

**NEW HISTORICISM AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF
CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS OF CRITICAL THEORY¹**

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Abstract

The present study 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 (2004) 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

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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 colored by affect and emotional response to historical experience. 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.

Keywords: New Historicism; deconstructing history; counterfactual history; critical theory; allohistories.

1. Introduction: Why Theory?

Why theory, one could wonder, as the topic is considered both difficult and dry. The answer will come in promptly: because theory has become a *sine qua non* condition of critical practice. It offers criteria for the assessment and validation of criticism based on arguments, consensus over methods, terms and protocols of approach, which earns it the status of literary study as science.²

Theory is the work of the last generation, yet the theoretical turn, as we might call it, has had effects that are going to stay with us in the same way in which the tasting of the forbidden fruit had irreversible consequences. One even has the impression that authors themselves write with a book of theory in hand.

² There is current publishing on the topic of literature and science, including a journal so titled: *Scientific Study of Literature (SSOL)*, published by International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and based in Amsterdam and Philadelphia, which "publishes empirical studies that apply scientific stringency to cast light on the structure and function of literary phenomena". Generally interdisciplinary in character, these studies appeal to the cognitive sciences and to network culture.

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The present paper is justifying 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.

2. Mario Klarer's Survey of Literary Theories on the Basis of a Communicational Model Involving Message (Author, Reader, Text) and Context

Mario Klarer's *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2004) is a book that focuses on the idea that literary interpretations consistently 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 (Klarer, 2004, p. 92). Literary studies are characterized by a multitude of approaches and methods. Literary theory has emerged as an independent discipline influenced by philosophy, it analyzes the philosophical and methodological postulates of literary criticism. Whereas literary criticism is concerned with the analysis, interpretation and assessment of primary sources, literary theory aims 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, permanently reflecting on its own development and methodological framework.

From 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.

First, the text-oriented approach is mainly concerned with issues of "materiality" of the text (the analysis of manuscripts, the language and style of texts, the formal structure of literary works). Second, contextual approaches try to situate literary texts

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on the historical, social or political background, trying to classify the texts both by genre and by historical periods. Third, author-oriented theoretical schools emphasize the author, trying to identify links between the works of art and their creator's biography. Fourth, reader-oriented approaches concentrate on the reception of texts by the public and on the overall impact of texts on readers. But, says the author, this is a simplistic systematization, because not every theoretical school is limited to a single methodology, invariable. One of these approaches will prevail in each cultural phase.

Our first objection concerning the text-oriented chapter is that Klarer (2004) discusses formalist schools (Russian formalism, English New Criticism, British or American) on a par with post-structuralist, postwar theories, following the semiotic turn, based upon a different philosophy of language. For semiotician Barthes (1977), a text is a "tissue of signs", a site of multiple meanings contributed by intertextual relationships, i.e., relationships of the respective text with "multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (Barthes, 1977, p. 148). Unlike formalist close reading, claiming to retrieve the authentic meaning of a text confined to its unique graphical space, postwar theoreticians of the text relate it to other texts (Barthes, 1977), to an interface with reality: hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard, 2015) or see it deterritorializing into the world as flux of matter and energy (Deleuze, 1993).

3. Text-Centered Approaches

The text-centered approaches emphasize the inner textual aspects of the literary work. In this case, extra-textual factors related to the author (biography or other works), audience (gender, age, education, race, class) or broader settings (historical, social or political constraints) are consciously excluded from the analysis. The formal or structural features of the text are analyzed. For example, traditional philology, studies the "concrete" elements of language, whereas rhetoric and stylistics analyze broader structures or modes of expression.

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Formalist-structural schools, including Russian Formalism, the Prague Structural School, New Criticism, Semiotics, and Deconstructionism, try to find common patterns in texts or clarify the issue of “literature”.

