's book starts from a premise that has gained more and more academic authority in recent decades, with the development of fields such as (the new) historicism. Literary studies have become increasingly receptive to an interdisciplinary approach to texts, including data from various areas of the social sciences. One of the most profitable associations remains that between literary criticism and history, in the form of the new historicism. The movement emphasizes the importance of the role played by the historical context in the interpretation of artistic creations. Thus, the past becomes open, hermeneutically, like a text, the writings having meaning only in relation to other writings, their value depending on the value given to them, directly indirectly, by the discourses of the time. In other words, in the author's opinion, the meaning given to a text by the initial readers remains unchanged. The difference is that today's critical readers are more aware of the political and cultural conventions of the past than the ancient public, because the latter assumed these models as part of the collective imagination.

If, according to traditional evaluation criteria, elitist literature is the one that contains a stable corpus of works, which is the result of an individual authorial intention and has international validity, the great Elizabethan pieces are part of the canon. The author's conclusion is that Shakespeare's plays — written to be played, improvised, incomplete, with many variations, and many other possible co-authors, dependent on external, social, political, and ideological factors — are today seen as fluid cultural products rather than as a fixed corpus of poetic creation, as argued in traditional literary criticism. Following the example of Shakespearean plays, Elizabeth's work can be the result of collective work, can respond to specific historical and personal contexts, even

if preserved in various versions, more or less authentic. It remains in the vision of Dana-Andreea Percec open to new discoveries and interpretations.

Andreea Deciu, another Romanian contributor, explains in *Romania literară*, no. 6 from 2001 that "Practicing New Historicism" is a book born of the astonishment that sometimes causes success. The first studies signed by Stephen Greenblatt, then a professor at Berkeley, appeared in the late 1980s. The subject of those contributions: medieval, renaissance, Shakespearean texts, but especially contexts reconstructed with the acuity of the anthropologist but also with the receptivity of the writer to detail. Catherine Gallagher, co-author of this volume, has published studies on feminism. The new historicism has begun, if we are to give credence to Greenblatt and Gallagher's confession, more as a type of literary sensibility than as a rigorous method. As a way to ask questions, but in no case to propose answers ". ("Practicing the New Historicism" in *Romania literară*, no. 6, 2001)

**The Third Chapter** opens with Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. *Shame* is Salman Rushdie's third novel, published in 1983. Like most of Rushdie's work, this book was written in the style of magic realism. It portrays the lives of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa) and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (General Raza Hyder) and their relationship. The central theme of the novel is that violence is born out of shame. The concepts of 'shame' and 'shamelessness' are explored through all of the characters, with main focus on SufiyaZinobia and Omar Khayyám. *Shame* discusses heritage, authenticity, truth, and, of course, shame and shamelessness, as well as the impact of all these themes on an individual, the protagonist Omar Khayyám.

Historiography is no longer a record of pre-existing events but a linguistic affair, a matter of textuality: the past forks out into versions thereof, it may be distorted, re-written, invented. Pakistan has no organic roots in the past, no continuity through racial and family life (the novel is the story of the extinction of the Shakil family) within some territory wrapped up in narratives, in commonly shared myths. On the contrary, it accrues to itself some identity through denial of its past, and in opposition to its cultural heritage. Its mix of religious fundamentalism, superstitions, and taboos is actually a counter culture, a culture of opposition ("full of irreconcilable elements, midriff baring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then"). Lacking origin, the Pakistan entity patched up from ideas fostered by deracinated migrants is actually simulacrum.

Factual and counterfactual, mixing up names and real bodies (the famous Omar Khayyam and the "dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat" protagonist), historical

personages and invented characters, postmodernist narratives weave a fictional universe characterized, as well as magic realism, by a superposition of contrary states.

The anatomy of “shame” can be easily recognized in Rushdie’s referential Pakistan. Personal history is embedded in the country’s history, Omar’s shameful birth described as a partum on an alley, anonymous like the coming into the world of beggars of stray animals, is symbolical of a string of later events and of the major break ups in the novel: of India from the British rulers and of Pakistan from India. Historiography is no longer a record of pre-existing events but a linguistic affair, a matter of textuality: the past forks out into versions thereof, it may be distorted, re-written, invented. Pakistan has no organic roots in the past, no continuity through racial and family life (the novel is the story of the extinction of the Shakil family) within some territory wrapped up in narratives, in commonly shared myths. On the contrary, it accrues to itself some identity through denial of its past, and in opposition to its cultural heritage. Its mix of religious fundamentalism, superstitions, taboos is actually a counter-culture, a culture of opposition (“full of irreconcilable elements, midriff baring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then”). Lacking origin, the Pakistan entity patched up from ideas fostered by deracinated migrants is actually simulacrum. For New Historicism, history is just a narrative like those in fiction; it is deconstructed (having no basis in the truth, re-invented) and re-written wrong, just a construct, a made-up fiction:

