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New Mannerism?
Mystery and Cultural Memory in Four Postmodern Novels

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Abstract. From a literary viewpoint, peculiar characteristics of Mannerism are intricate plots, refined style, fine rhetoric, particular metaphors, surprizing parallelisms and the taste for decorative elements. It seems that in four novels written at the end of the 20th century we can find the same characteristic features.

Other common elements present in all four books (*The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, *The Emerald Game* by Ioan Petru Culianu, *Dictionary of the Khazars*. *A lexicon novel* by Milorad Pavić and *Hollóidő* [*Raven's Times*] by István Szilágyi) are the tremendous erudition and knowledge used by the authors to evoke and describe past periods, and the appropriate linguistic tools, with the help of which the authors can place the readers in past consciousness and eras. The evoked time slices are also common: the Middle Ages and the period of Mannerism faced with the present, which is related to the former ones. The moral, according to which all aspirations of reconstructing the past are mere illusions, is also common. And still: the moment of key importance in all novels is the aspiration to record all memories in writing.

Keywords: Mannerism, postmodern works, mystery, cultural memory, erudition

It is the common experience of people at the end of the millennium that the world has become confused, self-evident structures have disappeared (digital technical structures have replaced machineries characteristic of modern era), information obtaining is mosaic-like. It is also basic experience that external forces

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are manipulating in an invisible way (we cannot back out of the influence of the media). We can never be sure whether the facts related to us have a real and strong basis; the real world, as the trap of communication society, is slowly becoming one of the virtual worlds: we have got into a labyrinth of information. In this anarchic freedom we often feel the lack of Order, which used to sort things out. Art is also intricate and many-sided, and resists the receiver's deciphering efforts. As if we were living in the era of Mannerism again.

Mannerism is an artistic trend, which first appeared in Florence in the middle of the 16th century signaling the crisis of the blissful balance of the Renaissance, first in painting and sculpture, later in architecture and literature. The wars in Italy, the shift of economic and commercial center from the Mediterranean to other areas, the Reformation, the new scientific and philosophical revelations, they all led to the fact that the solid ground of the outlook of the Renaissance, which had alloyed religion and humanism, started to shake.

> The fortunate historical moment, when reality and the cult of beauty could be reconciled, when man's earthly aims and transcendent aspirations, understood in their platonic meaning, seemed to be compatible, when in the same time the artist could be the sovereign creator of beauty, and the educator the servant of public utility, has faded away. As the basis had split, the artistic practice started to deviate from the ideal norms of the Renaissance. (Klaniczay 28)

The artists, who were profoundly living through the crisis, considered that the particular artistic representation, which suggested equilibrium and classicistic idealization, was not appropriate any longer, that is why distortion and ambiguity became the main characteristics of the subjectivism of Mannerism.

> Mannerists attributed less significance to harmonious and balanced composition than the artists of late Renaissance to such an extent that we can easily regard the entire trend as the rejection or modification of the latter one. Mannerism is characterized by a greater freedom of choosing attitudes, perspectives and colors, all classical sense of line and endeavor to harmony and shapeliness were submitted to it. The human being idealized by late Classicism was disjointed, as if mannerist artists had caught characters while moving. They immortalized these characters in some strangely contorted and distorted positions. . . . Contrary to creations belonging to late Renaissance, mannerist paintings have a less heroic moral and sentimental message thus leading to many-folded comprehension. (Little 39)

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Mannerism noticed non-aesthetic or even problematic objects and human beings standing at the periphery, and regarded them as having the same value as beautiful and aesthetic ones had. On the one hand the mannerist style assumed over-refined virtuosity; on the other hand it presumed deprivation of the classical perspective of the Renaissance. The mannerist space always chooses extremes and exaggerations instead of rational perspectives. (Characters appear in vertical, distorted position on the canvas.) New genres come into being, which use symbolic ways of representation such as hieroglyphs, which were intended to evoke the esoteric knowledge and the hidden wisdom of ancient Egyptians.

