

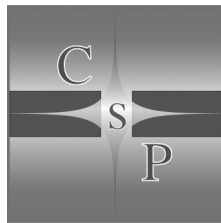
# History and its Literary Genres



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Edited by

Gašper Troha, Vanesa Matajč and Gregor Pompe



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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## INTRODUCTION

# HISTORY AND ITS LITERARY GENRES

VANESA MATAJC

The breaking of the “Rankeian” faith in the attainable scientific objectivity of historiography (“wie es eigentlich gewesen war”) is a representation of a new—that is, modernist—paradigm. Brian McHale (1987) ascribes an “epistemological dominant” to modernism. Even in history, by acknowledging subjective realities in the shadow of the absent Truth, epistemological uncertainty appropriates the subjectivism planned through the romantic and idealistic *Geistesgeschichte*, and enables historians to legitimize or become aware of their unavoidable presence in their own values and standpoints that Nietzsche’s critical history would call “time appropriate,” and their subjective (creative) imagination within their own discipline—that is, non-fiction historiography. At the same time, the doubt about metaphysical truth systems ascribed a deeper cognitive range to semi-literary and pure fiction forms; the culmination of the feeling of modernism—the zenith and the turn—is distinctly created and expressed by Nietzsche’s essayist philosophy. In the first half of the 20th century, the “geography” of western metahistory expressed similar beliefs; for example, in Germany, Egon Friedell recognized a narrative characteristic of history as well as its relationship to literary fiction in his *Geistesgeschichte* survey titled *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (1927-31). History revealed itself to him in the form of saga, legends, and myths (Friedell 1980, 13). At approximately the same time in France, the *Annales* historian Lucien Febvre (who established the journal *Annales* together with Marc Bloch in 1929) became aware that human perceptions of phenomena are created by ideas, emotions, tendencies, and reactions; even by people’s feelings, passions, and hatreds—that is, multitudes of uncanonized views, not merely the official views of selected individuals or institutions. It was not by accident that the complexity of views and feelings, for which a more open “conversational” historiographic form is suitable, awakened a renewed interest in Carlo Ginzburg (*Il formaggio e i*

vermi, 1976), for example, who used the method of “microhistory” within the *new cultural history*.<sup>1</sup> In the spirit of postmodern metahistory, Ginzburg is well aware of the fact that presenting the past cannot avoid rhetoric and subjective selection as well as stylization of the narrated. The British perspective that historians apply their subjectivity in the reconstruction of historical events was also expressed by R. G. Collingwood in 1935.<sup>2</sup> The chapter from his book *The Idea of History* (1946) is the point of departure that Lucia Boldrini uses to recognize the nature and expressions of the “Copernican” (Collingwood) or the “paradigmatic” (Thomas S. Kuhn) turn. With this, Boldrini actually realizes the modern derivation of the method that was emphasized by the *Annales* historian Marc Bloch in modern historiography. The method of his comparative history that advocates comparison of cultures or societies existing in the same place or time (cf. Hughes-Warrington 12) can be extended in modern metahistory to comparison of spatially and chronologically *related* text documents. In postmodern culture, the compared objects that are especially highlighted are texts of historiographic (meta)fiction and historiographic theory (metahistory). In this comparison, the relationship to the *Geistesgeschichte* method is especially obvious (cf. Virk’s essay *Strah pred naivnostjo* [The Fear of Naivete]).

During postmodernism—which, according to McHale, is defined by an *ontological dominant*—ontological uncertainty is expressed as a multitude of truths between which there are no clearly determinable lines; it is thereby produced and expressed as conscious intertextuality, blending, and pluralism of discourse, as well as an exchange of scholarly and fictional discourse. As already mentioned, the way for this kind of intertextuality and application of meta-disciplines has been paved, most evidently in the field of historiography, by modernism in western cultures. In the period of ontological uncertainty, the convergence of literary fiction and historiography culminated in two different representations of the postmodern historical turn that, with the cultural and linguistic turns, combines into historiographic metafiction and scholarly-historiographic metahistory.

Both representations reveal their connectedness at various levels; for example, the early Lukácsian *Geistesgeschichte* perspective (*Theorie des Romans*, 1920) defines the modern genre—that is, the novel—as an esthetic attempt to reconstruct the epic tradition or history—or, in other words, as a quote of the epic world’s lost totality. The origin of the modern concept of totality that has been used as a criterion of literary and historiographic genres since Romanticism, turned into a metahistorical

representation, is explored by John Neubauer in his paper “Literary Historiography” and, in the spirit of Whitean metahistory, he extends it to the origin of modern literary history discourse.

In his article, Neubauer establishes concrete relationships between newly established biologicistic concepts and literary history at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century (the transfer of the *epigenesis* concept). Using concrete text examples by August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, he presents the victorious march of the originally biologicistic concept through the romantic “foundations” of modern literary history. Using concrete examples from Eastern (and Southern) European national literary histories from the early 20th century he then manifests the ideological turn from its originally liberal (autonomous, emancipating) context into a consequently nationalist and conservative context. This conclusion, in which literature and literary history reveal themselves as a political force, is justified by the postmodern shift of literary history to the concept of heterogeneity that abolishes the *great story*. This shift is also used by Neubauer’s literary history. This practice is realized by recording unemplotted events, which thus avoids narrativity and also offers the recipient the opportunity to disperse the historical chronology of events into simultaneous component parts.