In literary criticism, traditionally, the term “philology” refers to approaches based on problems of writing and reconstructing texts. Philology, culminating in the Renaissance with the revival of ancient authors, the invention of the printing press and the need to edit texts correctly, continued to be one of the dominant schools until the nineteenth century. Philological approaches include the analysis of the frequency of use of certain words by an author, quantitative and statistical investigations. Text-oriented schools concentrate on formal aspects (point of view, textual and narrative structure, intrigue patterns) and on style (word choice, rhetorical figures, syntax, metrics). Along with grammar and theology, rhetoric has remained a dominant textual discipline for nearly two thousand years. Because ancient Greco-Roman civilizations appreciated public discourse, rhetoric gathered a number of rules and techniques for composing effective discourse. Rhetoric was particularly interested in techniques for influencing the masses, but it soon became a theoretical academic discipline. While attempting to classify, systematize, and research the elements of human speech, rhetoric laid the groundwork for linguistic and literary criticism. In the nineteenth century, rhetoric was replaced by stylistics, a discipline that focuses on grammatical structures (lexicon, syntax), acoustic elements (melody, rhyme, meter, rhythm) and rhetorical figures in text analysis. Stylistics is the forerunner of the formalist-structuralist schools of the twentieth century.

Russian formalism, the Prague Structural School, the New Critique, Post-structuralism, despite their differences, have in common the attempt to explain the content of the texts by their formal and structural dimension, in the author’s opinion. Russian formalism (active during and after the First World War) is interested in structural analysis, in the literature of texts (which makes them a literary text). In search of the typical features of literature, Russian formalism rejects notions such as spirit, intuition, imagination, poetic genius. The formalist approach

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deliberately neglects the historical, sociological, biographical or psychological elements of literary discourse, in favor of phonetic structure, rhythm, rhyme, metrics and sounds as independent aspects of literary discourse. In the opinion of Viktor Shklovsky and other formalists, as cited in Berlina (2017), the structural elements in a literary text produce an effect labelled as defamiliarization (“breaking” our usual perception of the world and the possibility of seeing everything with different eyes, as something new). To explain this effect, the classic example is the novel *Tristram Shandy* (published from 1759 to 1767) by Laurence Sterne. The novel begins as a traditional autobiography that tells the life of the main character from birth to death. Defamiliarization occurs with the fact that the story does not begin with the birth of the hero, but with the sexual act in which he is conceived, thus parodying traditional narratives of this type. The narrative structure and traditional intrigue are highlighted and intentionally parodied when Sterne incorporates the preface and dedication of the novel somewhere in the middle of the text and inserts chapters 18 and 19 after chapter 25. Additionally, Sterne includes empty spaces in the text, which the reader’s imagination will have to fill them. These elements challenge the familiar conventions of the novel, revealing the fundamental structure of the novel and reminding the reader of the artificiality of the literary text.

In contemporary literary criticism, self-reflection is often called metafiction (fiction about fiction), i.e. those literary works that reflect their own narratological elements such as language, narrative structure, and the evolution of intrigue. In postmodern texts written during the second half of the twentieth century, metafictional features become so used that they become almost a leitmotif, a dominant one, of this period. Vladimir Propp’s typology of characters (2012), which reduces the unlimited number of characters to be found in literary works to a list of types, has become one of the most important contributions of Russian formalism to the structuralist theories of the twentieth century. This type of analysis reduces the characters to a limited number of elementary structural agents such as: villain, helper, donor, princess, hero and fake hero. Mythical critics try to

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distinguish “archetypes”, narrative structures and symbols that seem to link a literary work with ancient myths and religions. The best-known and most important example of this approach is *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) by J.G. Frazer which attempts to discover common mythological structures in different historical periods and geographical areas. Claude Lévi-Strauss continues the typology of Propp’s characters and the analysis of Frazer’s myths in *Structural Anthropology*, which also refers to mythological models essential in cultural description and analysis. The most important contribution of the mythological approach is, however, that of Northrop Frye (1951), who places mythological structures at the core of the most important literary genres. Frye considers that the forms of comedy, novel, tragedy and irony (for example, satire) resemble the patterns of the seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter) in the primordial myths. The archetypal critique, based on the psychology of the unconscious by C.G. Jung, goes in the same direction, looking in texts for collective motives of the human psyche, common to different historical periods and countries. These archetypes represent the primordial images of the human subconscious that have preserved their structures in various cultures and periods. Archetypes such as shadow, fire, snake, Paradise Garden, hell, mother figure etc. appear constantly in myth and literature, expressing man’s fears and hopes, and can be interpreted structurally. Thus, the purpose of archetypal criticism is to move beyond the surface of the literary text in search of recurring structures of depth.