> At times a tremendous amount of knowledge takes up a cryptic shape in mannerist works of art. . . . Secret sciences, hermetic doctrines revealing themselves only to the initiated, represented the obvious or hidden symbolic content of many mannerist works of art. These works prove that astronomical theory, cabbalistic doctrines and the science of alchemy had never influenced the artists' imagination to such a great extent. Mannerist paintings, belonging to both lay and religious genres, are extremely rich and many-sided in contents. This is also proved by those contemporary tracts, which analyze the possibilities of deciphering the message of works, and which, besides their primary meaning, give room to at least three deeper ones, thus invest them with allegorical, moral and mystic meaning. (Kelényi 18)

From a literary viewpoint, peculiar characteristics of Mannerism are intricate plots, refined style, fine rhetoric, particular metaphors, surprising parallelisms and the taste for decorative elements. The aesthetics of Cinquecento re-interpreted the Renaissance practice of mimesis. Personal viewpoints, fantasies and intuition became more important than the imitation of nature. The ideal of beauty was gradually replaced by a new norm concentrated in the concept of *grazia*, which means internal beauty, and which prefers deviation from natural proportions and distortion. Admiration is regarded as the aim of any work of art, the rhetorical complexity, the intricacy of the language, the scientific characteristic and emblematic significance of works, they all served this purpose. But all this was available only to the narrow strata of the initiated.

The thinker of the postmodern era does not consider reality as being strongly established from a metaphysical point of view—there are as many kinds of realities as there is consciousness. This leads to the fact that art cannot be univocal. As the stable world image of classical modernism disappears, the hierarchy of values becomes ensnared; the creator loses his faith to declare his existence as having an absolute scope. In the 20th century the law of the universal cause and effect gradually becomes unstable (see Einstein's theory of relativity), therefore it is no

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wonder that openness becomes the dominating characteristic in literature. In the spirit of postmodern aesthetics it is allowed to handle all eras and authors, to re-write, paraphrase and mix different styles, ways of representation and techniques. Absolute points of reference were lost. Therefore the author leaves the reader on his own; he does not offer any Ariadne threads so that he could comprehend works. On the other hand, the sharp line between fiction and reality is getting blurred. There is a constant change of the narrative technique and viewpoint, the singular and the plural. Self-reflexivity of literature grows: the transmitting system of signs becomes itself a message. (The reader realizes that the work is about how to write a work and how it should be received.) It might be the increased awareness, which makes tragic, beautiful, majestic elements so rare, and tragicomic or grotesque structures and irony so dominating in postmodern works. The author invites his reader for a common play. Such a play is commenced when the author quotes mistakenly or he refers to non-existing works and authors. The essence of the play is to put the reader in tune with the fact that there is always another more important meaning concealed behind a seemingly important issue, and that all phenomena are many-sided.

> As Ihab Hassan pointed out, the main characteristics of postmodern works are uncertainty, ambiguity, fragmentary representation, self-reflexivity, irony, hybridization, polyphony and intertextuality. "As an artistic, philosophical, erotic and social phenomenon, Postmodernism is open towards playful, optative, dividing, dislocated and blurred forms, towards the discourse of fragments, the ideology of fractions, the willingness of dismantling, the calling of silence—it is open towards all mentioned; however it suggests their antithetical reality" (quoted by Cărtărescu 43).

For the naïve reader, Umberto Eco`s work entitled *The Name of the Rose*, published in 1980, is a crime story embedded into a historical framework. The plot of the work is formed by a chain of mysterious events. Eco figured his main character, the old, blind Spanish Jorge, responsible for multiple murders, keeping in his hands all threads of action, after the figure of the famous Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges. The Italian scholar of semiotics, who became writer, owes a lot to Borges, and commemorates him in a postmodern manner characterized by the use of irony: throughout the plot everybody is looking for him. Readers have to be trapped with the help of a simple, exciting story, which, in the meantime, contains deep philosophical doctrines and tremendous cultural substance—this is what Eco had learnt from Borges.

The plot of the novel entitled *The Name of the Rose* relates events happening in 1327 in a Benedictine abbey in North Italy in such a fictitious place, which is

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represented as being real, and which could really exist. Adso, a monk from Melk, who will put his memories together in the late years of his life, arrives at the abbey being accompanied by his master William, a Franciscan monk from Baskerville. The text, written according to the conventions of historical novels, is also a memorandum and a Bildungsroman from Adso`s viewpoint, as the events evoked by him will influence his entire life in the years coming. The act of building the monastery, the monks` life, the history of the heretic movements (told by his master to the rather interested Adso), the ideological fights within the Church related to Jesus` poverty, the extremely picturesque depiction of the Inquisition, they all strengthen the realism of the world during the Middle Ages. Brother William has come to prepare the meeting of the parties sustaining on one hand the Emperor, on the other hand the Pope, but the abbot entrusts him with the exhilaration of an entire series of murders. The victims of these murders are monks, who used to work in the library and reproduction workshop of the largest monastery in Europe. But the crime story structure of the book is only a superficial stratum. Imitating the interpreters from the Middle Ages, the author completes an explanatory glossary to his work, which he names *Side Notes to the Name of the Rose*. They refer to the game of the labyrinth, which dominates the novel, concluding that "even a naïve reader realizes that he has to deal with such labyrinths, which do not have anything in common with special representation." The labyrinth does not stand only for the scene of the novel (the library was originally meant to be built as a labyrinth, which could be deciphered with great difficulty only), but it also suggests the plot itself, being made up by the acts of searching, lapsing and finding. All this is already present in the introductory part in the intricate structure of the appearing and disappearing manuscripts**.**

