RELATED CONCEPTS: CULTURAL MATERIALISM, NEW HISTORICISM, CULTURAL STUDIES[1]

Maria MUREŞAN
"1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia
E-mail: elimuresan@gmail.com

Abstract:
Until 1988 Stephen Greenblatt practiced a kind of criticism which was closer to Cultural Materialism in its emphasis on ideology, on the exercise of state power in creating narratives supporting its desired self-image. In "Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare" (Chicago University Oress, 1982), Greenblatt undertakes a Foucauldian archaeology into the imaginary which caught the public eye in an age reputed for its self-dramatization and acting.

Alan Sinfield assumed his position as cultural materialist, which he equates with political dissidence, in his book, "Faultlines" (1992) from the very title: "Faultlines Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading". Included in this book is an essay on "Cultural Materialism, Othello, and the Politics of Plausibility".

In a New Historicist approach to the play ("The Shakespearean Search for Archetypes", 2020), Maria-Ana Tupan reads the plot against other texts that circulated at the time, and which account for the cognitive background of the characters.

Neema Parvini, a scholar from the University of Surrey, is a telling example of the way New Historicism works, that is, through a historicized and theorized approach to the author in question and through meditation on the tools of his interpretation (metatheory).

New Historicism too distances itself from the official canon, focusing on less known texts whose marginalization is seen as the policy of networks of power.

Raymond Williams launched a concept somewhat similar to Foucault's episteme – the "structure of feeling" – and his contribution to cultural anthropology dates back to 1961 when he published "The Long Revolution".

In Marin Sorescu's "Vărul Shakespeare" ("Cousin Shakespeare"), for instance, Hamlet's rage against the corruption of the Danish court swells so high because he is absolute for the humanistic ideals and values which were indeed current in the author's time, but which do not characterize either the time of the action (dated by Saxo Grammaticus at about 1200 AD) nor the time of the author rewriting it for a postmodern audience.

Similarly, D. R. Popescu produces a palimpsestic text in his 2012 novel, "Simonetta Berlusconi. Calugarul Filippo Lippi şi călugăriţa Lucrezia Buti", where not only do characters join a transhistorical party (the author too lapses into the chronodiegetic universe of the Italian Renaissance, visited by a refugee from Vlad the Impaler's land) but the very ontological stability of the worlds vanishes into the faultlines separating authors, critics, editors, characters.

The ongoing discussions about the sources, tenets, concepts and protocols of New Historicism, which are trying to breathe new life into a critical theory which colonized literary studies at the turn of the millennium, are revisionist and summative, locating New Historicism in the general picture assembled by William Wolfreys as editor of a book of essays on "Criticism at the 21st Century "(Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

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.

Until 1988 Stephen Greenblatt practiced a kind of criticism which was closer to Cultural Materialism in its emphasis on ideology, on the exercise of state power in creating narratives supporting its desired self-image. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* Greenblatt undertakes a Foucauldian archeology into the imaginary which caught the public eye in an age reputed for its self-dramatization and acting. Since 1988, however, he showed less interest in social and political contexts, concentrating on the discursive cultural practices which cut across genre or disciplinary fields. His new reading of Shakespeare's plays is meant to trace the circulation of semantic energies which fed into them. This time it is not social practices but artefacts, cultural objects which serve as the matricial field out of which literature is born: King Lear is read in connection with a pamphlet against the Pope which sends verbal echoes into the play, reports on Virginia, the first English colony, as well as the alchemist searches of John Dee, the Queen's mathematician, astronomer, occultist, etc. are said to be looming behind The Tempest and its protagonist, Prospero.

Alan Sinfield assumed his position as cultural materialist, which he equates with political dissidence, in his book *Faultlines* (1992) from the very title: *Faultlines Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Included in this book is an essay on *Cultural Materialism, Othello, and the Politics of Plausibility*. The basic assumption is that Iago has his work cut out for him by Othello's self-abasement, his awareness of inferiority and of his status as colonial other in relation to the Venetian society. He does not trust himself enough to believe in Desdemona's sincere affection for him. He is ready to accept Iago's insinuation that Desdemona is a lustful woman who had been attracted by his manliness, but who had already corrected her allegiance in favor of her Venetian peers.