The new critique, the dominant school of literary criticism in the English-speaking countries between 1930-1940, represented by literary critics such as William K. Wimsatt, Allen Tate, and J.C. Ransom, seeks to release criticism from extrinsic factors and focus on the text itself. In his analyzes, the New Criticism focuses on phenomena such as multiple meanings, paradox, irony, puns, rhetorical figures that link the literary work to the general context. Especially poetry is suitable for this type of interpretation due to the specific features (rhyme, meter, rhetorical elements).

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Semiotics and deconstruction - Klarer says (2004) - are trends in text-centered literary theory from the 1970s-1980s, which see text as a system of signs. At the basis of these theoretical ideas is the linguistic model of Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguist who starts from the hypothesis that language works through representation (the mental image is manifested or represented verbally). Before using the word 'tree', for example, man must imagine the mental concept of the tree. Saussure distinguishes two fundamental levels of language, the pre-linguistic concept (the mental image of a tree) = signified [fr. *signifié*], and its verbal manifestation (the sequence of letters or sounds c-o-p-a-c) = the signifier [fr. *signifiant*]. Saussure explains language as a means of communication through a similar dichotomy: "langue", the language, rules and methods of combination, and 'passwords', the word, the application of the former in individual oral or written expression. Semiotics and deconstruction use the verbal sign, the signifier, as the starting point of their analyses, claiming that there is nothing outside the text [that is, our perception of the world is textual in nature]. According to these approaches, the language or texts work in a similar way to the game of chess. A limited number of signs, like chessboard figurines, only make sense when they are in a closed system. A new and unconventional aspect of semiotics and deconstruction is the attempt to extend the traditional notion of textuality to non-literary or non-linguistic sign systems. Methods of semiotic analysis have been applied in anthropology, the study of popular culture (advertising), geography, architecture, film and art history. Buildings, myths or images are considered systems of signs in which signs interact in the same way as letters, words and sentences. Therefore, these different disciplines are often placed under the umbrella of the general term semiotics, meaning sign science.

A practical example of the analysis of non-linguistic sign systems is the semiotics of fashion by Roland Barthes (1975). The French critic considers clothing as systems of signs whose elements can be "read" as well as the literary signs of the texts. The width of a tie contains complex information. A narrow leather tie conveys a totally different message than a short, wide

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tie or a bow tie (Barthes, 1975, p. 234). Like words, these textile signs can convey a meaning only framed in a certain context or sign system. Fashion, as a manifestation of social relations, gives us a good example of mechanisms in a non-linguistic system. Like semiotics, deconstruction highlights the unitary character of texts whose elements are signs. This method of post-structural analysis starts from the idea that a text can be analyzed (deconstructed) and composed (constructed). According to the deconstruction, the text does not remain the same after the reconstruction, because the analysis of the signs and their reorganization during the interpretation are like a continuation of the text.

Deconstruction is represented by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1978/2005) and the literary theorist Paul de Man (1982). An adaptation of this theory are “dictionary novels”, such as *Alphabetical Africa* (1974) by Walter Abish. These texts take the form and structure of a dictionary or encyclopedia to highlight postmodern theoretical notions of text. Dictionary novels can be read from beginning to end linearly, or they can be started from somewhere in the middle, jumping back and forth from reference to reference.

Placing under the same umbrella (text-centered) all these critical theories – even some of them which are at loggerheads with each other, such as archetypal and deconstructionist criticism – seems to us highly objectionable. Semiotics studies meanings in a world of things, the whole social semiosis being its object (See Roland Barthes distinguishing between weaving loom as dictionary entry versus vignette in an encyclopedia, associating the sign with processes and processual codes in *The Plates of the Encyclopedia*, where he comments upon Diderot’s use of engraved plates – Fig. 1). According to Barthes’s insightful commentary of the French Encyclopedia (1964/1980), the object is “historicized”, presented in its genesis from nothingness, and in this way asserting the luminaries’ trust in man’s infinite creative powers. “This Encyclopedic object is ordinarily apprehended by the image on three levels: anthropological, since the object, isolated from any context, is presented in *itself*; anecdotic, when it is “naturalized” by its insertion into a large-scale *tableau-*

