# Perspectives on the Relation between History and Fiction

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**Keywords**: *history*; *historiography*; *fiction*; *historical truth*; *interpretation*; *representation*

## 1. Introduction

Up until the 19th century, history was a blend of fact and fiction, myth and reality, while the study of history was more an art than a science. History generally meant major events such as wars or revolutions and insisted on important rulers, glorifying founding legends in an attempt to instill patriotism and legitimize identity. Historians usually left out what they considered minor events, inconsequential people or unimportant social concerns. History was considered a form of art and the ornaments of the medieval history books come as evidence.

In Ancient times, the writing of history was a mixture of fact and fiction with prominent references to divine intervention. An example is the writings about the Trojan War or the founding of Rome. However, the ancient Greeks (Thucydides) were also the first to propose a historical method that looked at cause and effect rather than divine intervention. They also regarded history as cyclical, with recurring events. However, the Middle Ages and Renaissance returned to the religious perspective, with Saint Augustine as an influential promoter of this approach.

The 19th century, through the works of the German philosopher and historian Friedrich Hegel, brought a secular approach in the study of history. History became queen of the social sciences, a position justified by the strong influence of ideologies (rooted in history, in the past), which played an important role until well into the 20th century (communism, Nazism) and the emancipation and formation of the modern nations (also justified by their past). The 19th century reorganized and reformulated the concept of history which was theorized for the first time and for which a scientific method was proposed (White 2006: 25). It was also the moment when history was divorced from the literary fiction (novels) as

> literature became history's other in a double sense: it pretended to have discovered a dimension of reality that historians would never recognize and it developed techniques of writing that undermined the authority of history's favored realistic or plain style of writing (White 2006: 25).

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The 20th century marked a major change of perspective on history as many historians discovered the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach in order to broaden the image, fill in the gaps and understand the past better. Thus, history ramified into various branches such as cultural history (Annales School), psychohistory, social history (or History of Everyday Life) and others. Also, history was interpreted from different points of view as the idea of multiple histories became prominent. Thus, Marxists interpreted history from the point of view of economic resources, Feminists sought to make woman visible in the past by studying the female experience, while postmodernists challenged the validity and need for the study of history based on interpretation of sources. The importance of history in the 20th century subsided considerably as people no longer felt the need to justify their identity in the past and live more in the present. This shift made theorists such as Francis Fukuyama proclaim the end of history in his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

## 2. What is history?

While some theorists believe that the time we live in is an ahistorical period others think we are steeped down in history (Boia 2002: 18). Whether the former or the latter theory is true, history seems to engulf us everywhere we look. In Europe, for example, one can encounter history at any corner as the old continent bears its marks very clearly. In the postmodernist consumerist society, history too has to keep up with the age and turn commercial if it is to survive. The 20th century opened a world of possibilities for traveling and tourism and thus more people than ever can go anywhere they want. They can visit the pyramids, the ruins of ancient Rome, the sites of the Second World War, countless monuments, battlefields, old castles, fortresses, temples and other relics and artifacts of ages long gone. Apparently we are constantly aware of the presence of history through tourism, movies, popular TV channels, books and other sources.

In spite of the fact that history, as a school discipline, is much maligned by students who generally find it boring, the current media have managed to bring it into the spotlight with cinematic revivals that offer fresh reinterpretations of previously considered established historical facts. Cinema and TV have apparently revived an obsolete genre: the historical film. Recent years have registered unbelievable box-office and television successes with films about ancient heroes and exploits, medieval times, colonial America and the Second World War, which is probably one of the most screen-friendly historical event, due to its complexity. How these films are produced, how accurate they are and why they appeal so much to the general public is a topic for a different debate. However, the fact remains that their subject matter is based on or inspired from what we term in one word, *history*. Films are also the most easily comprehensible illustration of one of Hayden White's theories that will be discussed further on.

But what is actually history? To the layman, history most likely means museums with relics, ruins, battles and events that occurred a long time ago. History thus equals the past and who, in our consumerist and overtechnologized 21st century society, looks with reverence or interest to the past? To most people history is



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interesting as long as it is entertaining. Scholars, on the other hand, have a more complex view. This view relates to the word history itself and to what it refers. History is not just the past, it is not just events that happened two thousand or two hundred years ago. History is made every day. Any political decision that influences people's lives, for example, is history in the making.