Othello moves from being a colonized subject existing on the terms of white Venetian society and trying to internalize its ideology, towards being marginalized, outcast and alienated from it in every way until he occupies his true position as its other [...] Othello becomes a good subject once more by accepting within himself the state's distinction between civilized and barbaric. (Sinfield, 1992: 31, 35)

Cultural Materialism often errs on the side of one-factor analysis in order to promote their ideological agenda. An equally solid case could be built by a feminist in support of Desdemona's victimization by Othello's misinterpretation of an authority higher than the Spanish-named character, Iago, whose name means one who undermines in Hebrew.

In a New Historicist approach to the play (*The Shakespearean Search for Archetypes*, 2020), Maria-Ana Tupan reads the plot against other texts that circulated at the time, and which account for the cognitive background of the characters. Her comparative reading of Othello and the Quran identifies unmistakable quotes from the latter, Shakespeare probably becoming interested in the Turks and their beliefs on reading Richard Knolles's *History of the Turks* published in 1603, that is, the year of his writing the play. In this light, Othello is no longer a fool turned brutish, but a hero worthy of a tragedy, motivated by high ideas about human character and justice, yet, as Aristotle says, falling parry to a minor error of judgement. The argument goes as follows:

> Othello's religious identity can only be read against the sacred texts of a cult, and his concerns about Desdemona's infidelity do not for one moment weigh in the scales of his decision to kill her. His motivation is salvation of other people among whom she might spread corruption, and salvation of Desdemona herself, by restoring her to "light" instead of allowing her to end up in black hell. The text supporting his cogitation is the Qur'an: Othello measures time by the sun and the moon (see Surah 6, verse 96). In the Qur'an (XXXVII; 6, 7), God is said to have adorned

the lower heaven with stars as guards against "any
rebel devil, "the capital sins being apostasy and
fornication. Othello calls Desdemona "a young and
sweating devil here/ That commonly rebels" (Act III,
Scene 4) … In demonized Desdemona he sees a
threat to other men ("else she'll betray more men,"
Act V, Scene 2), disseminating corruption (See Surah
IX: 47). The rebels against the Law would like to put
out God's light (Surah IX: 32), but God will punish
them in order to purge and make them undefiled
again (Surah IX: 103), restored to "former light." On
the Day of Judgement the faces of the sinners look
"begrimed and black" (Koran: Surah III: 106, Surah
XXXIX: 60) "Begrimed and black/ As my own face, "
says Othello in Act III, Scene 3). In the Quran (Surah
VII: 46), men are said to "recognize all (of the
Paradise and Hell people) by their marks (the
dwellers of Paradise by their white faces and the
dwellers of Hell by their black faces." God is He who
sees the flowers bloom forth and then turn to black
hay (Surah LXVIII: 20) (Tupan, 2020: 131).

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Othello uses similar vegetative correlatives, more to
himself than to uncomprehending Desdemona:
"thou young and rose-lipped cherubim -/ Ay, there
look grim as hell" (Act IV, Scene 2) … There is divine
reprieve for those who repent, confess, and prey
(Surah IX), but, as Desdemona refuses at first to do
any, Othello decides that she has doomed herself.
Afterwards he tells her it is too late for prayer, as,
according to the Quran, it is no longer received when
death has already come upon the sinner (Surah IV:
18). He is not moved by Desdemona taking his crime

> upon herself, like Christian Emilia, because, in the
> Quran, no soul can do anything for another soul
> (LXXXII: 19), and, by lying, she has only aggravated
> her plight. After finding out the truth, he takes a
> different view of his future Reckoning with God:
> Desdemona will testify against him, as God
> summons witnesses to His trial (Surah XI: 18), and he
> will be hurled into hell: When we shall meet at
> comp, / This look of thine will hurl my soul from
> heaven, / And fiends will snatch it (Act V, Scene 2).
> (Tupan, 2020: 131)

Neema Parvini, a scholar from the University of Surrey, is a telling example of the way New Historicism works, that is, through a historicized and theorized approach to the author in question and through meditation on the tools of his interpretation (metatheory). His Books do indeed build an image of consistent scholarly research which goes deeper and deeper into the subject, adding new facets to the phenomenological construct, instead of jumping from one subject to another with radical changes of approach. It was his focus on Shakespeare that allowed him to come up with theoretical conclusions and enlightening explanatory narratives, such as the one underwriting the table below, on page 4 of *his Shakespeare's History Plays. Rethinking Historicism* with its fine distinctions among traditional humanist hermeneutics and the language-focused study of cultural historicists falling into two groups: New Historicists and Cultural Materialists.