A second opportunity is offered by the revived *history of events* that undergoes *emplotment* in Whitean terms or builds up into a narrative form. Consistent derivation of both historiographic concepts thus leads to two tendencies formed by the postmodern awareness of historical value in metahistory: to a revisionism of historical or past understanding of history that can lead to an opposition of the pure experience of reality at a given moment, and to a revisionism that, by discerning the symbolic orders within a culture, consciously historicizes and connects the past with the present—that is, consciously emplots the selected events. In short, the postmodern earthquake undermines Archimedes’ “point” and the epistemological experience of instability leads to two “citation” paradigms: the Herodotean principle of history as a series of records made of individual concrete events, or the chronicle, and the Aristotelian principle of poetry as *mythos* or *mimesis*. However, in modern metahistory both “citation” paradigms are realized with an awareness of a displaced viewpoint—that is, from a relativized line between fiction and (historical) truth or reality.

As demonstrated by Peter Burke’s<sup>3</sup> comparison of concrete writers’ or historians’ realistic- and modernistic-oriented narrative strategies, historiography and literary fiction establish numerous analogue narrative strategies that articulate the time experience of reality. By openly

increasing the share of subjectivity in documentary material, the second aspect or understanding of time provides (historical) literary fiction with an esthetic and experiential effect, and thus a contemporizing and revival of the past, whereby the esthetic form preserves the temporal duality of the past and present, the known and the other, in the reality presented. Esthetic contemporizing of the past—that is, the other face of historicizing the present through symbolic forms—is reminiscent of the *experiential* effect that Wilhelm Dilthey (*Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 1910) presented as the most reliable way of understanding the past in *Geisteswissenschaften*.

Within the framework of “absolute” historicizing, Lucia Boldrini explores the literary representation of *the historical turn* or historiographical metafiction in her paper “On the Threshold of a New Ism.” However, she does this by contrasting numerous metafictional levels, from genre syncretism to the narrative anachronism procedure in Banville’s novel (1976), with the aspect of theoretical representation, and connecting both historical aspects into an expression of a paradigmatic turn; Banville’s novel (i.e., historiographical metafiction) represents the structural entity of *Kuhn’s scientific revolution* through the character of Copernicus and his intellectual context, as the crisis of passing from the Middle Ages to the modern age, but such that “through hybridization and by linking discourses, Banville extends Kuhn’s analysis of the history of science into a comprehensive form, which could be referred to as the epistemes of the period in Foucault’s terms. In Boldrini’s opinion, Banville presents the Copernican turn and postmodernism as an introduction and an epilogue to the modern paradigm thus expressing, with his epilogical gesture, “a threshold of a new ism, a new synthesis.”

It still remains open what the articulation of the future time experience will be like. The retrovision of “great stories” or “organic totalities”, which reversely reveal their nature of the Foucauldian *discourse of power* and the articulation of political or national ideologies, is inseparably connected with metahistory (which can also be used as an umbrella term for both historiographical discourses).

National ideologies do not merely define the *traditional*—or, in fact, *modern*— literary history paradigms in Eastern, Southern, and Central Europe, as established by Neubauer’s paper, but they also strongly influence the formation of literature created in these cultural zones. Because their geographic location also represents a place of meetings and appropriations of various 20th century political ideologies (or Hobsbawm’s *time of extremes*), the ideological reference of the literary fiction produced and received in this area is intensified accordingly. In his

paper “The Historical Novel Between National Identity, Ideologies, and ‘Historical Genres’”, Egon Pelikan observes various ideological dimensions in the historical novel genre from the viewpoint of modern historiography, which in this case combines the history of ideologies, literary history, and—by registering ideological strategies and tactics in literary practice—cultural history as well.

Although both novels (Boris Pahor’s *Zatemnitev* [The Darkening], 1976, and Alojz Rebula’s *Nokturno za Primorsko* [A Nocturne for the Littoral], 2004) are great artistic creations, Pelikan’s paper proves how parallel reading of both of them demonstrates the historical novel as an eminent genre in which the ideological semantization of literary fiction can be realized; in this case it represents a national ideology as well as modern progressive ideas of the nation’s political and ideological perspectives (i.e., political Catholicism, and communism).

However, because of its constructedness, the historiographical past can never present itself as absolutely coherent. This post-structuralist view is discussed by Beata Thomka “Deconstruction of History and Its Narrative Identity.” This post-structuralist view also expresses most strongly the awareness of historical relativism that is generally latently present in all postmodernist metahistoriographies. In the epistemological span from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jacques Derrida, from the *interpretation* that Nietzsche emphasizes in his *Will to Power*, to the *traces* highlighted by Derrida, historians reveal themselves as interpreters that cannot talk about the past *an sich*, but only through text sources or documents of the past; the past is thus presented only as a textualized past or, in other words, as a text. The *discursive (de)construction of reality* refers to the present and past in their simultaneous—and only in this way possible—representation. Thomka observes the realization of this turn in Esterházy’s novel writing; with his metanarrative strategies he explicitly presents the history of his family, country, and region, as well as his own past—all this as an interpretative construct that establishes the narrator or historian as a “narrative identity.”