First of all, the word *history* has been deconstructed and shown to have several meanings. History refers to the past, the present, the sources, the narrative, and it also refers to historiography and the school discipline. After a complex discussion and a summary of the main theories on the topic, Keith Jenkins offers the following definition of history:

> History is a shifting, problematic discourse, ostensibly about an aspect of the world, the past, that is produced by a group of present-minded workers (overwhelmingly in our culture salaried historians) who go about their work in mutually recognizable ways that are epistemologically, methodologically, ideologically and practically positioned and whose products, once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum (Jenkins 2003: 31–32).

Jenkins determines thus that history is a discourse about the past, therefore history as discourse and the past as object of this discourse are two separate things. "The past and history float free of each other" (Jenkins 2003: 7) and this is simply because an object can be read differently by different discourses. Jenkins further points that this distinction may be difficult to understand because the English language has only one word that covers both categories and he proceeds to give a detailed explanation about past and history, basically showing that "the past has gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work" (Jenkins 2003: 8).

The second problem that arises is in relation to the historians and how they can put the past and history together. There are three theoretical areas that come together in this endeavor: epistemology, methodology and ideology (Jenkins 2003: 12). In terms of theories of knowledge, Keith Jenkins shows that history as construct exists *because* of its very "epistemological fragility" as, if it were possible to know very clearly what happened in the past, there would be no point in the many rewritings and ever new versions of a single event or personality or epoch from the past and history would stop (Jenkins 2003: 13). There are four important epistemological limits that allow history to continue. The first argument is that no historian can ever recount precisely what happened in the past as its volume is insurmountable. The second argument is that "no account can re-cover the past as it was because the past was not an account but events and situations. As the past has gone, no account can ever be checked against it but only against other accounts" (Jenkins 2003: 14). Indeed, all interpretations of the past are but new readings of the already existing texts and, as Jenkins remarks, "there is no fundamentally correct «text» of which other interpretations are just variations; variations are all there are" (Jenkins 2003: 14).

The third argument regarding the epistemological limitations of history is that, in view of the previous point, history is nothing but "personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a «narrator»" (Jenkins 2003: 14). This



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is a point where objectivity comes into question. Adam Schaff, in his book *History and Truth*, proposes this difficulty of history. In doing so, Schaff introduces Paul Ricoeur's theory about objectivity, which basically states that objectivity in its pure form does not exist and although it was desired as a scientific intention of history, now it is regarded only as the divergence between the historian's good and bad subjectivity, being thus transformed from a problem of logics to one of ethics (Schaff 1976: 233). The good subjectivity cannot be eliminated as it is bound to the person, the historian who does not live or think in isolation and whose personality is shaped by the reality in which he lives, by his nation, class or gender. The bad subjectivity refers to the personal interests of an historian, to their social prejudices against a person or a group based on nationality, race, gender or religion. Schaff concludes thus that objectivity of cognition would signify the elimination of all traits of human personality, the rejection of the personal system of values and the existence of a universal value of judgment, in which case "objectivity would be simply a fiction, since it would assume that man is a superhuman being" (Schaff 1976: 235).

The first three points made by Keith Jenkins about the epistemological limitations of history indicate that the past can only be recovered in fragments, while his fourth point shows that "we in a way know more about the past than the people who lived in it" (Jenkins 2003: 15) because historians now have access to sources that had been unavailable before and they may discover things that were concealed from the people of some particular historical period. Jenkins's conclusion, after the detailed explanations on epistemology, is "that history is a shifting discourse constructed by historians and that from the existence of the past no one reading is entailed: change the gaze, shift the perspective and new readings appear" (Jenkins 2003: 16).