In *Imaginary Homelands*, where he denies the existence of a so-called “Commonwealth literature”, he [Rushdie] affirms, nevertheless, a literary mode, **magical realism**, whose frontiers are neither political nor linguistic, but **imaginative**. It is a literature of “the powerless” – mainly Latin Americans and Indian-language writers –, blooming forth as a trans-national and cross-lingual “process of pollination.” As an aesthetic mode, it transgresses boundaries which realist conventions set between history and fiction, reality and imagination, natural and supernatural, real space and textual space. (Tupan 2004: web)

What makes Rushdie remarkable in point of depth psychology is the allegorical representation of the character so as to render the full significance of its unconscious workings. Here is Sufiya reduced to an animal’s condition, restored to the natural state preceding all civilization, but finally free. The animal’s freedom is everything one gets in a prison society, lacking in democratic institutions and laws capable to ensure the observance of rights and liberties. As far as the plot is concerned, we may say that it twists to “fairy tale”, to magic, while still in the historical world. Rushdie uses the magical style of magic realism in which myth and fantasy are blended with real life. The alternate history is a sort of poetic justice. The politicization of the whole social life in a

totalitarian regime – which is the habitual setting of a magic realist novel, triggering the need for allohistories as remedy or relief - includes the domain which is the farthest away from it – the arts. The historicist treatment of time is a highly relativistic one, characters migrating from one century to another, joining the most unseemly company. If we were to look at the issue from a Bakhtinian perspective, we might say that the magic realist chronotope is characterized by hybridity and absurdity. The surrogate identity, in Omar as well as Babar's case, can be considered a characteristic of Postmodernist identity philosophy. Names fall away from persons, words fall away from things are emptied of content. There is no more a centre of a hegemonic, hierarchical structure, the figure of supreme authority (emperor) exchanges places with the anarchic, rebellious guerrilla world.

In Subchapter III.2 we tried to identify facts and fiction in historical romances. By describing the *past as the voices of the dead*, Stephen Greenblatt deconstructed it from that status of matrix of the subsequent events whose roots and nature can be explained by what went before with the consequence that the past turned spectral, possessed of the capacity to haunt the living. The most persuasive literary example is the dictator in *L'Automne du patriarche* by Gabriel García Márquez who is found dead in the palace where he had been abandoned. On the one hand, his rotten body cannot be identified with precision, the effacement of the uniform and signs of prestige being symbolic of the desire to annihilate abusive power, but even during his life had his identity been a puzzle to the people, he appearing at public events as a person of different ages: eighty at charity raffles, sixty during civil hearings and less than forty at public festivities (Marquez 1975: 105). Now that he is declared dead, the Patriarch continues to be heard or seen. Actually, he had always enjoyed the privilege to be in two places at once: playing dominoes and lighting cow chips to drive the mosquitoes out of the reception room. The two planes of his life, socializing with humans and attending to the cows and hens which have stolen into his palace signify the irrational, beastly side of the cruel dictator, suffering from solitude like all those in power exerted in excess. Unstabilized on the literal level of the narrative, meaning is recomposed on the tropical, symbolic one. Power is indeed pervasive, tending to institute control over people and their lives, and, as Marquez is trying to prove, it is an endemic social evil, which continues to threaten peoples through time.

The *spectrality of the past* is explained by its reduction to language which may lack a referent existing out there in the real world. In *Marea mascara (The Great Masquerade)*, Victoria Comnea has inserted a conversation on the topic of the origin of Romania's capital city, suggesting that history is just a fable, a matter of legends which are substituted for the actual events. Historical romances are double-threaded, meaning that the *plot line forks out into two or more parallel*

*trajectories, as in the multiverse theory of quantum physics.* What if it happened otherwise? The question launches the reader into virtual history. Actually the motif belongs to a long-running tradition, including folklore. The difference between these ancient speculations upon the existence of a parallel universe of immortality and the virtual history spawned by New Historicism lies in the process of world-building, which, in the latter, is an example of mirror civilizations. Both fictional worlds are fully constituted, or rather one single world forks out into alternate versions of a historical world which are different developments of its possibilities. This new picture seems to be the work of a world-builder or a historian who ponders upon the possibility of the existence of the best of all worlds.