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vivant (which is what we call a vignette); genetic, when the image offers us the trajectory from raw substance to finished object: genesis, essence, praxis, the object is thus accounted for in all its categories: sometimes it *is*, sometimes it *is made*, sometimes it even *makes*.” (Barthes, 1980, p. 24). The vignette does not have only an *existential* function, but an *epic* one, as for, instance, when through the door of the weapon shop one can see two men dueling in the street (Barthes, 1980, pp. 31-32).

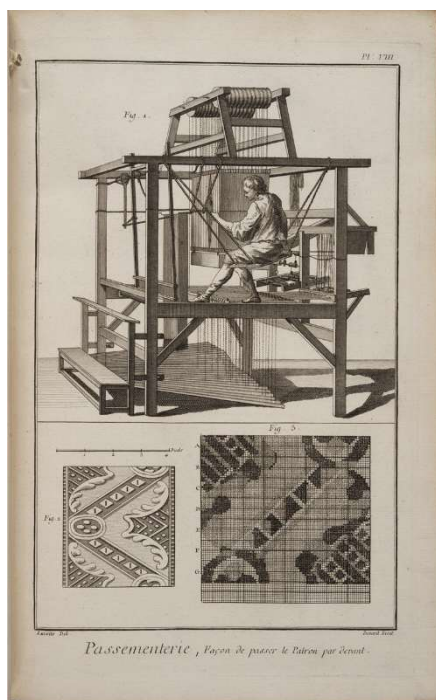


Fig. 1. Plate 17111 of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*

Moreover, J. Hillis Miller (1980) of Yale University, who evolved from semiotics to New Historicism, glosses on the indeterminate character of a text's meaning structure to the point where, not only are there several possible interpretations, but even opposite ones, contradictions or indeterminacy. In his own words, he

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identifies “the presence in a text of two or more incompatible or contradictory meanings which imply one another or are intertwined with one another, but which may by no means be felt or named as a unified totality” (Miller, 1980, p. 107). Miller quotes Tolstoy’s “splendid phrase”, “the labyrinth of linkages”, which nowadays we could use to describe the hypertext constituted through browsing in the net. It is this kind of interpretation, which identifies double and opposite meaning structures in a text, or the atemporal labyrinth of links in the net that allows us to appropriately gloss on narratives of transhistorical parties (characters belonging to different ages) and of competing historical accounts of events; it is New Historicism.

The object of our REFUTATIO are now the author-oriented approaches.

4. Author-Centered Approaches

In Klarer’s taxonomy, biographical criticism evolved and became a dominant movement in the nineteenth century, before the most important theories of formalism and structuralism. This author-centered approach establishes a direct link between the literary text and the author’s biography. Facts, facts and events from an author’s life are juxtaposed with elements from his works to find aspects that link the author’s biography to the text. The author’s environment and education are researched, linking them to certain phenomena in the text. The author’s library can also be examined to understand the author’s readings, and his letters and diary can be read in search of personal considerations. Autobiographies are useful in this type of approach that compares the author’s fictional portrait with the facts and figures in his life. In many cases, autobiographical elements enter, coded, into the fictional text. Author-centered approaches also focus on issues that could have entered the text at a subconscious or involuntary level. For example, the author argues that the fact that Mary Shelley lost a pregnancy while writing the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) may be directly related to the subject. The author-centered approaches see in the central theme of the

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novel, the creation of an artificial human being, a connection with the intense psychological preoccupation of the author with the birth that was to follow. Many authors want to keep their fictional texts and privacy intact by opposing these approaches. The American author J.D. Salinger, famous for his novel *The Catcher in the Rye* completely refused to make public any information about his life. As the example with Mary Shelley shows, many biographical approaches tend to use psychological explanations.