Historians continue to search for the ultimate historical truth and also strive for objectivity. In view of what has been said before, it seems a futile struggle for an illusive goal. Many self-respecting historians that have been considered referential and whose texts are used in schools believe that this struggle for objectivity and search for the truth is possible if it is based on a method with clear rules and procedures, like any science. This is supposed to eliminate the constant interpretation factor, as well as the ideological hindrances. The problem that arises though is the common sense question: which method is better? However, even if one manages to choose among the multitude of methods and theories (a few examples could be: Hegel, Marx, Popper, Elton, Collingwood, feminists, neo-Marxists, empiricists, structuralists or post-structuralists etc.), the next question is what criteria one uses in making their choice, or as Jenkins puts it, "How could one know which method would lead to the «truer» past?" Jenkins 2003: 18).

All these methods are quite different but in spite of their eclecticism they do have something in common: they all share concepts, the historical concepts that are used in the process of producing history. Common concepts such as time, evidence, cause and effect, empathy, continuity and change are easily recognizable as the ones that determine our perception of history. We think in terms of when an event occurred, what evidence we have to know that it occurred, why it took place and what were the consequences of that event; do we know the mentality of the time? In fact, these concepts are not as universal or as old as one might think and they are not necessarily the concepts that emerge from the historians' methods. Actually, as



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Jenkins points, these concepts have been used in recent decades on educational grounds, in schools for a better understanding of the subject matter, "for what might happen if other concepts were used to organize the (dominant) field: structure-agency, over-determination, conjuncture, uneven development, centre-periphery, dominant-marginal, base-superstructure, rupture, genealogy, *mentalité*, hegemony, élite, paradigm, etc.?" (Jenkins 2003: 20). This is a matter of ideology, the third theoretical area that contributes alongside epistemology and methodology to putting past and history together.

Keith Jenkins also shows that the distinction between *history as such* and *ideological history* does not exist, even though the dichotomy is widely used: "History is never for itself; it is always for someone" (Jenkins 2003: 21). History is an ideological construct, which means it is constantly subjected to re-visitations according to the respective power relations. The messages are perpetually changed because both the dominant and the subordinate have their own interests and seek to exert influence on particular spheres. Given these arguments, the proper question to ask is not "what is history?" but "who is history for?" Meaning is different according to the particular group that interprets history and selects the needed elements. Everybody needs the past in order to justify the present and the future. The minority emancipations of the 20th century are such examples: blacks, women and others that try to root their existence in the past, that try to make themselves visible in a time when their voice and presence were denied by the dominant power.

Michel Foucault is one of the first theorists to initiate these views of multiple histories and power relations that determine these histories. In this regard, he starts from two famous predecessors and contests their opinions. Hegel, the first major philosopher of history in the modern times developed the theory of dialectics, according to which history is a clash of opposite forces that will eventually be resolved by a synthesis between them. Marx applies Hegel's theory to the material condition of society concluding that the clash is in fact over economic resources and it can be resolved through a revolution. This revolution will lead to the synthesis suggested by Hegel, in this case, a communist utopia, where the products will be distributed according to needs. In their book *Understanding Foucault*, the three authors, Danaher, Schirato and Webb explain Foucault's objections to the theories of Hegel and Marx taking colonialism as a point of reference because it corresponds to the early 19th century, the time when history writing in its modern form began. For obvious reasons, Foucault does not approve of this tradition of writing history:

> [...] this is because conventional history writing regards history in terms of a single and steady progress unfolding over time. This progressive view of history (sometimes called a teleological view) tends to see the world gradually evolving into some ideal state, or utopian society. From this perspective, rather than being considered as an act of violent aggression by the colonising force, colonialism is regarded as an aspect of the evolutionary development of history into higher forms of society (Danaher, Schirato, Webb 2000: 99).

He has three objections to the dialectic theories of history. The first obvious reason is that these theories justify colonialism as a positive action from the civilized world against primitive societies. The second objection relates to the organization



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and explanation of history according to ideological systems that emerged from Enlightenment, such as liberalism, capitalism, socialism etc. According to the above mentioned authors, Foucault's third problem in this matter is that dialectic theories understand history "according to a grand or totalizing vision" (Danaher, Schirato, Webb 2000: 100), while Foucault's conception of history involves plurality and discontinuity. Thus, he challenges the traditional view of continuous, linear history where the events are fitted together and form regular patterns (Danaher, Schirato, Webb 2000: 101), and proposes instead a history seen as a chaotic structure made up of struggles between various forces, where the events do not follow one after the other in an orderly fashion, but are in conflict with each other. In view of the new discoveries in science (Einstein's theory of relativity and Henri Bergson's theory of coexistent time) and shift of mentalities, Foucault's opinions are justified. "History is the way people(s) create, in part, their identities" (Jenkins 2003: 22–23) and each generation re-writes history.