“The interpretation of text traces” in the paradigm of modern metahistoriography places (i.e., historicizes) all scholarly disciplines, including literary theory, into a historical perspective. Literary theory also convincingly places the narrative structures—that seemed ahistorical when recognized—into the historical mentality paradigms of pre-modern and modern times. In this journal, such a literary theory stance is realized by Bart Keunen in his paper “The Emergence of a Meta-Genre: The Modernization of the Novel.” Even if the novel is not realized from the modernist approach (if we accept Bakhtin’s understanding of the novel),

its modern versions can be observed, which Keunen dates to the 17th and 18th centuries, and their apex in the 19th century. This differentiation is enabled by the effects of two text strategies: the scope of the novel's semantic universe, and the type of its plot. According to Keunen, the meta-genre structure of the modern novel becomes evident from the viewpoint of transfer between pre-modern, final, "eschatological" dynamics of the plot to the modern, open, and "dialogical" plot; in modern versions of the pre-modern novel, divine providence, or at least preplanned ascribing of meaning to events, is replaced by a coincidence or tension between characters. According to Keunen, this (or a dialogical conflict) substantiates the modern novel as a meta-genre because it can combine all of the known genres and text strategies in its text strategy.

In a narrative and structural manner, the plot's dialogical dynamics represent *Bakhtin's polyphonic character* of the modern novel. It represents a shift from the medieval metaphysical vertical of Truth—man to the modern new-age horizontal of man—man or *Mit-mensch* (Peter Szondi: *Theorie des modernen Dramas*, 1956) and to the *Lukácsean* Romanesque world that the gods have abandoned. From this viewpoint, the novel appears as a meta-genre or "quotation" of the lost totality.

Postmodern metahistory—also meta (literary) history—reveals this type of "quotation" under the influence of the *Foucauldian discourse of power*, especially in the ideological constructs of the past that correspond to the present.

Using selected historiographical, semi-literary, and literary genres of the texts discussed, Marjan Dovič's paper "Early Literary Articulations of Slovenian National History and 'Slovenian Cultural Syndrome'" establishes how national history (or historiography) and identity were constructed from Protestantism (1550 onwards) to Romanticism through the representation of two Slovenian myths: the Illyrian and the Karantanian. They both created and expressed an emancipatory national consciousness—that is, the motivation of national autonomy. The thesis that became famous with Herder—that is, that a nation's essence is expressed most clearly within culture and the *linguistic* art or literature within it—subjected the emancipation and autonomy of literary discourse to a "higher" purpose (that is, the emancipation and autonomy of the nation) with its culmination in the 1848 *Spring of Nations*. In the Slovenian nation that (until 1991) remained without its own state, literature should assume the role of a representative of national culture and identity *par excellence*, and thus also a nation-building institutional function in which literature is appropriated by national ideology. Based on the viewpoints of modern

meta (literary) history, Dovič supplements the thesis of the “Slovenian cultural syndrome.”

In the theater reception of drama, the ideological function of historiography is shown in Gašper Troha’s paper “The Dissidence of Slovenian Historical Drama in the 1960s,” which analyzes the relationships between three social factors: the theater, authorities, and audience. Regarding the question of why the authorities received the plays *Afera* (The Affair) by Primož Kozak (staged in 1961), and *Topla greda* (The Hothouse) by Marjan Rožanc in a diametrically opposite way, Troha replies with an adapted theory of ideology as developed by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his *Logika antisemitizma* (The Logic of Antisemitism, 1987): “The authorities divided society into ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ spheres, and then ascribed the latter the nature of a common enemy.” Appropriations of history (or historical themes) in literary genres are ambivalent; on the one hand, they represent Foucault’s strategy of power, by which this power is established and maintained and, on the other hand, they represent individual tactics that adjust the authorities’ power and thus partially subvert the authorities, confirming them in literature by using the ambivalent symbolic potential of historical signs (only seemingly and, at the same time, real).

Gregor Pompe’s paper “‘Historicity’ of Historical Opera” translates the described retrovisions of history, historiography, and historical artistic genres onto an interdisciplinary level. By comparing them to historical literary (fiction) genres, it outlines the characteristics of the genre of historical opera, which, the same way as *Scottian* literary fashion, became popular during Romanticism—that is, when “consciousness of history” was established (Lukács). Although its integral element of libretto means that opera is also partly a literary representation, the historical theme potentially expressed in the libretto is not sufficient to place it in the genre of *historical opera*. According to Pompe, “musical materialness” is also insufficient. The genre characteristic of *historical opera*—which Pompe recognizes in, for example, the works of Giacomo Meyerbeer and Modest Mussorgsky—is provided by dramaturgy when it appropriately functionalizes the historical theme. Conceptual power can be modified into an ideological power because the heyday of historical opera takes place in the time of the Spring of Nations.

However, historicity of the *new dawn* can also reveal the tragic consequences of its dialectics. As Vid Snoj shows in his paper “The Historical Tragedy of Franz Werfel,” Werfel in his “historical tragedy” *Paulus unter den Juden* presents “not only the Judaic sense, but *the whole of Judaism as tragic*. Proceeding from genre consciousness, he shapes the

historical matter in the manner of a literary genre which itself—according to Georg Steiner—has already become history, yet gives his selected genre, the tragedy, validity by placing it in a precisely determined, crucial historical time in which it separates Paul as the protagonist, to whom the title points, from the tragic hero. [...] When disaster befalls the tragic hero in Werfel's historical tragedy, Israel, and the end of the tragedy itself convolves into the image of this disaster, it is the end of Judaism as the first religion, and God's providence now begins to reign through victorious Christianity." Judaic tradition is also discussed in Simona Škrabec' paper "Capsules of Memory", dealing with Paul Celan's poetry. Plurisemantics of Celan's poetic language creates poetry as the struggle against forgetting: it implies a temporality of a single historical event and simultaneously transcends the time. That is the reason why not only historiography but also literature itselfs can speak as a "capsule of memory."