*The historicist view is a double one*, an intersection of the present-to-past and past –to-present vectors. Victoria Comnea’s novels are all written as alternate histories of Romania’s past: the movement of political resistance in Piața Universității after December 1989 (*La Eneida*), the reign of Voda Caragea (*The Great Masquerade*), and the early years of the communist regime (*Mr. T. Confessions Pink-Black*). Writing about the past is a fold upon the past writing to us. In *Amarad*, the scribe is the main character of the book, and the distortion of the actual events is caused by the pressure put upon him by the system of power created by the Empire. Representation is found to depend upon the intelligibility of the language in which it is cast, and that intelligibility depends upon the existence of common knowledge and understanding about the situation. The narrator who listens to her uncle’s stories and passes them on thinks according to the logic of her time. She does not understand why the deported people had not tried to walk on to other places and people. Her uncle simply says: “You did not live back then. You would not understand”. The reason we do not understand the motives behind past actions is the changing worldview which may break us apart from our ancestors. Historicity, the fact that humans interpret the world in different ways in different times, is one more element which confines each generation to a certain world outlook, which is responsible for the discontinuity of the historical praxis from one generation to another. The narrator’s uncle is aware of that: yes, does it not seem strange that the idea of going away had not come to anybody’s mind? There must have been, he says, something impalpable and unintelligible to us, yet strong enough at that time which determined everything. One needs to understand that totalitarian regime which placed boundaries between their political victims and the rest of society, so that those outcasts were more isolated from neighbours than if they had been deported to another planet. Her uncle explains that what they must have realised back then was that anything arbitrary or absurd had become possible. If it had been possible for innocent people to be grabbed from an inoffensive wedding and cast into the wilderness, taking them back in time to the primitive age of humans exposed to the elements, then their present isolation needed no



logical explanation either. It was only they who could bring rationality back into their lives, starting the work of survival and construction. The uncle says that what happened then could now be understood only as something theoretical, such as time travel or the plurality of the worlds, in the existence of which nobody believes. What once had been real, material, was now beyond the possibilities of representation. History is never the discourse of an agent free from pressures of all kinds born of the historical context. The scribe in Victoria Comnea's *Amarad*, for instance, meditates upon the biased, Cyclopic view of those who represented the war between Romans and Dacians in the scenes carved on Trajan's Column in Rome.

Writing at the beginning of the 80s – the turn to New Historicism – a collection of short-stories under the oxymoronic title, *Proiecte de trecut (Projects of the Past)*, 1982, Ana Blandiana warns the reader that the narrated events had been filtered several times through multiple narrators, and therefore they were to be taken with some degree of doubt. Maybe her uncle's memory had failed him in time, maybe what he remembered was only wishful thinking about them, the community of citizens arrested from a wedding and deported and abandoned for years in the waste of the Baragan, who had built a civilization in the midst of wilderness.

Representation is found to depend upon the intelligibility of the language in which it is cast, and that intelligibility depends upon the existence of common knowledge and understanding about the situation. What once had been real, material, was now beyond the *possibilities of representation*. There is doubt in texts fuelled by a historicist view about which version of reality is the actual one. D. R. Popescu, the author of several books written in the magic realist mode, launches a daring hypothesis in an essay about the ontological dilemma in *Don Quixote. Without boundaries (the hermeneutics of suspicion)* is the fictional universe of D.R. Popescu: the primitive, beastly world is making its way into civilization in *Royal Hunt* (1973), the vanishing of temporal distinctions allows the author D.R. Popescu to travel backwards to the time of the Renaissance, and, moreover, to transgress the ontological boundary between life and text and become a character in the novel allegedly written by a certain Simonetta Berlusconi (*Simonetta Berlusconi. Calugarul Filippo Lippi si calugărița Lucrezia Buti*, 1912). The new perspective on history as narrative construct or pattern imposed upon the chaotic flow of past events has somehow imposed the presence of *the metafictional level*, where the author explains his reasons for choosing the topic and the manner of treating it. The paradox is that this self-reflexive part of the work is an island of realism, as the author speaks here in his own voice, assuming his real life identity. Borrowing Borges's trope of the map on the scale of one to one ("Of Exactitude in Science"), Ștefan Bănuțescu imagines himself expanding the image of Metopolis in his eye into a map which might coincide with the physical space of the city: [...] ca și cum aș privi dintr-un cer mobil celșe maim mărunte mișcări

de prin curțile și ulițele localității, așa putea mări deesenul cotidian și fugar, prins în priuirile mele la scara dimensiunilor *trecut-prezent-viitor*, să leg adică și să încheg din frânturi milimetrice stupide de moment harta destinelor metopolisiene la Scara unu pe unu.”<sup>2</sup>