But where do we go in order to understand history? Historians use sources in order to write their stories and these are various. The most important tool of the historian is the text, the chronicles written by others which mean that historians refer to other texts and thus move across instead of down, doing comparative work, as Keith Jenkins suggests (Jenkins 2003: 57). However, the frenetic search for the original, the fundamental source believed to reveal the absolute truth is detrimental:

> This prioritises the original source, fetishises documents, and distorts the whole working process of making history. At root is that perpetual quest for truth, the quest also apparent in desires for empathetic understanding – to get back into the genuine minds of the original people so that their views are unadulterated by ours (Jenkins 2003: 58).

In terms of sources, Jenkins suggests a problem with a paradox at its core: does the evidence of the past have a voice of its own, so strong that the historian's only job is to record it? Or is the evidence mute and the historian has to articulate it by using their own voice, in fact silencing it in the process?

Still, leaving the problem of interpretation aside, another issue, equally important occurs: what are the sources and, more importantly, can they be trusted? In *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, Lucian Boia proposes three types of sources: written documents, images and oral history. Regarding the concept of source itself, Boia considers it the illusion of a direct and perfect correspondence between fact and its representation because the source as representation is mediated through a mental and ideological filter and therefore belongs to the register of imagination (Boia 2000: 40–41). Boia points how in the past, the historical tradition set the *document* as the main source of historical truth, while now, historical inquiry is based on the *problem* and not the document (Boia 2000: 41). A document can be read in many ways and it can be an inexhaustible source depending on what aspect one seeks. He even proposes literary texts as sources, generally rejected by historians because they too belong to the register of imagination.

The unreliability of the sources is again underlined by Lucian Boia in *Jocul cu trecutul*: "Izvoarele – în egală măsură scrise, iconografice sau orale – nu sînt produse de «istorie», ci de oameni, ele ne oferă de la bun început o istorie filtrată şi



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tradusă, o lume de imagini peste care construim la rîndu-ne alte lumi de imagini"[1] (Boia 2002: 18). A similar theory is stressed by Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* where she discusses a postmodern novel whose main theme is this very unreliability of the text and its inescapable subjectivity (Hutcheon 2002: 45). The novel is Roa Bastos's *I the Supreme* and it undermines and subverts everything that historians have claimed for centuries. Thus, not even dictators can record history exactly how they want. The novel starts from a historical figure, a South American dictator that actually existed and proceeds to confuse the reader: "This novel disorients its readers on the level of its narration (who speaks? is the text written? oral? transcribed?), its plot and temporal structures, and even its material existence (parts of the text are said to have been burned) (Hutcheon 2002: 45)". It also shows the reader how the objectivity of historical records can be disputed in so many ways. One of these ways is to suggest that the scribe, the person that writes down whatever he is being dictated, is unreliable as he does not understand what he is being told, therefore he writes incorrectly.

So, if the sources are not reliable and the historian is not reliable, the past remains a land of mystery, perpetually subjected to new interpretations, always challenged and never fully revealed. Thus, in spite of all the theories and all the effort of historians to categorize history as science and not art, it remains a border discipline, forever vacillating between the concepts of fact and fiction. This is a problem that affected history since the beginning of time. In fact, fiction prevailed over fact in many cases.

Lucian Boia exemplifies this view referring to ancient history where myth was incorporated into actual history on a regular basis. How much is fact of what has reached present day about the Trojan War or the foundation of Rome? As these famous events lack solid attestation and real evidence, their only proof for ever having existed being literature, we might even say they never existed. "Războiul troian nu avea nevoie de un autentic război troian pentru a intra în istorie. Homer era îndeajuns"[2]. (Boia 2002: 21), and Schlieman made the discovery of the famous ruins of Troy based on the indications given in Homer's epics. However, these ruins apparently are relics of other battles and events while the information given by Homer himself does not refer to the 12th century (the time of the Trojan War) but more to Homer's time (Boia 2002: 22).