> An abstract model of conjecturality is the labyrinth. One is the Greek, the labyrinth of Theseus. This one doesn't allow anyone to get lost in: you go in, arrive at the center, and then from the center you reach the exit. This is why in the center there is the Minotaur; if he were not there the story would have no zest, it would be a mere stroll. Terror is born, if it is born, from the fact that you don't know where you will arrive or what the Minotaur would do. But if you unravel the classical labyrinth, you find a thread in your hand, the thread of Ariadne. The classical labyrinth is the Ariadne's-thread itself.
> Then there is the mannerist maze: if you unravel it, you find in your hands a kind of tree, a structure with roots, with many blind alleys. There is only one exit, but you can get it wrong. You need Ariadne's-thread to keep from getting lost. This labyrinth is a model of the trial-and-error process.

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> And finally there is the net, or, rather, what Deleuze and Guattari call 'rhizome'. The 'rhizome' is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space. The labyrinth of my library is still a mannerist labyrinth, but the world in which William realizes he is living already has a rhizome structure: that is, it can be structured, but is never structured definitively. (Eco 607)

The characteristics of a crime story can be traced in several different strata: the text operates as an enigma, which needs to be deciphered by the reader; the past is illustrated as a peculiar corpse, which is revived by the interpretation of the novel. The introductory part, the intermediary narrator's text, is built on the vision of authenticity; in fact it is the story of searching for a manuscript and the attempt to reconstruct it. This game inherited from Mannerism, is the favorite artistic procedure of Postmodernism. It represents in a miniature size the purpose of the entire work: to reconstruct and revive something, which has irremediably and irrevocably passed away, with the help of its remained elements. At the end of the story Adso looks back once again at the scene of the great adventure of his youth, and he tries to re-infer the contents of those codices, whose scorched shreds he has found among the ruins. This symbolic deed, just like the title of the novel, is the metaphor of the past. According to Postmodern thinkers, history is ungraspable as an objective factor; there are only several different narrative ways, which are the products of the imagination, just like fictitious novels. Our ideas are related to real events as Adso's shreds of codices are to the former library containing hundreds of volumes.

One of Eco`s Postmodern games is the procedure through which he builds fragments belonging to other authors in the text of his own works, without using quotation marks, as if they belonged to himself. Another procedure used by him is the imitation of the literary habit of the Middle Ages regarding the use of quotations: there are plenty of them in his works. But some of these quotations are invented by himself, which he puts into his characters` mouth.

> But I believe a historical novel should do this, too: not only identify in the past the causes of what came later, but also trace a process through which those causes began slowly to produce their effects.
> If a character of mine, comparing two medieval ideas, produces a third, more modern, idea, he is doing exactly what culture did; and if nobody has ever written what he says, someone, however confusedly, should surely have begun to think it (perhaps without saying it, blocked by countless fears and by shame). (Eco 534)

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Thus adepts led by detective fervor have made long lists of these quotations, systematized the so-called authors, and in this way they tried to reconstruct Eco`s extremely rich collection of doctrines.

The title of the novel, whose primary aim is to draw the readers` attention, is also related to the link with the past. It is a source of another mystery, as there is no information about any roses in the book. Abelard, the philosopher-poet of medieval Paris, uses the expression *nulla rosa* to explain the fact that language can express things, which have disappeared, as well as things, which have never existed. The last line of the novel refers back to the title, the meaning of the Latin hexameter quoted is: *the former rose is a mere noun, we can grasp nouns only.* Thus this closure refers to the fact that everything that was pulsating with life and painful experience survive in fragments kept by language. In the same time he evokes the big controversy characterizing the scholastics of the Middle Ages, which serves as cultural and historical background; this controversy was carried on between the *nominalists* and *realists* regarding the science of signs. *The Name of the Rose* makes interpretation open as it is the joint of a beautiful, scented flower and an abstract concept, and it precisely evokes the viewpoint suggested by the novel about history.