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**PART I:**  
**LITERATURE AND HISTORY**

# CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORIOGRAPHY OF LITERARY HISTORY

JOHN NEUBAUER

History of literature nestled itself between history writing and historical fiction. Though it could not compete with their popularity and scholarly stature, it powerfully shaped the identity of nineteenth-century national groups by canonizing national writers and their works and by authenticating ancient legends and myths as reflections of a past national glory. Literary histories, widely used in schools and at universities, became an important factor in shaping national self-images.

The overarching tropes and narrative forms of literary history were eclectically adopted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from two different fields: 1) the epic or dramatic narratives that were actually a subject matter of literary history, and 2) the history of living organisms that the new science of biology developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. My paper is primarily a study of the biological metaphor, which has been relatively neglected compared to the former category, which is usually treated today under the heading “grand narrative” (*grand récit*).

### I

If, as Hayden White and others have argued, all historical writing employs tropes and narrative forms, then literary histories, especially in Eastern Europe, have borrowed these primarily from the history of living organisms. The organicist ideology that underlies such literary and other histories has rightly but often indiscriminately been attacked. Organicism, as I call it, has many faces. More concretely, biological metaphors had a double role in literary histories, a positive and emancipatory one that allowed for genuine historical change, and a negative one that counteracted this by setting up organic form and organic growth as quasi-natural laws of literature, the arts, culture, and human history. Precisely

this reading of culture as nature has been the target of contemporary criticism.

Before turning to literary history proper, I briefly note that “organicism” has been applied to many aspects of the arts. Literary (as well as musicological and art historical) studies have imposed biological cycles of birth, growth, decline, and death on the life of artists, on literary periods and movements, and many other temporal processes in the arts. Furthermore, organicism has, next to this diachronic dimension, also a structural meaning: it implies that the parts of a totality are “organically” interrelated, that all of them manifest, though in various forms, the core or essence of that totality. We are all familiar with the “organic cohesion” that literary historians have attributed until recently to each successful work of art, to the life and the oeuvre of an artist, and to such period concepts of literary history as Baroque, Romanticism, or Realism. Holistic approaches have been severely criticized by deconstructionist thinkers, as well as by Michel Foucault, who wanted to replace the organicism of *Geistesgeschichte* with his own notion of *epistèmes*. I have argued elsewhere that Foucault’s philosophy of history, and other radical attacks on organicism, could not rid itself from vestiges of an organicist ideology.

Biology’s more technical contribution to the emerging genre of literary history emerged from the switch from a mechanistic *preformation* model to an *epigenetic* one that attributed to each organism an inner life force of its own. In the theory of *preformation* (*Einschachtelung* or *emboitment*) all descendants were considered to be present as miniatures in the oldest ancestor or originator. At the end of the eighteenth century, preformation was replaced by the theory of *epigenesis*, which claimed that the developmental force was not predetermined but rather innate to each organic being. Although important physiologists like Lazzaro Spallanzani and Albrecht von Haller opposed the new theory on account of its materialist potential, physiologists and philosophers of the next generation continued to elaborate on the notion that organic beings possessed some innate force. Charles Bonnet, for instance, distinguished between two versions, labeling them with terms that have recently been recuperated in the humanities: seeds were either everywhere (*dissémination*) or they descended from Adam and Eve (*mise-en-abîme*). Caspar Friedrich Wolff, the key figure in epigenetic theory, claimed that all beings possessed a *vis essentialis*; Friedrich Blumenbach rebaptized this force as *Bildungstrieb*, whereas Herder, building on Blumenbach, claimed that more than one innate force shaped the life of all living beings (see Müller-Sievers 1997).

Theories of innate life forces obviously had an immense appeal to the romantics and the idealist philosophers. Some critics have recently argued

that epigenesis forms the basis, or point of departure, for theories of self-generation, and even that it had a vital role in the emergence of Idealism and Romanticism. For now, I want to show with a concrete example how the new epigenetic model functioned in one of the first literary histories, August Wilhelm Schlegel's 1811 lectures on European drama. In a famous passage, August Wilhelm turns against Johann Joachim Winckelmann's doctrine that the modern arts must imitate the classical ones. In August Wilhelm's view, Shakespeare and Calderón are a match to the ancients, even if they do not follow theatrical rules derived from them. Instead of mechanically imposing ancient forms on their material (which would be the equivalent of biological preformation) these post-classical and post-medieval writers adopted forms that developed from their own material and age. It is this "inner-determined" form that Schlegel regards as organic. Seen this way, organic form manifests autonomy and self-organization. Translating the epigenetic biological principle into a principle of theater history: each age must develop, "from inside" so to speak, its proper theatrical forms:

the spirit of poetry is eternal but it passes through different bodies, as it were, and each time it becomes incarnate in humanity it has to bring about a new body, must build for itself a differently constructed body from the nourishments of a changed epoch. Forms change with the direction of poetic sensibility; to label new poetic forms as old genres and to judge them in terms of them is to make an utterly inadmissible use of the reputation that classical antiquity enjoys. Nobody should be judged by a court that has no jurisdiction over him. We gladly admit that most dramatic works of the English and Spanish poets are neither tragedies nor comedies in the ancient sense; they are romantic theater.<sup>1</sup>

The passage does not refer to epigenesis explicitly, but its biological simile hinges on the epigenetic view that each organism develops from an inner principle, and not from a pre-existent one inherited from the ancestors, as the preformationists held until the last decades of the eighteenth century. As Schlegel argues, it is unfair to judge English and Spanish theater in terms of criteria derived from ancient tragedies and comedies; the spirit of poetry impregnates each epoch differently, so that new art forms come about. The imagery may seem romantic and fanciful, but it relies on biological discourse: literature perpetuates itself by means of epigeneses (repeated new generations) rather than mechanical preformation. By implication, both genres and national literary cultures can develop freely, unfettered by the canonized forms of tradition. The biological metaphor is

not restrictive but liberating, allowing a free movement throughout the centuries and across national boundaries.