Another famous mixture of fact and fiction comes from the Anglo-Saxon space and it is embodied by the Arthurian legends for which evidence has always been sought and, some claim, found. There are many theories regarding the existence and most importantly, the affiliation of the famous king. The elements that have always characterized Arthur, such as the fight for justice and equality (the ideal city of Camelot, the Round Table) and the quest for the Holy Grail, all represent Christian values. Even though this legend has Celtic origins dating back to a few centuries BC, it was passed on in oral tradition, rewritten by monks, adapted for

[1] "The sources – written, images or oral – are not produced by «history», but by people, they offer us right from the start a filtered and translated history, a world of images over which we build other worlds made of images" [*my translation*].

[2] "The Trojan War did not need an authentic Trojan war to enter history. Homer was enough" [*my translation*].



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Christian audience and popularized during the Middle Ages. Nowadays the legend lives on and thrives apparently as it is rewritten by the contemporary tradition, that is, by the film industry, which prefers either the idealized mythical view or a more realistic one devoid of all the magic and fabulous details.

The 20th century recorded many adaptations of the story of the famous king, most of them claiming to be faithful to the original story. And, since the origins of the story are so confusing, what value can this claim have? It would be fair to say that this story is a constant victim of revisionism, employing and projection of present values onto the past. The Arthurian legends are very complex, therefore open to interpretations according to needs, and that is why they continue to fascinate. According to the necessities of the period and the desires of the scriptwriter who has to subscribe to the wishes of the industry, the Arthurian legends are told from different angles with the purpose of pleasing and educating the audience. Thus, it can be a love story, a tragedy, a story of betrayal, a moralizing piece against the pointlessness and horror of war, a thesis for the Christian values of justice and equality, for the importance of both individualism and team play, a comedy or a parody, a fairy-tale, and many more. The basic structure of this particular legend can be remodeled to sustain many interpretations and can become the point of Marxist theories, new-historicist readings, psychoanalytic commentaries, feminist analyses, and postmodernist views.

Fiction seems to be much more powerful than history as it has better access to the mainstream and it is easily popularized. If a king called Arthur really existed, no doubt his life was less interesting than the one made famous trough the immortal legends. And Arthur is not the only case. Cleopatra was not as beautiful as we were led to believe out of the prejudice that seduction must unequivocally imply beauty, Richard III was not a hunchback and he also enforced some good social policies, and Vlad the Impaler was a ruthless prince among other ruthless princes that ruled in that bleak period of history but was turned into an immortal vampire that haunts the nights of young maidens and feeds on their blood. Who cares about the truth anymore when the stories are so interesting?

This simple analysis of the many rewritings of the Arthurian legends has merely been an illustrative introduction to the issues to be discussed from this point forward, namely, the difference between fact and fiction, history and fiction, the traditional historiography and its contemporary forms, between the classical historical novel and the postmodernist novel.

### 3. Fact and Fiction

Many theorists today analyze the concept of history and bring it closer to the concept of fiction by pointing out striking similarities. These theories, drawn from post-structuralism, deconstructivism, and postmodernism, propose a new view on history, one that challenges the old idealism that history deals with undisputed facts grounded in reality and supported by evidence. The new voices demonstrate that, on the contrary, history and fiction share a common ground and history cannot be objective as it relies on narrative and on representation, which are both elements that distort reality being filtrated through the consciousness of their author, creator.



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Michel de Certeau is one of the voices that include the term *fiction* in the process of making history. He explains that the practice of history is ambitious but utopian and that: "It is not content with a hidden «truth» that needs to be discovered; it *produces* a symbol through the very relation between a space newly designated within time and a *modus operandi* that fabricates «scenarios» capable of organizing practices into a currently intelligible discourse – namely, the task of «the making of history»" (de Certeau 1988: 6). De Certeau also quotes Roland Barthes who wonders whether the narration of past events under the term of «history» is really that different from the imaginary narrative found in a novel (de Certeau 1988: 41) and he also shows that historians begin from present realities when they investigate past events (de Certeau 1988: 11), a method called presentism.