Among the connotations appears the outstanding literary work of the Middle Ages, *The Romance of the Rose*, the allegorical, didactic love poem. It is an important step in the development of Adso's personality to meet the mystery of love. The fact that he does not know the name of the beloved woman is another ingredient of mystery.

The series of murders, which makes the framework of the novel, is committed because of a certain book. The novel representing the mechanism of the persecution of heretics, the fights for investing dignities, the world of mutinous controversies about faith and religion in a realistic way is also a parable of how ancient culture was saved (and lost) during the Middle Ages. (The book looked for and eventually found just to perish in the huge, apocalyptic fire, is the part of Aristotle`s *Poetics* with regard to comedies.) During the search there are several attempts to reconstruct the text through quoting other books. *The Name of the Rose* becomes a model to Eco`s later works[1] due to the fact that it suggests in the same time the illusion of certain knowledge and the eternal human aspiration to preserve cultural values. This duality can be traced in British and Serbian historical novels belonging to the halo of Eco`s trickery novels, as Péter Milosevits names them in his work entitled *History of the Serbian Literature*, whose authors also conceal tremendous cultural material behind the mask of crime stories. [2]

[1] For example, in the novel entitled *Queen Loana's Mysterious Fire,* written in 2004, the aim of the investigation is retracing his own earlier identity with the help of books which he read in his childhood.

[2] Milorad Pavić is Professor of Theory of Literature, Ioan Petru Culianu taught History of Religions.

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Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars. A Lexicon Novel*, published in 1984, also swaggers with the variegation of genres: it contains a saga novel (the history of the Branković), a surrealistic, fantastic tale about dream hunters (Hoffman's influence), a history novel about the Empire of the Khazars, and a crime story revealing the secrets of the Hapsburg—Turkish war. An important time slice of the plot is the period of Mannerism. The dictionary form is the most economical variant of information storing, its use leads to open works in literature, whose main aim is to attract the reader actively in its interpretation, as the reader is the one who chooses the order of the headlines while reading.

Just like the success of the novel *The Name of the Rose*, the popularity of the *Dictionary of the Khazars. A Lexicon Novel* is due to the fact that each category of readers can find something adequate to their own interest: crime story, fantasy, sex or national philosophy, historical and cultural data, and exciting novel structures. The theme of the book is a less-known nation, which nevertheless had a real existence (the Khazars) and a real, but blurred historical event, a controversy organized by the Great Khan in the 8th-9th centuries, which was carried out between the representatives of three monotheist religions. The form is traditional: the book is formed of three volumes (the red one represents Christianity, the yellow one stands for Judaism, and the green volume contains Muslim doctrine). The fiction of the lost manuscript, being reconstructed later in the 17th century, is an occurring theme in this book as well (the Christian representative is Saint Cyril, whose biography and other sources refer to the Khazar mission—here we have to deal not with a fictitious, fake document, but with a document, whose existence was real, just like that of Aristotle`s volume in Eco`s book), as well as the topography of the poisoned book. Daubmannus, who published the *Dictionary of the Khazars* in 1691, impregnated a copy with poison, and, because the Inquisition had burnt all books, only that copy survived, which had been printed with the help of poisonous printer's ink, and which had a golden coat. The control copy, having a silver cover, also survived the fire. This is why Pavić wrote in the introductory part of the book a mysterious, ironic, and in the meantime a curiosity-kindling reassurance**: "**The author assures the reader that he will not have to die if he reads this book, as did the user of the 1691 edition, when *The Dictionary of the Khazars* still had its first scribe" (1). The publisher himself, Johannes Daubmannus (alias Jakob Tam David ben Jahja) published a text dictated by an Orthodox monk, which he had reconstructed with the help of the Jew Cohen, the Serbian Brancović, the Muslim Masudi and that of the dream hunters on the basis of the lost Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources. The version of these printed papers, whose reconstruction was completed in the 20th century (amended later with relevant information), unavoidably places three periods on top of each other: the legendary early Middle Ages, the period of the Balkan wars full of sufferings and hardships, and the end of the 20th century.

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The style of crime stories and the postmodern self-reflexivity is alloyed into an ironic sentence on the verso of the first page of the book: "Here lies the reader who will never open this book. He is here dead forever" (Pavić, np).

The style is variegated: the sophisticated tale-telling manner of the Byzantine chronicles, the Muslim ornate style of the *Tales of One Thousand Nights*, the world of the Old Testament and the medieval Jewish tales, they all stand by each other and reveal similarities in spite of their differences. They are counterpointed by the reconstructed text in the 20th century. The modern editor points out that the three volumes of the dictionary published by Daubmannus introduce three time slices, which were unified by the modern editor.