The table does not include prominent cultural materialists, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, whose contributions go back to the 60's, siding with those who claim that Cultural Materialism emerged in the 80's, as a counterpart to the American New Historicism (See Line Cottegnies, *The New Historicism: A French Perspective*, 1997). We have already seen the difference between a New Historicist and a Cultural Materialist approach. Nevertheless, the school whose basis was laid by Richard Hoggart *(The Uses of Literacy)* concomitantly with the Roland Barthes turn to semiology *Mythologies* (1957) did mean a radical shift away from

aestheticism, New Criticism and high culture towards ideology, popular culture, which in 1963 made its entry into the academia (the Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies), subversion of the canon, study of the entire cultural semiosis. This is, however, an excellent map of the related fields in the society- and history-oriented criticism of the 80's.

Cultural Historicists		Dissenters
New Historicists	**Cultural Materialists**	**Humanists**
Text as instrument of state power	'First wave'	Liberal humanists
Stephen Greenblatt (pre-1988)	Jonathan Dollimore	Edward Pechter
Leonard Tennenhouse	Alan Sinfield	Richard Levin
Jonathan Goldberg	Catherine Belsey	Graham Bradshaw
Cultural poetics	Graham Holderness	Harold Bloom
Stephen Greenblatt (post-1988)	Richard Wilson	Other humanists
Catherine Gallagher	Michael Bristol	Andy Mousley
Stephen Mullaney	Feminist 'new materialists'	A. D. Nuttall
Other new historicists	Dympna Callaghan	Robin Headlam-Wells
Jean E. Howard	Kathleen McLuskie	
Marion F. O'Connor	Clare McManus	**Formalists**
Phyllis Rackin	Post-colonialists	
Walter Cohen	Lisa Jardine	'The new aestheticism'
Louis Montrose	Gerald MacLane	Isobel Armstrong
	Jerry Brotton	Simon Malpas
	Daniel Vitkus	John J. Joughin
	Ania Loomba	

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Raymond Williams launched a concept somewhat similar to Foucault's episteme – the "structure of feeling" – and his contribution to cultural anthropology dates back to 1961 when he published *The Long Revolution*. Here he anticipates New Historicism in several respects:

- There is no direct access to the past: "We cannot say that we know a particular form or period of society, and that we will see how its art and theory relate to it, for until we know these, we cannot really claim to know the society." (Williams 1961: web)

- Documenting the past is a matter of narratives grounded in certain assumptions. Williams mentions two former theories: according to one of them, culture is derived from the bases of society (relations of property, production, that is, the Marxist view of basis and superstructure); according to the second, the order of culture is autonomous: "a good deal of history has in fact been written on the assumption that the bases of the society, its political, economic, and 'social' arrangements, form the central core of facts, after which the art and theory can be adduced, for marginal illustration or 'correlation'. There has been a neat reversal of this procedure in the histories of literature, art, science, and philosophy, when these are described as developing by their own laws, " One can easily recognize in the latter the modernist legacy of art for art's sake, the aesthetic value being set above all the others, and decreed to be its own end.

  Raymond Williams supports neither, his theory of the patterns cutting across the institutions of "a whole way of life" sounding similar to Greenblatt's comment on the circulation of social energy in *Shakespearean Negotiations:*

  > Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this context, analysis of their essential kind of organization, the relationships which works or institutions embody as parts of the organization as a whole. A key-word, in such analysis, is pattern: it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities

of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned. (Williams, 1961: web)

- Williams distinguishes among three levels of culture – a classification which anticipates two New Historicist axioms: that the access to the past is mediated by language (what is recorded), and that the present generation shapes the textualized past according to its own interests and outlook, retrieving it in an act of reinscription: "We need to distinguish three levels of <u>culture</u>, even in its most general definition. There is the lived <u>culture</u> of a particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place. There is the recorded <u>culture</u>, of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts: the <u>culture</u> of a period. There is also, as the factor connecting lived <u>culture</u> and period <u>culture</u>s, the <u>culture</u> of the selective tradition. " (Williams, 1961: web)

Stuart Hall, in his turn, evolved a theory of representation within a contextualized, semiotic frame, in opposition to both realist and subjective/ modernist poetics.

The third approach recognizes this public, social character of language. It acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs. Hence it is called the constructivist or constructionist approach to meaning in language. According to this approach, we must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate.

Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to

make the world meaningful and to communicate
about that world meaningfully to others. (Hall, 1997:
25)

Hall makes it clear in the passage above that he is not
interested in the Marxist concept of basis (property and the
material means of production) but only in the signifying practices
in the order of culture (concepts, representations, metaphors,
symbols, etc.). Representation is not reflective of some preexisting
reality but constitutive. Reality is the effect of language, this being
also the main tenet of New Historicism. Language, however,
includes multimodal channels, images, artefacts – a semiotic, not a
disciplinary field. Barthes, Williams, Hall, as well as New
Historicists approach texts in relation to images, fetishes,
symbolical objects, etc.

The Open University Press published a new edition of the
book in 2013, which proves the viability of this classic of postwar
critical theory. We express our doubts, however, over the
classification of Hayden White as a predecessor of New
Historicism, if not a canonical figure thereof.

Hayden White secured his place in postmodern
historiography as a deconstructionist, for whom history vanishes
into tropes of discourse. On the ruins of the Old Historicism,
confident in its faithful reconstruction of the past, however, he
places new explanatory narratives with totalizing tendencies.
Could one really include, under the same umbrella, of "historical
realism", historians as different as Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville
and Burckhardt, or tell them apart according to concepts
borrowed from genre theory (romance, comedy, tragedy and
satire)? Do Marx, Nietzsche and Croce differ merely according to
rhetorical figures and schemes (metonymy, metaphor and irony)?
None of them ushers in the sense of distancing – now versus then
– which is all the more striking as they are interwoven.

In Marin Sorescu's *Vărul Shakespeare* (*Cousin
Shakespeare),* for instance, Hamlet's rage against the corruption of
the Danish court swells so high because he is absolute for the
humanistic ideals and values which were indeed current in the
author's time, but which do not characterize either the time of the

action (dated by Saxo Grammaticus at about 1200 AD) nor the
time of the author rewriting it for a postmodern audience. *Cousin
Shakespeare* was written in the late 1980s, the Ceaușescu
dictatorship's most repressive period. Early in the decade, Marin
Sorescu already had turned from literature to painting
temporarily, when his works became interdicted. I never got to ask
him, but I would guess that Sorescu hadn't expected to see *Cousin
Shakespeare* put into print or produced in his lifetime, for its
premise alone would have offended the regime's censors as too
blatant an allegory for Romania and its police state: that, because
of the political spies, the terror, and the (Elizabethan) secret
service, Shakespeare has writer's block. Hence the character
"Sorescu—a Dane" has somehow ventured back in time to help his
cousin playwright. Written mostly in verse, the play is a kind
of *tour de force* of moods and methods, from seriousness to
comedy, from bloody melodrama to pathos, from absurdity and
farce to witty irony and trenchant satire. The roster of characters
in itself suggests the playwright's range of thematic concerns and
theatrical effects. In the *dramatis personae* are, for example,
Shakespeare himself, Hamlet, a witch, a ghost, the Ides of March,
Ophelia's sister Camelia, a skull that speaks in rhyme, a patriotic
free Romanian peasant in search of a playwright to portray
Romania's tragedy ("Voicea – the hero who cannot find a place in
Shakespeare"), the Dark Lady, Shakespeare's wife, an American
Sailor, Ben Jonson, jesters, and various nobles and players and
playwrights, etc. Sorescu joins the cast of characters taking with
himself into Elizabethan England the relativistic, playful mood of
the late twentieth century cast into a colloquial, informal, if not
pejorative idiom.

The Prologue is meant to explain the holistic image of the
world as a theatre, that world reduced to the O of the stage, as
Shakespeare's Prologue says in *Henry V*: nothing and everything.
History is thus reduced to drama, to the stage of representation,
and to the breath/ wind of the Word that created the world.
Distinctions between one age and another there are no more.
Through rewriting, the same scene/ events are re-enacted. No
generation can live what others lived, they merely rewrite the past,
but the new vision is replete with scenes of the past as they are

passed on in cultural artefacts. From actuality, history is retrieved through play (suggested by the ball/ globe/ earth, by the whirligig and many other tropes).