Presentism (a type of historical analysis that presents the past in such a way as to reflect the ideas of the present) is viewed as a negation of history as science because it shows that the objective historical truth can never be found (Schaff 1976: 224). Hayden White is another voice that claims history cannot be a science by showing that "history differs from the sciences precisely because historians disagree, not only over what are the laws of social causation that they might invoke to explain a given sequence of events, but also over the question of the form that a «scientific» explanation ought to take" (Walder 1990: 354). And, since there is no agreement and historians do not concur, White's conclusion is that "history remains in the state of conceptual anarchy in which the natural sciences existed during the sixteenth century, when there were as many different conceptions of «the scientific enterprise» as there were metaphysical positions" (Walder 1990: 346). Apparently there are no rules to make it a science, objectively speaking.

In regard to the same topic of historical interpretation and connection with fiction, Hayden White, a prominent new historicist, proposes a theory in his 1973 book, *Metahistory* (republished in 1975). The overall idea is that history cannot be presented objectively as nobody can write about the past or present as it actually happens. Instead, historians are seen as different archetypes that present the facts according to different types of narrative. He starts from the basics:

> I begin by distinguishing among the following levels of conceptualization in the historical work: (1) chronicle; (2) story; (3) mode of emplotment; (4) mode of argument; and (5) mode of ideological implication. I take «chronicle» and «story» to refer to «primitive elements» in the *historical account*, but both represent processes of selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record* in the interest of rendering that record more comprehensible to an *audience* of a particular kind (White 1975: 5).

He distinguishes between chronicle and story by defining them. Thus, the chronicle represents the historical facts in a chronological order and it is open-ended, while the "*transformation of chronicle into story* is effected by the characterization of some events in the chronicle in terms of inaugural motifs, or others in terms of terminating motifs, and of yet others in terms of transitional motifs" (White 1975: 5). It is this very transformation that involves the subjectivity of the historian and, since a story always has a meaning, this meaning is identified by determining the kind of story, a process called emplotment (White 1975: 7).



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According to this theory, it is fair to say that history is what historians make of it. Since nobody can record everything exactly that way it happened in the past or present, there cannot be such a thing as objective history. Lucian Boia expresses the same opinion, suggesting how little faith we can put into history and its stories or rather what historians call *facts*:

> Istoria pe care o producem este mai mică decât istoria reală, dar îi seamănă până la identificare. Este istoria cea mare redusă la scară, replica ei sintetică. Iată-ne aparent asiguraţi. Cu condiţia de a avea o încredere nemărginită în cuvinte. Oare cuvintele nu ne joacă din nou o festă? Ce înseamnă: important, reprezentativ, semnificativ? Trebuie să mărturisim că nu înseamnă altceva decât ceea ce vrem noi să însemne[3] (Boia 2002: 8).

Lucian Boia reflects what new historicists are advocating through the theory of Foucault, that history is made by the ones in power, the ones that decide what is important and what needs to remain in history. Feminism, as well as other marginal groups, adheres to this theory, as the Power that wrote history was the patriarchal order that decided who stays in history and who disappears or is turned into The Other. According to this view, women are massively absent from history and when they are present they are shown either in stereotypical roles that efface them or as the villains of history: witches, wicked lustful women that used their physical attributes to sinfully gain favors from naïve men that must have been lured by their undoubtedly diabolical charms. The men were always excused and exonerated because they must have undoubtedly fallen for the evil spells of these women. The women that stand out in history as positive symbols are exceptions, women that took on masculine jobs and thus became masculine too in the process. Joan of Arc led an army, Elisabeth I led an empire, George Sand and George Elliot wrote books under male pen names. However, they all remained women, and highly feminine. It is even interesting to note how Joan of Arc lived her life doing a man's job but ended her life found guilty of a most feminine trespass in those times: witchcraft. The charge was proven later to have been a cover-up for a very political decision.