This has led to psychoanalytic criticism, a movement that seeks primarily to clarify the general psychological aspects of a text, not necessarily related exclusively to the author. The characters in a text can be analyzed psychologically, as if they were real beings. An example analyzed in this approach is the mental state of Hamlet in Shakespeare's tragedy. Psychoanalytic critics ask whether Hamlet is insane and, if so, why he suffers from mental illness. Sigmund Freud also used literary texts to explain certain psychological phenomena. In the second half of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic criticism revived under the influence of the French analyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981).

Our objections concerning this part of the survey concern the very centrality of the author whose "death" was decreed by Roland Barthes in his celebrated 1967 essay, and nobody from among contemporary literary theorists has contradicted him so far. The writing instance is separated from the body in the world, and, therefore, writing is also independent of the body of the world: from a linguistic point of view,

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. (Barthes, 1977, p. 145)

The writer is under no pledge to carry the reality he witnesses into his book; most probably than not he will do the opposite

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being subject to signifying conventions, political biases, norms imposed by institutions, etc.

It ensures that writing can no longer label an operation of recording, notation, representation, “depiction” (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists call a performative, i.e. a rare verb form (entirely given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the speech act by which it is uttered - something like the “Command of kings” or the “Sing of the early bards”. Having buried the Author, the modern writers can consequently no longer believe, as dictated by the “pathos” of their precursors, that their hand is too sluggish for their ideas or emotions and that as a result, making a law of necessity, they must underline this setback and endlessly “polish” their form. On the contrary, for the nowadays writer, the hand, severed from any voice, carried by a pure gesture of inscription (not one of expression), charts a field without a starting point - or which, at best, “has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (Barthes, 1977, p. 146).

In other words, while not reflecting back upon a reality presumably perceived with objective lack of prejudice, writing will sooner construct reality, project its textual garb for posterity.

Philippe Lejeune (1989) has even dismissed the biographical genre altogether, on account of the impossibility for the human mind to faithfully retrieve past experiences. This kind of writing is merely assumed as autobiographical through the tacit complicity of author and reader.

As far as Jacques Lacan is concerned, the origin of representation is not within the private realm of the I (the *I* of the mirror stage, of the infant looking at its full and autonomous image in the mirror) but in the intersubjective order provided by language (where the *I* is metonymically present according to norms imposed by the power system or Law of the Farther). Lacan writes in his essay “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud” (1966/2006) that the reflection of this order in the subject’s unconscious is the voice of the Other, that is, the voice of authority which the individual

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unconsciously internalizes. Apparently, the reader-oriented and the context-oriented approaches sound more familiar to the postmodern theory reader.

5. Reader-Centered Approaches

As a reaction to the dominant position of the new text-centered critique, in the 1960s a reader-centered approach called reception-response theory was developed. She argues that there is no single, objective text. There is a new "text", individual to each reading process. These approaches assume that, at each stage of the reading, a text creates in the reader certain expectations, which it then satisfies or not. Expectations are the basis for interpreting the text at any level of reading, from deciphering a word or a sentence, to analyzing the thematic structure of the text. Thus, the theory of reception shifts the attention from the text to the interaction between the reader and the text, arguing that the interpretation of texts should not be separated from individual reading.

The reader-response is not, however, what Barthes had in mind when speaking about the birth of the reader pitied against the death of the author. On the one hand, Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser have in mind the act of communication which reduces the text's indeterminacy to a certain meaning structure; on the other, the phenomenological act of interpretation, of progressive appropriation of a text's meaning is based on two assumptions: 1) that the text has a definite meaning structure, and 2) that that meaning is at least hypothetically reachable through consecutive stages of phenomenological variation and reduction. Neither is accepted by Barthes. He refuses "to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text" (Barthes, 1977, p. 147), and he also speaks of a virtual, ideal reader:

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography,

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psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (Barthes, 1977, p. 148)

The historian as reader of the past's leftovers never satisfies such conditions. He does not have access to all the traces, all the documents (some of them are fragmentary), he is some concrete individual, who is not in a position to decipher but to conjecture, while being poised between present perspective and the other's past lived experience.

We have finally reached the part of the survey that incorporates New Historicism, its inclusion among context-oriented approaches being a consensual one, with the specification that the context is a linguistic one, not one provided by the historical world out there.