## II

This liberal and anti-dogmatic approach to literary history very quickly changed in the early years of the nineteenth century, as Friedrich Schlegel's much discussed 1812 Vienna lectures, *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur*, clearly shows. The decisive historical event shaping Friedrich Schlegel's lecture was the war against Napoleon, which reached its turning point in 1812. By that time, as Hans Eichner writes, "the follower of Fichte became a Catholic, the partisan of the French Revolution became its determined opponent, and the European Cosmopolitan became a German patriot and an admirer of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." Ironically, just these lectures, which supported so firmly the state and the status quo, were almost suppressed. The university was of the opinion that such extra-mural lectures were unnecessary, the police rejected the application, and only the Emperor's direct intervention secured for Friedrich the needed permit—on the condition that a police observant be present at the lectures. In the end, the lectures that were held between February 27 and April 30, 1812 became a great success.

Schlegel's newly won Catholic, conservative, and nationalist position is reflected in his dedication to Metternich, which explains that he wants to bridge the deep gulf between the literary and intellectual world on the one hand and "practical reality" on the other. Schlegel's goal was to show, "how decisively a nation's spiritual culture (*Geistesbildung*) may often intervene, even in great global events and the fate of nations." For Schlegel, literature was not merely entertainment or a copy of the "real world" but also a political force.

Schlegel's introduction and his first lecture specified the task further. He wanted to convince the political leaders that literature was the essence [*Inbegriff*] of a nation's intellectual life, though he acknowledged that scholars and writers had traditionally been isolated, from the higher classes as well as from the rest of the nation. Divisions within the artistic-intellectual culture itself, and its separation from the people were the greatest obstacles in developing a general national culture, but, Schlegel claimed, the eighteenth century generated in Germany and the other European nations a revival of the "national spirit." In practice this meant for him that literature ought to serve the state, and, more specifically, to glorify the national past:

From a historical perspective that compares people according to their value it is most important for a nation's further development, even its whole spiritual existence that a folk should retain those great national memories of its distant origins that usually vanish. Poetry's prime business is to preserve and to glorify these. Such national memories, which constitute the most splendid part of the heritage a folk can have, represent an advantage that nothing else can replace. And if a folk finds itself "ennobled," elevated in its self-esteem due to its great past and its memories of primeval time—if it has, in a word, poetry—then it will also be raised to a higher level in our eyes and judgment (Schlegel 1961, 15 f).

### III

In other contexts I have shown how Friedrich Schlegel's conservative and nationalist conception of literary history became dominant in the nineteenth century. For my present purpose I can merely indicate, with a couple of examples, that organicist nationalist literary histories lived on in the twentieth century. I take the great Romanian polyhistor and politician Nicolae Iorga, his younger colleague Nae Ionescu, and the Croatian literary historian Branko Vodnik as my examples.

Iorga maintained in his *History of Romanian Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (1901) and thereafter that Romanian literature grew *organically* and *spontaneously* from the soil of local traditions and folklore, but also from Dacian, Roman, and Byzantine sources. In *Byzantium after Byzantium* (1935) he tried to show that Dacian culture and Roman customs were preserved by the Romanian peasantry. Indeed, he thought that the peasants he found in Hunedoara county were still Dacians:

here are the true Dacians, the new Dacians of 2,000 years past, who carry with them as a sign of their triumph the language of a Rome long consigned to dust. The peasants here are indeed Dacians, with their tough and reserved features, their tight-lipped and ancient custom of paying everyone their due with a sense of justice. (Iorga 1971, 167-69).

If Iorga's organicist nationalism is inclusionary and expansionist (because it appropriates a whole non-Romanian tradition), that of his younger countryman, Nae Ionescu, was exclusionary. Ionescu, like many populists in various countries, deplored the cosmopolitan spirit of cities, especially of Bucharest. For him, Romania's capital city distinguished itself by "lack of national roots" (note the biological metaphor!) and a "loss of contact" with everything native, including the Eastern Orthodox Church and folk tradition in the countryside (Ionescu 1990, 146-48). He even recommended closing the Romanian borders and decoupling Romania

from world politics and foreign borrowings (Ionescu 1990, 287).

It would seem from these examples that organicism had always glorified the peasants and the traditional values of the countryside. While this is, indeed, mostly the case, my final example shows that organicism could serve several different ideologies. At the center of Branko Vodnik's Croatian literary history was not the countryside but the city, more concretely the Dalmatian city state. Vodnik's organicism was as exclusionary as that of Ionescu's, but it excluded just what was, for the latter, the heart of the organism. As Nenad Ivić writes, Vodnik wanted to show in *Povijest hrvatske književnosti* "the organic development of our old literature" (Vodnik 1913, 4). He meant by "organic development" the exclusion of whatever seemed to him heterogeneous, not organically fitting, for instance Glagolitic literature, because it was not specifically Croat. Proper Croatian literary history began, according to Vodnik, with the flourishing of humanism and Renaissance in free Dalmatian city-states. The Croatian national space was organically cohesive and permanently coextensive with that of his own time: Vodnik suppressed, according to Ivić, potential disruptions, differences between cities and their environments, between Dalmatia, Croatia proper, and Slavonia, between Dubrovnik and other Dalmatian cities, between languages and dialects, or types of literacy and literature. The hero of Vodnik's historical narrative was an unchanging subject without internal fissures or contradictions: a Croatian nation, reduced to its primeval form of a city-state.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV

Vodnik published his Croatian literary history in 1913, on the eve of World War I and of a long period, in which organicist literary histories—and literary histories in general—were regarded with great suspicion. Let us remember the rise of Russian Formalism during and after the war, the Western dominance of New Criticism in the interbellum and beyond, the coming of Structuralism and Poststructuralism in the decades starting with the 1950s. Of this well-known story, which need not be rehearsed here, I single out as exemplary Roland Barthes's "Histoire ou littérature?," written in the 1950 and included then in his book on Racine (1963), and Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), the polemical companion piece to his own historical construction in *The Order of Things* (1966) and the most concerted attack on organicist historiographic assumptions.<sup>3</sup>

Poststructuralist, Foucauldian, and deconstructivist attacks on the presuppositions of the organicist traditions have led recently to new and

experimental literary histories, which transgress narrative, disciplinary, and national/cultural borders and thereby destroy, explicitly or implicitly, the principles of organic unity. Of this growing body of new histories I can mention here only a few. Thus, narrative conventions are radically discarded in the French literary histories that Denis Hollier put together with a team of scholars. The overarching narrative of the “grand récit” is replaced here by a large number of essays, each attached to a particular date that marks a literary or political event. Disciplinary borders are most evidently transgressed in studies inspired by New Historicism, while national and cultural borders are crossed in regional studies, such as the *History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe*, edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and myself, and the new attempts to write transcultural and global literary histories, published by under the editorship of Gunilla Lindberg-Wada. How they succeed in overcoming the organicist tradition, how they absorb elements from it, and how they succeed in creating radically new ways of writing literary history, time will tell. Their thorough discussion will have to wait, in any case, for another occasion.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# “ON THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW ISM” HISTORICAL PARADIGMS IN JOHN BANVILLE’S DOCTOR COPERNICUS

LUCIA BOLDRINI

In the chapter “The Historical Imagination” of his classic *The Idea of History*,<sup>1</sup> R. G. Collingwood identifies historical thought as the dominant interest of modernity (Collingwood 1993, 231–249). History, he argues, has evolved a technique no less structured and certain than that of her “elder sister,” physical science, which dominated thought in the seventeenth century (Collingwood 1993, 232). But Collingwood rejects the “common-sense theory” according to which the historian relies on documentary sources to record facts objectively as they have happened. By recognising that imagination in the (re)construction of historical events is “not ornamental but structural” and “a priori” (Collingwood 1993, 241), and that the historian himself—rather than (presumed) objective facts—is his own ultimate authority, “it is possible to effect what one might call a Copernican revolution in the theory of history” (Collingwood 1993, 236).

For us, steeled in the (post)structuralist and postmodern debates of the second half of the last century, such withdrawal of authority from historical fact may not seem so bold. Even when Collingwood was writing, the objective status of external reality was being queried: in the concern with the subjectivity of perception and the power of language to shape reality differently, or in the challenge to the ideological premises of supposedly factual genres that we find in writings as diverse as the fiction of Joyce and Woolf, the linguistics of Saussure and Sapir-Whorf, the “new biography” of Strachey. But in the 1930s the positivist model of historiography still dominated, and relocating authority from the objectivity of external facts to their narrative reconstruction by the historian was a radical move, and a pivotal moment in the twentieth century’s evolving thought on the nature of “referential” discourses.

Thus Collingwood's description of this shift of perspective as the possibility of "a Copernican revolution in the theory of history" almost inevitably prompts reference to Thomas Kuhn's equally groundbreaking model of the history of science. In the terms of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), what Collingwood effects would be defined as a paradigm shift. The way "normal science" (research firmly based on the foundations of previous scientific achievements and of accepted theories) operates within the stable paradigm (briefly: the sets of theories and beliefs that at any given time govern the way scientific knowledge is organised and new information is sought) may be compared to the "common-sense theory of history," insofar as both these normalising modes of operating assume that the methods and principles governing research within their disciplines conform to the structure of reality and therefore best allow us to describe it. Kuhn explains how, when normal science produces data that cannot be accommodated within the existing paradigm, this starts to come under pressure until a crisis occurs, leading to a sense of confusion and a loss of reference points and certainties (ramifications may be felt well beyond the group of specialists, as we see in the wider social effects of heliocentrism, or of Darwinian evolutionary theory). A battle ensues within the scientific community over the conflicting theories, until a new paradigm is accepted: this is what Kuhn calls a "paradigm shift." Collingwood's interrogation of the principles of historical writing indeed comes at a time when the predominant model is unable to answer satisfactorily the questions asked of it; his unhooking of narrative from objective truth can be seen to herald a new "paradigm" (I place it in quotation marks so as not to elide the differences between Kuhn's and Collingwood's systems) that privileges the historian's choice and focuses on the structures of linguistic and narrative accounts—what would come to the foreground in postmodernist and New Historicist historiography.

In the 1960s and 1970s, in the context of the debate on "the two cultures" but especially of the impact of Foucault's writing on Western knowledge (Foucault 1970) and of "the linguistic turn" of theory, Kuhn's work was seized on to blur the differences between discursive disciplines and those traditionally based on external evidence. While Kuhn himself had pointed out a fundamental similarity of the two,<sup>2</sup> however, he was also careful to warn against a too hasty juxtaposition of the scientific and artistic models.<sup>3</sup> Collingwood too had distinguished the sphere of historical research from that of fictional narrative despite their profound analogy: while the latter need only be bound by laws of internal artistic coherence, the historian will select, combine, and use his imagination in

the narrative of events but must of course neither invent facts to prop his argument, nor suppress those that might undermine it.