The work has an open structure as the receiver can change the order of reading: he can read the book backwards or forwards, at random or even following the references offered by the Encyclopedia, but the essence of the novel is revealed only if he reads the entire work. The entries recur in alphabetic order three times, and they partly cover each other. The reader has the choice of liberty: he can read the work by volumes or by reading similar entries one after the other. With each recurrent entry the author makes the reader see the events in a different light, the reader's interpretation can but wander between different variants and can but ask himself about the truth concealed by them.

The revelation treated as real evidence by postmodern story-writing becomes obvious from the collation of different versions: each and every reader explains history according to his own viewpoint and interest. (According to the Christian source Princess Ateh managed to convince the Great Khan to follow her, thus becoming a Christian together with his people, according to the Jewish source the same thing happened, only the Khan and his nation became followers of Judaism, and last but not least, the Muslim source evidences the Princess's great role in the process, after which the Khazars became Muslims). The recurrent motifs of the book are *the face, the dream, the mirror*, and they all are considered chain-links of the text-labyrinth.

The ironic sparks of the self-reflexivity so much beloved by Postmodernism can be noticed at every step in Pavić's book. Such sparks are the instructions published in the 20th century, whose aim is to decipher the essence of the labyrinth:

> He may, of course, wander off and get lost among the words of this book, as did Masudi, one of the writers of this dictionary, who wandered into others people's dreams, never to find his way back. In that event, the reader has no other choice than to begin in the middle of any given page and forge his own path. Then he may move through the book as through a forest, from one marker to the next, orienting himself by observing the stars, the moon and the cross. (Pavić 13)

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The author's voice, who teaches Theory of Literature as well, can be heard sometimes**: "**Hence, each reader will put together the book for himself, as in a game of dominoes or cards, and, as with a mirror, he will get out of this dictionary as much as he puts into it, for, as is written on one of the pages of this lexicon, you cannot get more out of the truth than you put into it" (Pavić 13). He invites the reader for a game in semiotics, he highlights the idea that only those readers are able to re-create the world who can read the book in the proper order.

As the author of the reconstructed dictionary dating back to the 17th century does not use any criticism of sources, and due to the exquisitely legendary style, the 20th century-editor's apparently precise comments operate as fiction: the reader is completely insecure concerning the information read (which is mere fiction and which is real historical fact?). Both the structure and the evoked reality are labyrinth-like. Another series of mysteries built on the basis of time is outlined by the passage between different historical timelines. To this aspect the multiplication of the identities of heroes is added, this idea being represented by the motif of the "Khazar face." The motif of the face, as the mirror of the soul, occurs here as the emblem of the secrecy and eternal inscrutability of the Khazars` destiny. The motif of the Khazar face occurs in the murders committed in the 20th century, whose description is placed at the end of the book, and whose reason is the purchase of the Khazar documents. The murders are the reincarnated representatives of the three afterlives, which prevent Adam Ruháni, the original entity manifested in *the Khazar Dictionary*, from reincarnation due to the aligned search of the representatives of the three monotheist religions, thus they want to maintain the state of postmodern fragmentariness. Completion and perfection are both transcendent and mythical in the same time, but they are available in a linguistic form only through the Khazar dictionary. This postmodern philosophy of language questions whether there is reality apart from language. It also refers to the fact that we can apprehend reality only with the help of the language.

The revival of mythical characters partially covers but also rouses the reader's suspicion regarding the author of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* as the Arab and Christian specialists dealing with this problem are murdered in Istanbul, and Dorota Schultz of Jewish origin is imprisoned on the ground of false accusations. Who managed to acquire the manuscripts left in the hotel and the only copy of Daubmannus's publication, which had not been poisoned? It goes without saying that the serial killer acquired them. (If the editor is Madame Schultz's other identity from Krakow, the interpretation leads back to the labyrinth of identities).

As well as with Eco, the idea of the library appearing as a labyrinth appears in Pavić's book. The editor of the *Khazar Dictionary* (the copy published by Daubmannus), Father Nikoljei Teoktiszt admits in his last manuscript that he had bought all kinds of Arabian, Hebrew and Greek manuscripts for Squire Avram at the markets and cellars in Vienna. He also pointed that these manuscripts were

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placed in the same order as the ones belonging to the Brancović. Dr. Isajlo Suk, professor of the University of Novi Sad, is also lost in the double labyrinth (building=book). "He thought of how this building was like a book written in an unknown language he had not yet learned, how these corridors were like the sentences of a strange language, and the rooms foreign words he had never heard before" (Pavić 107).