> PROLOGUL
> (intră îmbrăcat în togă, cu mască și coturni):
>
> 'De-i spațiul curb ca mingea, ce-n perete /Dac-o izbești, îți sare-n piept — și astfel/ Tot căutînd pe alții, dai de tine... /Atunci și timpu-nchis în minge-același/ Rămâne secole, milenii lungi. / Și zile, chiar din drojdia genezei, /Se-nvecinează cu-ale tale clipe... /Stau secolele după gard, cu mâna / Le-atingi și respirînd același aer, / /Aceleași viziuni ai... Toți de-a valma / Ne-mpleticim parcă-n aceeași piesă, /Pe care încercăm s-o tot rescriem, /Dar replicile ni-s mereu suflate /Și tra'se-n piept de-apuse generații/ Și vîntul ce rotește-n veci pămîntuil /Ne suflă sufletele... și le-ncurcă...
> Intră Titirez. (Sorescu, 1993: 168).
>
> PROLOGUE
> (enters dressed in a toga, with a mask and stilts)
> 'Because the space is curved like a ball, which in the wall, / If you hit it, it jumps on your chest - and so, while looking for others, you find yourself ... millennia long/ And days, even from the yeast of genesis, / Are flowing into with your moments ... / They stand behind the fence, with their hand / Touching and breathing the same air, /The same visions of the Amalgamated All / We stumble into as if in the same square, / Because we persevere in rewriting it, / But our lines are always blown / And dragged into the chest of past generations /And the wind that whirls forever in the earth / Blows our souls ... and confuses them ...

Enter Whirligig. (our translation)

In this sophisticated piece of writing, we are particularly intrigued by the image of the air/ wind dragged into the chest of past generations. The meaning is probably allegorical: when present generations write about the past, partial and biased as our access to it may be, the picture is modified by a new interpretation in light of a new epistemology. The contact between generations always implies contamination. It may reach the level of displacement. Sorescu displaces Shakespeare imagining another plot for the story, but not in a random fashion. In allegorical fashion, Sorescu travels back in time and his reading of the play can only be accompanied by a new vision or interpretation of the events. The taming of Hamlet may be the idea of a modern, pacifist age, yet is not Sorescu mixing up guns and crosses in the graveyard echoing Shakespeare's undertext or level of implications? Is not Hamlet jumping into a grave in the final act and identifying himself with his father on the very day but thirty years later when his father had killed Fortinbras triggering the cycle of violence (according to the gravediggers)? Is not Shakespeare troping on the very choice between peace and war/ death which Sorescu is literally blaming? Is not Hamlet reasoning out the issue of his uncle's sin and reaching the conclusion that the whole of humanity is fallen as a consequence of the original sin that tainted human flesh? Hamlet's speech about Denmark being rotten is reinscribed in the negative:

> SORESCU: Om bun danez, ți-atrag luare-aminte: /Nu ponegri atîti această țară!/ Norvegu-i la un pas și Englitera /Tribut în silă dă de ani vreo șapte./ Se pregătesc oștiri, evenimente. /Nimic în Danemarca nu e putred! /Așa să știi. Orice daniez cunoaște. /E totuși mică-aeeastă țărișoară, / Chiar fetele, cu genele, forțează / Prea strimte graniți, când clipesc din gene, /Și ochii peste cap și-i dau, ochioase.
> HAMLET: Dar cine ești ?

SORESCU: Prieten, ca Horațio La fel de bun.
Dar lasă-mă să termin. De s-a stricat cumva această
lume Și globul merge ocâș — și Danemarca / Atunci
are câtimea ei de vină... / Dar nu-i exagerăm
atît pomosul. „E ceva putred azi

în toată lumea", / Așa să spui, te rog. în general.
(încet, prietenește.)
Te roagă Shakespeare.
HAMLET: Nu-l cunosc. El cine-i ?
SORESCU: Nici el de mine n-a vrut -la-nceput
/ Să știe... însă cumpănind, luând seama, / Și
chibzuind s-a dumirit... / Și anume încoace m-a
trimis să-ți spun: / Nu-i place/ Purtarea ta la Elsinore!
Te schimbă, / Să poată scrie el o altă piesă. (Sorescu,
1993: 171).

SORESCU: Good Dane, I would like to
caution you: / Don't blame this country so much! /
Norway is one step away and England / Forced
tribute has paid around for seven years./ Hosts,
events are in readiness./ Nothing in Denmark is
rotten! / So may you know? Every Dane knows. / It's
still this little country, / Even the girls, with their
eyelashes, force / Too tight borders, when they blink
from their eyelashes, / Rolling their eyes with luring
coquetry.
HAMLET: But who are you?
SORESCU: A friend, like Horatio. Just as
good. / But let me finish. If this world is somehow
ruined / And the globe is spiralling down – so will
Denmark / Then it's just a share of universal blame ...
/ Let's not exaggerate so much./ "Something is rotten
now in the whole world"? Thus speak thou, please, in
general.
 (Whispering on a friendly tone)
It's Shakespeare who's asking you.
HAMLET: I don't know him. Who is he?