If I return to these issues and bring together Collingwood and Kuhn, it is precisely because of their impact in the 1960s and 1970s, and because it is such moments of historical, scientific, and cultural crisis and renovation that are explored in John Banville's 1976 *Doctor Copernicus*,<sup>4</sup> a novel faithful to historical and biographical recorded "fact" which engages the discourses of science, biography, fiction, historiography and economics to show their interrelatedness in the "historical paradigm" and to reflect on the crisis of knowledge and values of the present. By placing the figure of Copernicus at the centre of both early modern and contemporary crises, Banville implicitly extends Kuhn's analysis of the history of science to a more encompassing, Foucauldian notion of epochal *episteme*. It is to this confluence of discourses in *Doctor Copernicus* that I therefore now turn.

The genre signposted from the start of the novel is that of the Joycean *Bildungsroman*, marked by the third person narration and the adoption of the character's perceptual and intellectual point of view, gradually evolving from the child's to the adult's. Unlike in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, however, the voice is that of a narrator that translates the perceptions of the child into a sophisticated language rich with literary and philosophical echoes. The novel later mimics the style and conventions of biographical narration, adopting then an omniscient narrator. There are pages in epistolary form, and the second part is framed by visionary Gothic passages. A different portrait of Copernicus follows in the (auto)biography of his disciple Rheticus, an utterly unreliable narrator animated by resentment towards the astronomer. Copernicus voices thoughts that the final notes ascribe to more recent figures such as Einstein, Planck, Kierkegaard, and any semblance of psychological realism is further disrupted near the end by the imaginary, allegorical debate, also full of anachronistic references, between the old scientist, victim of a stroke, and his dead brother Andreas.

In *The Copernican Revolution* (1957), cited by Banville as one of his sources, Thomas Kuhn presents Copernicus as a man suspended between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the novel, the use of the proper name becomes the pivot of this "suspension" between two epochs and between different artistic and scientific necessities, and focuses the ways in which the individual belongs to history and to shifting "historical paradigms." The proper name should be the fixed, untranslatable mark of individual and family identity. Yet, debating the derivation of the name Koppernigk from an uncertain, material origin seems to be the first and foremost necessity in most published biographies of the scientist. Open to

different interpretations, the name can be linked to different “things” depending on the eulogistic or spiteful intention of the speaker:

Burnished sheets of copper glowed . . . . It was from this metal that the family had its name, his father said, and not from the Polish *coper*, meaning horseradish, as some were spiteful enough to suggest. Horseradish indeed! (Banville 1990, 8)

To complicate matters, Copernicus himself varied the spelling of his name: Copernic, Coppernic, Koppernieck, Kopperlingk, Kupernik... Copernicus appeared especially in literary and scientific manuscripts; Koppernigk is the form used in most biographies. What matters, however, is what Banville makes of this etymological and graphic uncertainty. It is when reference is made to the origins of the name—as if anchoring it to matter—that the narrative technique shifts from that of the Joycean *Bildungsroman* to the traditional biographical narration, with the account of the family origins and their shrewd business sense, thus also placing Nicolas in a precise genealogical and social context:

The Koppernigks had originated in Upper Silesia, from whence in 1396 one Niklas Koppernigk, a stonemason by trade, had moved to Cracow and taken Polish citizenship. His son, Johannes, was the founder of the merchant house that in the late 1450s young Nicolas’s father was to transfer to Torun in Royal Prussia (Banville 1990, 8).<sup>5</sup>

To assert his essential, autonomous identity, Nicolas will have to perform a symbolic act of rupture that enables him to make a new name for himself, a name that can become his own seal on the new world view coined by his scientific theory:

They might try, but they would not take everything from him, no. If the sentry were to accost him now he would announce himself fiercely, would bellow his name and impress it like a seal upon the waxen darkness for all Heilsberg to hear: *Doctor Copernicus!* (Banville 1990, 109)

This self-made name, sanctioned by history ever since as “Copernicus,” supplants in history the—until then—historically and socially sanctioned family name “Koppernigk.” It is here, in the choice, by the subject, of his manner of belonging in/to history, that the rupture is located. Thanks to this new name the character can engrave, impress (Greek *kharássein*) his own uniqueness upon history, like a seal on wax (a wax remindful perhaps of the second Cartesian meditation on the proofs of the existence of the subject (Descartes 1979, 89-95)), like a sort of

copyright mark upon the new structure of modern thought. This historical-genealogical fracture coincides with the scientific and philosophical fracture of traditional cosmology, while the shift from an identity centred in one's place in the social structure to one centred on individuality—the act of self-creation—coincides with the moving of the centre of the cosmos from the earth to the sun.