No matter how fabulously surrealistic the events are, a certain coercion of reference is needed by the reader. Experiencing central European dictatorships, the reader nods when he reads about a student's right to examine his own professor, scholar and archaeologist at the University of Novi Sad, his work is banned for no reason; he is slapped on the street by unknown people.

Ioan Petru Culianu's novel *The Emerald Game*, written in 1987, also alloying the structure of historic novels and that of detective stories, is halfway between the intellectualism of *The Name of the Rose* and the Dan Brown-like sensation-chasing mystery. The appearance of authenticity is provided by the memoir-like characteristic of the text just like in *The Name of the Rose*. Just like Eco and Pavić, the Romanian professor has his editor publish the translation of a found and then lost manuscript dating back to the 16th century. The motif of the object trouvé has an outstanding role in Avant-garde literature. (We speak about Postmodernism at the point when its striking innovations have become common patterns). In this case we speak about an immigrant intellectual who fled to Italy in 1972 because of the Romanian dictatorship. He finds a codex in his luggage, which got lost at the airport in Rome, and which might have probably been stolen from one of the Transylvanian libraries. He starts translating the text written in Latin, but at some point the manuscript is stolen from his hotel room by unknown smugglers. Thus the first series of mystery, which is not solved throughout the novel, is given: who, where from and why has smuggled the manuscript? Just like in Pavić's novel, the mysteries of the plot remain unrevealed, and this time this aspect is due to the fact that the translator loses the manuscript before he succeeds in completing his assignment. The translation is a distorted act: the multilayered linguistic filter blurs the meaning of the text: the Latin used by English Humanists is grafted into 20th century English by the Romanian immigrant while being in an Italian hotel. Unlike the Serbian novel, in Culianu's work the direct relationship between the Latin memoir dating back to the 16th century and the 20th century stops at this point, nevertheless—just like in István Szilágyi`s novel entitled *Hollóidő* [*Raven's Times*]—the conformance between the evoked past and the present circumstances is obvious. The experience lived in Florence in the 16th century can be easily identified by the modern reader, who is constantly under the influence of a certain coercion of reference: the power structure manipulating from the background in fake democracies, the failure of the interpretation of phenomena subject to theories

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of conspiracy, the defenselessness of the intellectual, they all are characteristics which ask for referential reading.[3]

The genre of the memoir creates the appearance of authenticity, in the meantime, due to the fragmentary structure—the novel becomes an open work. This method makes the reader have an active role, it is him who has to decipher the possible solution just like Thomas, the main character, who unwillingly gets involved with the events; thus the witness eventually becomes a detective, the nominated victim becomes a murderer (and this is a postmodern flick).[4]

Another flick addressed to the reader`s expectancies, conversant to Renaissance culture to some extent—in the spirit of the traditional postmodern manner—is the fact that in the background of the premeditated murders there is Pico Della Mirandola, who lectures about *Human Dignity*.

The motif well-known from Eco's novel is that of searching and getting lost; detective and his assistant (this time the detective is Doctor D`Altavilla, and his assistant is Thomas, who later becomes memoir writer); the labyrinth (the streets of Florence) or, more abstractly, the mystery of the series of murders. (One of the favorite motifs of Mannerism is the labyrinth.) Just like in Eco`s novel, the murders evoked from the past take place within a week one after the other. The horror of *The Name of the Rose* seems to be grouped around the images of the *Apocalypse*; with Culianu they are mysteriously related to constellations and Botticelli's famous painting, the *Primavera*. The victims are members of the Neo-Platonic Academy, who all are closely associated with the painting. With the help of astrology, alchemy and magic they are all trying to decipher the correspondences encoded in it. The novel represents the decline of Florence during the Renaissance, the progress of Mannerism, when, sequel to the loss of power of the Medicis, under Savanarola's influence souls become dominated by the desire of damnation. Bright palaces, astrological and alchemical laboratories, manufacturers' workshops in the outskirts of the town, monasteries and the districts of the poor in the outskirts—they all stand for the 16th century authenticity alloyed with the crime story written with great mastery.

The title is also mysterious: in the same time it refers to the jewels of the victim, the blaze of the town still preserving the glamour of the Renaissance, the name of the third victim (Smeralda Vespucci), the heat lighting of the mystery. There probably are other meanings as well, which are relevant and revealed only to

[3] The images of the relatively few brutal events, such as that of the victims (former accomplices) hung on the butcher's hook, or that of the last victims drowns in seething tin, have their own 20th century correspondent: the same modus operandi was applied by legionnaires in Bucharest when executing Jews. An efficient method of getting rid of corpse was immuring them in concrete.