All the theories and opinions presented so far are only evidence that, since history starts from a text that is further turned into narrative, just like fiction, then the so-called objectivity and respect for the historical truth is yet just another story, and history and fiction are closer to each other than previously believed. This distrust, which reminds us of the one Lyotard is talking about when theorizing postmodernism and defining it as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Natoli, Hutcheon 1993: 72), is characteristic of this age of established skepticism. History is continuously demystified in postmodern fiction, action whose purpose is to argue that history is nothing but fiction, subject to constant reviewing, correcting, revision, and victim of falsification and misunderstanding. By proposing alternative histories, postmodern authors are trying to make people aware that nothing should be taken

[3] "The history we produce is smaller than real history, but it resembles it to identification. It is the grand history reduced at scale, its synthetic replica. We are apparently ensured. On the condition of an infinite trust in words. But don't words trick us again? What does it mean: important, representative, significant? We must confess that these words mean nothing more than what we want them to mean" [*my translation*].



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for granted and simply accepted as fact. Everything should be questioned because sources are unreliable and that is the only fact we have.

Thus, history is being re-written. However, even before the emergence of all these new theories, history had always been rewritten and scholars have been trying to find reasons why. To postmodernists, rewriting history seems like an obligation given all the changes observed throughout this paper. Adam Schaff proposes two reasons: the needs of the present impose a reinterpretation of history or "the reinterpretation of history is a function of the emerging effects of the events of the past" (Schaff 1976: 224). In the liberating context of postmodernism, rewriting history from the perspective of the present seems a positive undertake as, given the rise of minorities, writing history from the point of view of the present seems to finally give an unbiased version of history. Another reason that makes this theory a positive one is that distance in time from the particular event to be interpreted gives the historian the chance for a less biased and subjective view. However, this version, regardless of how non-discriminatory it may appear at a first look, is still power biased. The needs of the present decide what should be kept in history and what should be omitted. Besides, writing history from the present perspective produces an even more distorted narrative. Schaff's conclusion is that "the changeability of the historical image is a function of the changeability of the criteria for the selection of historical material" (Schaff 1976: 226).

So, if history can be constantly rewritten, why is there a fear among scholars that history is over? Theorists such as Francis Fukuyama or Alexandru Zub have tackled this subject and written extensive studies on the topic. Lucian Boia however, has a less apocalyptic view (Boia 2002: 146–149). He warns the reader that he is not making predictions, just offering a scenario and suggests that history will not disappear or come to an end as it has been observed by others. It is just that history's glory days are over. History was queen of the social sciences during the 19$^{th}$ century when nations were formed and ideologies were needed for this massive construction. Ideologies are rooted in history as they need to rely on the past in order to shape the present. Nowadays, ideologies are apparently obsolete as it seems that all of them have been tried. Globalization seems to be the so-called ideology of the present, though even this one is already beginning to fail.

## 4. Conclusion

Everything is subject to interpretation and this paper has attempted to illustrate, with the help of theoretical views, that representation dominates our world since the essence cannot be known otherwise. And since we have to deal with representation, then we have to admit that we can never learn the absolute truth or discover the historical fact in its purest form. We have to rely on representations, choose the ones that seem to be closer to the essence they represent and make our own interpretations. Fiction does not claim to present the truth, but history does and, given all the theories and opinions stated throughout this paper, history fails at its purpose as it relies on the interpretation of representations and it is therefore victim of subjectivity and intentional or unintentional distortion. History is just a narrative, like fiction.



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## Abstract

History is an established discipline. However, it is still debatable whether it is science or art, as it is largely open to interpretation given the reliability of its sources. This paper will analyze the theoretical aspects of history, namely the scholarly concerns regarding the method of history and its reliability and objectiveness, as well as its relation to fiction. Theorists have always had problems in classifying history as a science or as an art, arguing in this regard that fiction is a necessary part of history as the interpretation of sources involves filling in the many gaps with the historian's imagination based on their knowledge of a certain period of time. The past is much too vast and claiming to be able to know it all is an utopia. This paper offers different definitions and perspectives on history with the purpose of proving that history and fiction are indubitably linked. In fact, novels are proposed as complementary sources for the 'official' versions of the past. This paper also provides insight into the recent theories on history and into the way postmodernism views this domain.



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