6. Context-Centered Approaches

Context-centered approaches represent a group of schools and methodologies that do not consider literary texts as independent, independent works, trying to place them in a broader context. This context can be the historical, social and political background, the literary genre, the nationality and the author's genre. The most influential movement of this type is literary history, which divides literary phenomena into periods, describes the text according to its historical background, dates the texts and examines their mutual influences. An important school that places literary works in the broader context of socio-political mechanisms is Marxist literary theory. Based on the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and theorists such as Georg Lukács (1885-1971), the texts are analyzed as an expression of economic, sociological and political factors. The conditions of production in certain literary periods and their influence on the literary texts of that period are examined. A Marxist literary interpretation would see the development of the novel in the sec. XVIII as a consequence of the new economic conditions on writers and readers, and of the new ways of producing books. The theoretical framework offered by Marxist criticism has been adopted by

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more recent schools that focus on marginalized groups: feminist, African-American, homosexual and lesbian criticism, colonial literary studies, etc. Text-centered approaches such as Deconstruction and the New Historicism are influenced by Marxist thought in their terminology and philosophical foundations.

The new historicism developed in the USA in the 1980s. History is not seen as isolated from the literary text, as a historical context, becoming a textual phenomenon. Related to the new history, but independent of it, are cultural studies, which became in the 1990s one of the most important approaches to the literary text. Starting from literary studies, this approach analyses different aspects of human expression, including visual arts, film, television, advertising, fashion, architecture, music, popular culture, etc. Cultural studies have a multilateral approach, trying to understand the plurality of culture.

The most productive and revolutionary movement among the newer theories of literary criticism and among contextual approaches is feminist literary theory. It starts from the idea that the gender difference is a neglected aspect in traditional literary criticism and argues that the traditional fields of literary criticism must be re-examined from a gender-oriented perspective. At the beginning of this movement in the late 1960s, topics such as the image of women in texts written by authors were brought to the fore, with early attempts at feminist criticism focusing on stereotypes and distorted portraits of women in the male-dominated literary tradition. The next stage of feminist literary theory is feminist literary history and the revision of the canon, to establish a new set of standard texts written by the author. With the reception in America of French feminists such as Hélène Cixous (1937) and Julia Kristeva (1941), with a good background in psychoanalysis and philosophy, the attention of feminist literary critics shifted in the early 1980s to the stylistics of the text. Assuming that the gender difference determines the act of writing (style, narrative structure, content, intrigue, etc.), feminist literary criticism has questioned the term “écriture féminine”.

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Grouping under one heading schools of the eighties, which meant a return to history but not in the sense ascribed to it by classical historians, Klarer smooths over important differences existing among Identity Studies (studied of the classed, raced and gendered body), New Historicism – wrongly associated with deconstruction – Cultural Studies, and a sort of Neo-Marxism which is looked upon as an ideological ground shared by all of them. Unlike Marxism, which relegates language, ideology, culture to the superstructure of the basic means and relationships of production, all postmodern theories emphasize the priority of language, of the intersubjective order of culture, of ideology (Foucault: “the power structure”; Lacan: “Law of the Father”; René Girard: “the discourse of the Other”). It is true that feminists and New Historicists set out from a deconstructionist act (deconstruction of essentialist identity, or of history), but they also construct their object as the interface of texts and world (hyperreality, living in the world according to texts, texts drawing on modes of living). Moreover, Cultural Studies emerged out of the association of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism (the Birmingham School).

A discussion of New Historicism involves a philosophy of signifying practices – the text–, signifying instances – the author–, discursive negotiations – the context–, linguistic hermeneutics – the reader– (Klarer, 2004). That is why we had to go through his entire survey.

7. Conclusion

Klarer (2004) is trying to produce a picture of all the theories concerning the literary text which emerged in the last century. He chooses, as classificatory principle, the site of an act of communication which has an illocutionary source (AUTHOR), an addressee (READER) a message (TEXT) and a CONTEXT of communication. The reason he fails is his neglect of the completely distinct epistemological matrix in which the four notions are grounded in each case. Mario Klarer's *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2004) is a book that focuses on the idea that literary interpretations consistently reflect a certain

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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.

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