> SORESCU: He too denied knowing me at the beginning/ But on second thoughts, pondering on it, he came to understand./ Here he sent me to tell you: / He doesn't like / Your conduct in Elsinore! / Prey change thyself, / So he can write another play. (our translation).

Similarly, D.R. Popescu produces a palimpsestic text in his 2012 novel, *Simonetta Berlusconi. Călugărul Filippo Lippi și călugărița Lucrezia Buti,* where not only do characters join a transhistorical party (the author too lapses into the chronodiegetic universe of the Italian Renaissance, visited by a refugee from Vlad the Impaler's land) but the very ontological stability of the worlds vanishes into the faultlines separating authors, critics, editors, characters. The embedding structure looks like a Matryoshka doll: outer frame - metafictional plot; real AUTHOR (D.R. Popescu) playing EDITOR of a found text; an academic studying the text (CRITIC-RTESEARCHER). Inner frame: Giorgio Vasari, the Renaissance critic of Italian art as SOURCE and CHARACTER.

Innermost frame: MIX OF CHARACTERS: historical (Medici, the Pope, painter Fra Lippo, Vlad the Impaler ...), invented (Simonetta Berlusconi, the personification of Italian art, travelers from Vallachia...) mythological (goblins, Greek and Roman gods ...), real (the author).

The ongoing discussions about the sources, tenets, concepts and protocols of New Historicism, which are trying to breathe new life into a critical theory which colonized literary studies at the turn of the millennium, are revisionist and summative, locating New Historicism in the general picture assembled by William Wolfreys as editor of a book of essays called *Criticism at the 21st Century*.

The return to history, however, is a problematic issue as Linda Hutcheon has maintained: it is a return made problematic by overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs, indeed as human illusions – necessary, but none the less illusory for all that. The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in a way, the views of certain contemporary historiographers...: it offers a sense of the presence

of the past, but this is a past that can only be known from its texts, its traces, be they literary or historical. (Hutcheon, 1989: 4)

The interactive use of the literary and historical texts and intertexts functions as a formal marking of historieity, especially in the novels of such authors as Peter Ackroyd, D.M. Thomas, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Ian Watson, Jeanette Winterson, A.S. Byatt, Penelope Fitzgerald, Lawrence Norfolk, Ross King, Robert Irwin, and Derek Beaven, among so many others in the 1980s and 90s. In addition, Hutcheon says that in postmodernism, the tendency to understand literary and historical texts as a common possession of society returns: "but it is a return made problematic by overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs, indeed, as human illusions- necessary, but nonetheless illusionary for all that"(Hutcheon, 1995: 4). In historiographic metafiction history is seen as illusion, not determinism as in Marxism.

Many literary scholars argue that the centrality to convey this mode of subjectivity and constructedness in historiographic discourse lies in the narrative techniques the authors use (see e.g. White). They accordingly argue that the historical events depicted in historiographic metafiction do not have any meaning in themselves, but rather that historiographers must assign meaning to them by establishing patterns and connections in the narrative in order to create coherence. Furthermore, owing to the self-consciousness of their own narrative process aforementioned, "the narrator is visibly in control of what is presented and usually comments upon, ex-plains and rationalizes contradictions or narrative disorder" (Hutcheon, 1995: 55). In other words, "historiographic metafiction openly acknowledges the narrator's presence and power of manipulation" (Hutcheon, 1995: 41).

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.

IN MEMORIAM: Mircea BRAGA - LITERATURA ȘI VIAȚA: ÎNTRE REALITATE ȘI FICȚIUNE

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Maria MUREȘAN: Dr. Maria Mureșan is lecturer at the Department of Philology and currently teaches Business English, Oral and Written Communication in Business, Commercial Correspondence in the field of Business Administration, Marketing and Tourism and Services at the Faculty of Economics. Her main interests include teaching English for business studies (readings from newspapers, works of non-fiction and college textbooks to illustrate the use of target structures in English), translation studies.

She is the author of 2 books, articles and book chapters; she is the co-organizer of *In Extenso* Business English Conference for Students in Economics (Alba Iulia, 2011 2020) and of CMKS international conferences *Career Management in Knowledge based Society*, Alba Iulia, 2013-2020.