Borges mocks the obsession of exactitude, blamed on science, as a representation such as the map will always provide some interpretation which distances the real object from its coded image. The map can only be the printed page. The writing instance becomes all important in new historicist narratives, which are the very opposite of the realist precedent, in the sense that, whereas the omniscient narrator is a transparent glass that allows the image of the world to pass unaltered into the text – at least this is the convention – the historicist narrator is either a filter or even a reality-generating battery. In the post-truth age, readers expect an interesting interpretation of familiar events, a new way of connecting the various threads of social praxis among themselves. What the historian produces is more of a mirror of his mind than of the world. No wonder if the roles are often reversed, with the narrator drawing a map of his mind than of the lived experience of his contemporaries. The author, the narrator and the character in the story are often changing places, with the author included in the fictional universe like an insect in amber and some imagined character playing the author, etc. The underlying idea is that the teller narrates himself into the story. Borges is one of the earliest examples of such experimentators. His stories are *multi-layered with characters migrating from one ontological level to another*.

In **Conclusions** we tried to explain that probably, the title of our doctoral research may sound rather abstract and vague, but the theme serves our need for the clarification of the extent to which literature depends on a certain critical theory for elucidation of meaning and assessment of value. The school of New Historicism, or, in its alliance with Cultural Materialism, of Cultural Studies, is here taken into consideration as the most appropriate source of method and concepts in an age also known as the terror of theory. Our thesis brings up proofs in this argument, some of them originating in a theoretical discussion of the premises of New Historicism in the context of other critical schools, of the present exegesis of literary history, theory and criticism. Other arguments are provided by the epistemology of the age which carries the traces of the linguistic turn, that is, the reversal of the relationship between language and referent. History is no longer conceived of as the non-problematic and truthful record of past events; it has been deconstructed as an act of language, a narrative following no other rules than the generic ones. The weightiest argument,

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<sup>2</sup> [...] as if I were watching from a mobile sky the smallest movements through the courtyards and streets of the locality, I could enlarge the everyday and fleeting design, caught in my worries on the scale of past-present-future dimensions, to tie and to unite from fragments stupid millimetres of the moment the map of metopolistic destinies on a scale of one-to-one.

though, is our reading of a number of literary texts which are best understood in light of this critical theory which emerged in the 1980s.

New Historicism becomes the focus of our discussion in Chapter I.3., where this school of critical theory is examined from several points of view, such as its place in the history of ideas, its history, its representatives, and its relevance to the meaning structure of a work of art.

The deconstruction of history (Alun Munslow) as narrative or as a matter of tropes was the logical consequence of the deconstruction of metaphysics, logocentrism, hegemonic structures, and of the subject in the previous decade (the sixties). The new concepts structuring the discourse about history are analysed, such as virtual, counterfactual, allohistory, etc.

The theory of New Historicism has also interested young academics and international writers, such as Dana Percec and Andreea Deciu, the Romanian contributions to the domain being discussed along with a presentation of two representatives of this school at the moment of its emergence: Linda Hutcheon and Stephen Greenblatt. Whereas Hutcheon coined the term “historiographic metafiction” – a very useful one for the interpretation of postwar/ postmodern fiction – Greenblatt revealed the contribution of other (also non-literary) discourses to the birth of a new work of art. These negotiations place the new text in the context of the entire social semiosis.

Magic realism is another name for historiographic metafiction. We have analysed the dramatic, foreboding context of its emergence in the early twentieth century when it replaced expressionism, its hybrid generic constitution, its alliance with other arts and emphatic reliance upon the visual element. We have distinguished between the two main traditions of magic realism, the European one, which is closer to surrealism and a matter of formal experiments, and the Latin-American one, which is intimately connected with the local folklore, beliefs, superstitions, and which is also more involved in politics, especially as a protest against totalitarianism.

A close reading of a canonical magic-realist text – the novel *Shame* by Salman Rushdie – is meant to cast light on the specific narrative structures and rhetorical devices which serve a historicist perspective on society and human relationships.

The last chapter is an attempt to define some parameters or generic features of magic realism: the spectrality of the past, the past as fiction, the forking ontology, the double view, the politics of representation, the hermeneutics of suspicion, the metafictional element.

The purpose of our research was that of bringing in arguments supportive of a theorized and conceptualized approach to literature in the context of a growing distrust of theory and of talks about a crisis in the humanities. We were also pleased to draw attention to valuable Romanian contributions to the research and discourse on this subject.

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