[4] Under the influence of the coercion of reference the reader recalls that the murderers of Ioan Petru Culianu, Professor of History of Religions at the University of Chicago, have not been found ever since then.

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readers initiated in occultism. The stake of the murders might be the preservation of Renaissance culture and that of Florence's economic and political primary role.

István Szilágyi's novel entitled *Hollóidő* [*Raven's Times*], published in 2001, is also close to the conception of the classical historical novel. Nevertheless, his predecessor depicts more tradition with regard to both the postmodern approach and way of creation. In his study about the novel, András Görömbei highlights the synthetic characteristic of István Szilágyi's novel: he points out that the novel uses the characteristics of chronicles, historical novels, didactic novels, adventure stories, crime stories, sagas, myths, stories from the Bible, psychological and philosophical essays in a masterful manner. Helping and completing one another, these types of novels create a sovereign form, which is elevated to a higher scope. The diversity of the language is attained through the presence of psalms, biblical sermons, epics, there are letters, documents having a moralizing purpose, which remind the readers of Zrínyi's *Vitéz Hadnagy* [*The Valiant Lieutenant*], and the image of the cake and ale served in encampments is also evoked. One of the leading religious genres in the 16th and 17th centuries, the religious dispute, is also present in the book.

The novel entitled *Hollóidő* [*Raven's Times*] is interwoven with a rich web of literary motifs: the raven, the book, the bread, skulls, the fire, the church, migration, escape, birth, decline and death, building and demolition (for example the church and its ruins, the wall built of mugs made of bone and pyramids built of skulls etc.), from among which the motifs of searching, deception and finding excel. Motifs are gradually becoming more and more, but a certain mystery remains around them. The motif of secret is of prime importance in this book as well. Its presence is defined as being a postmodern characteristic by András Görömbei. In his *Studies about István Szilágyi* he points out that the poetic form used in the novel comes into being by the alloy of modern and postmodern world experience. On one hand it is a determined, decisive aspiration of seeing the world as a unit and of understanding and modeling destiny, on the other hand it is a continuous perception of the fact that the logic of events is erratic. It is often cleared up that several things, which are considered to be what they seem to be, mean something totally different. This hesitation can be understood also from the determining role of historical situation, which is outlined by space and time. He highlights that those who live in subjection, thus in defenselessness, can never be sure of anything. Everybody struggles against oppressors and parryies in his/her own way. Everyone has his/her own mentality and character, therefore what seems to be consistency from a certain viewpoint, is totally absurd from another one. In this way the historic time and situation join the postmodern experience of life, the total insecurity.

The open ending of the novel, the fact that both parts end with sharp caesurae, leaving so many questions asked by the reader unanswered, can be comprehended

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as a part of postmodern practice, which means rupture with traditional narratives. In the meantime it corresponds to the motif of secret, which runs all through the novel as the metaphor of the fact that past cannot be deciphered, and which has the same role as Eco's rose.

In the first part the third person narrator is close to Tentás's viewpoint, in the second part the first person narrator is one of the fellows from Revek who have joined the army. Due to the limited knowledge of the narrator many points of the plot remain blurred, as they are external to the narrator's perspective: this is also the source of the mysteries. (Where does the student come from, what's Fortuna's past like, what consequences will the bailiffs` slaughter have, Fortuna's travels and death, Tentás's disappearance, his final stepping out of the story, etc.).

As far as the narrator of the second part is concerned, total insecurity prevails. (It can be established only with the help of lengthy investigation that the narrator using first person plural is Máté Darholc, one of the boys who ran away from Revek.) The scenes of the plot are continuously flapping from fiction and reality; they constantly incite the reader to try to identify them. This effect is completed by the presence of real and imaginary people, real and imaginary places, projection of different time slices on top of each other. The closeness between Tentás and the author is marked by the fact that the title of the first part ("Lovat és papot egy krónikáért" ["A Horse and a Priest for a Chronicle"]) evokes the anecdote of the student's liberating action, that of the second part ("Csontkorsók" ["Mugs of Bone"]) evokes the motif of one of his recurrent dreams. What can be expected to happen from the viewpoint of the reader of the first book (for example the father and son relationship between Tentás and Fortuna or the schoolmaster's Transylvanian relationships) does not exist from Máté's perspective or it remains a mystery. As well as in Eco and Pavić's novels, it is questionable whose saying and text can be heard.