*Kharaktér* describes both the tool that allows a mark to be impressed, for example on coins so as to give them their value, and the imprint itself that fixes the value of the coin. Thus it is appropriate that the issue of character construction—in a way, the central issue of biographical writing—should be connected with the question of value, of money, of coins: for in the novel there is an undercurrent that plays against the scientific and the imaginary (what should be concerned with the priceless, the absolute) and concerns instead the question of money, of the economy of meanings, of the value of science. This too has historical and biographical grounding: in 1522, by request of the Prussian Diet, Copernicus wrote a treatise to implement a reform of the monetary system that fixed the quantity of metals to be used in coins, introduced state monopoly on the issuing of money, regulated the amount of currency that may circulate at any given moment. Thus Copernicus also takes his place within the nascent modern economic structure. Of course, this early capitalist development is only envisaged: the dominant system is still the hierarchical, feudal system of land control through ecclesiastical tithes, and it is one of Copernicus' tasks, during the war between Poland and the Teutonic Knights, to ensure that the land continues to be cultivated. The link between money and cosmology in the (self-)construction of Copernicus' *character* prompts us to read the contrast between these opposite views of the cosmos and of man (medieval and modern; pre- and post-Copernican revolution) also in terms of the changing economic structure that evolves from the tie to the earth and the "fixity" of the "natural" value of things towards free movement, variability and productivity controlled by man through conventional and arbitrary laws increasingly detached from the rhythm of the apparent but regular and natural movement of the sun.

This also extends to the verbal and scientific *accounts* that, by their very nature of vehicles of communicative exchange, become substitutes for their referent. Nicolas' father, the Torun merchant, explains to him "the meaning of money" (Banville 1990, 6), linking it to the value of words and of representations:

Coins, you see, are only for poor people, simple people, and for little boys. They are only a kind of picture of the real thing, but the real thing itself

you cannot see, nor put in your pocket, and it does not jingle. When I do business with other merchants I have no need of these silly bits of metal, and my purse may be full or empty, it makes no difference. I give my word, and that is sufficient, because my word is money. Do you see? (Banville 1990, 6)

Nicolas “did not see” (Banville 1990, 6), but the parallel between monetary and verbal systems of substitution has been established, and he will later extend it to the scientific system of representation, when as an astronomer he seeks to explain the universe through an abstract model that he would like to be true (“He had believed it possible to say the truth”), but whose inevitable and frustrating conventionality, fictionality, and yet necessity he has to recognise (“now he saw that all that could be said was the saying. His book was not about the world, but about itself” (Banville 1990, 116)).

The tension between “truth” and our attempts at description already emerge during Nicolas’ student days, when the trace of a doubt in the writings of his teacher of astronomy makes tangible for him the crisis of a system and the slow but inevitable advent of a new one:

Nicolas had read everything the Professor had ever written on the Ptolemaic theory. Out of all those weary hours of wading through the dry sands of a sealed mind there had been distilled one tiny precious drop of a pearly doubt. He could no longer remember where or when he had found the flaw, along what starry trajectory, on which rung of those steadily ascending ladders of tabular calculation, but once detected it had brought the entire edifice of a life’s work crashing down with slow dreamlike inevitability. *Professor Brudzewski knew that Ptolemy was gravely wrong.* He could not of course admit it, even to himself; his investment was too great for that. This failure of nerve explained to Nicolas how it was that a mathematician of the first rank could stoop into deceit in order, in Aristotle’s words, *to save the phenomena*, that is, to devise a theory grounded firmly in the old reactionary dogmas that yet would account for the observed motions of the planets. (Banville 1990, 29)

Brudzewski’s retort—

You are asking our science to perform tasks which it is incapable of performing. Astronomy does not describe the universe as it is, but only as we observe it. That theory is correct, therefore, which accounts for our observations. (Banville 1990, 35)

—almost signals an awareness that is more modern, more “Kuhnian,” than that of Copernicus, who wants to get to the “vivid truth” of the cosmos. He

does so, he thinks, in a clear, pure instant of vision. *Theoria* etymologically translates as “spectacle,” “contemplation.”<sup>6</sup> Copernicus’ theory, in short, is his intuitive vision: he is the spectator of a mental representation of the cosmos that he mistakes for its reality. But the linguistic translation of the vision, “instead of approaching the word, the crucial Word,” can only fade into “loquacious silence” (116). The theory, so simple in its purity, but also so illusory, is both original creation and radical rupture with tradition and the dominant culture of the time. At war here are not only two different scientific paradigms, but also two conceptions of truth. The concept of the change of paradigm is Kuhnian, the language visionary:

Nothing less than a new and radical instauration would do, if astronomy was to mean more than itself. [...] The closed system of the science must be broken [...] the birth of the new science must be preceded by a radical act of creation. [...] Calmly then it came, the solution, like a magnificent great slow golden bird alighting in his head with a thrumming of vast wings. It was so simple, so ravishingly simple, that at first he did not recognise it for what it was. [...] What mattered as not the propositions, but the combining of them: *the act of creation*. He turned the solution this way and that, admiring it, as it were turning in his fingers a flawless ravishing jewel. It was the thing itself, the vivid thing. (Banville 1990, 83-85)

Copernicus too has a moment of doubt, experiencing a sense of loss, fear, and confusion similar to that described by Kuhn at the end of a paradigm:

No sooner had he realised the absolute necessity for a creative leap than his instincts without his knowing had thrown up their defences against such a scandalous notion, thrusting him back into the closed system of worn-out orthodoxies (Banville 1990, 85).

He would be dragged out, kicking and howling, into the market place. [...] He began to wonder if he would be well advised to destroy his work. [...] They would turn on him (Banville 1990, 119-20).

(Ironically, there is no such outrage, not yet: paradigms shift slowly). This is just what had happened to Brudzewski, whose nerve failed him, who accepted to sink back into that orthodoxy to which Copernicus will also yield, afraid of the consequences of publishing his revolutionary book.

The novel also raises more specific historical questions. What may be displaced onto the historical position and appropriations of Copernicus—is he German, Prussian, Polish, Ermlander?—is the question, particularly