The title of Szilágyi's novel, just like those of Culianu's and Pavić's, is metaphorical, but in the meantime it is easily decipherable as the recurrent symbol of the novel is the image of birds feeding themselves with corpses, a striking representation of the horror occurring in history.

The plot of the first part of the novel, paraphrasing Shakespeare, evolves around the *Chronicle of Nuremberg*. It might have been the reason for which Pastor Terebi was kidnapped from among his followers by the emir, whose liberation stands in the center of the first book. It is the reason for which indirectly all inhabitants of Revek are murdered. Thus the book is double-faced: it represents a culture-preserving and in the meantime a destroying principle. This duality is represented by the motif of the poisoned book in the other two novels. The ironic reference to the role of culture is achieved through the presentation of the main character's ability to fulfill his nightmare, that is to precisely count how many skulls he needs to build a pyramid, and this ability is the product of the

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Renaissance-type teaching of mathematics. The head of the master, who passes the knowledge and who in the meantime is the life-giving father, is placed on the top of the pyramid.

The common space in Pavić's and Szilágyi's novels is the mannerist world of the battles between the Turkish Empire and the Hapsburgs. The image of footing at the end of the millennium in Central and East Europe resembles the evoked mannerist world to a great extent. Another common element is the presence of the macabre as if it were the revival of the interest of Mannerism in all that is distorted. The title of Szilágyi's novel refers to the scavengers of the Apocalypse whereas the second part (*Mugs of Bone*) refers to the student's nightmares. Reality and dream are often interwoven in the novel, nightmares often end up in the realm of reality. Eco's Adso dreams about the grotesque world of *Coena Cypriani*. The drift in Pavić's novel also points towards fantasy and unrealism: those who try to reconstruct the material of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* dream about each other's lives, destinies and deaths. Culianu's hero takes a journey to the afterlife just like Dante's hero made his own while, following a baffled attempt of murder, he might possibly be in coma. In Szilágyi's novel nightmares, fantasies and the irrational become reality. "All of a sudden there it was, in the depth of the church near the sanctuary, where, overwhelmed with horror, we could see a huge pile of skulls one on top of the others. The man is ardently adjusting and ordering them in lines... along this long, labyrinth-like alley-way" (Szilágyi 393).

The identity of the characters is less intricate than that of Pavić's characters, but they are also subject to the motif of secret. (This stands for Fortuna Illés in the first place who is thought to be a schoolmaster by the boys from Revek. As a matter of fact he is a secret agent from the 17th century, a mythical forefather: "the father and also the grandfather of almost everyone") (Szilágyi 331).

The characters of Szilágyi's novel also reincarnate. There are several references that they can be interchanged. Tentás has heard that he is very much alike Fortuna Illés who might well be his father, the flustered old priest believes Andriska to be the child Tentás, and the student to be his own young father, Fortuna. The two infants from Revek, abducted by the schoolmaster (possibly Fortuna's later son and grandson), would search for the mystery of their origins just like Tentás did throughout the novel.

While Pavić's entire work is a labyrinth, Eco, Culianu and Szilágyi use it as a thematic motif: in the novel entitled *Hollóidő* [*Raven's Times*] the ruined church appears to be the labyrinth, where Tentás disappears from the group of the boys from Revek. The way leaving from Revek to the uncertain is understood as a labyrinth by the boys from Revek and such is the fortress of Bajnaköves.

All books represent the world as being undecipherable, but to a different extent. Eco, Culianu and Szilágyi have some doubts but they still believe in the organizing power of the intellect and the opportunity given by rational acts. Adso

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accepts his master's reasoning about the possibility of solving the mystery, Thomas risks his life to reach the final apprehension of things, during their education the orphans from Revek become brave soldiers who can find their way in the surrounding confusing world and are ready to protect their country.

Other common elements present in all books are the tremendous erudition and knowledge used by the authors to evoke and describe past periods, and the appropriate linguistic tools, with the help of which the authors can place the readers in past consciousness and eras. The evoked time slices are also common: the Middle Ages and the period of Mannerism in relation to the present. The moral, according to which all aspirations of reconstructing the past are mere illusions, is also common. And still: the moment of key importance in all novels is the aspiration to record all memories in writing. The reconstructed Khazar dictionary becomes the completion of the world. Through his continuous reading, copying, elucidating searching, Tentás also manages to "create a world." For Adso it is of vital importance to keep the memories of his youth, and he who wants to reconstruct the lost medieval text can find his peace only when he publishes the reconstructed text.

Because of their nature, the reconstructed texts contain a lot of gaps, which have to be completed by readers in order to solve recurrent mysteries.

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