

WRITING AGAINST THE GRAIN: THE (RE)PRESENTATION OF
HISTORICAL REALITY IN DON DELILLO'S *LIBRA* (1988)

الكتابة عكس التيار: إعادة عرض الحقيقة التاريخية في رواية الميزان (1988) لـ
دون ديللو

Hassiba SOUFLI

Djillali Liabès University, Sidi Bel Abbès,
soufli-hassiba@univ-eloued.dz

submission date:09/10/2020 acceptance date:26/02/2021 published date 15/03/2021

Abstract:

Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), as a postmodernist historical novel, can be read as a subversive text that problematizes the boundary between historical reality and fiction. In fact, in *Libra* DeLillo, writing against the grain, seeks to question the truth-value of historical (re)presentation by imitating the traditional historical novel and corresponding to what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction. As a historiographic metafiction, *Libra* does not only emphasize the indeterminacy of the meaning, but also it reflects that language is no longer the obedient servant of (re)presenting (writing/narrating) History. Therefore, this paper aspires to prove that *Libra* as a historiographic metafiction work challenges the capacity of history to represent reality outside the text and defy the truth-value of historical knowledge suggesting the possibility of plurality of truths instead of one truth.

Key words: postmodernist historical novel; historical (re)presentation; historiographic metafiction; History; historical knowledge;

ملخص:

رواية "الميزان" للكاتب دون ديللو (Don DeLillo) كرواية من الروايات التاريخية لما بعد
المدات يمكن قراءتها كنص تخريبي لكونه يطرح إشكالية الفرق الشاسع ما بين الحقيقة

التاريخية و نسج الخيال. فعلا، في رواية "الميزان" الروائي دليلوا - يكتب عكس التيار - يتر تساوالات عديدة حول مدى صحة الحقيقة التاريخية و ذلك من خلال تقليد الرواية التاريخية الكلاسيكية و الاستجابات الى الروايات التاريخية لما بعد الحداث و التي اطلقته عليها الناقدة الكندية (ليندا هوتشون - Linda Hutcheon) "روايات التاريخ المابعد خيالي". نصير التاريخ المابعد خيالي، كرواية "الميزان"، التي لا تقر بوجود عدد لامتناه من القراءات فسيه، بل على العكس ترى انه اللغة ليست عنده حيايا في اعادة عرض (كتابة/ سرد) التاريخ. بناء على ما تقدم، طمح هذه الدراسة الى اثبات ان رواية "الميزان" - كرواية التاريخ المابعد خيالي - تتحدى قدرة الكتابات التاريخية في تقديم الحقيقة خارج اطار نصير الرواية منافية وجود تفسير واحد للحقيقة التاريخية طارحة تعدد القراءات للمحدث التاريخي الواحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية التاريخية لما بعد الحداث ؛ اعادة عرض التاريخ؛ رواية التاريخ المابعد خيالي؛ التاريخ؛ الحقيقة التاريخية

1. Introduction

History as a discipline has struggled for decades to establish itself as an empirical science whose methodology results in a truthful representation of the past. This view of history has influenced many historical novels in the nineteenth century; works such as Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly*, are set to uncover the truth around historical facts. However, in a world where all certainties have ruined, this "scientification of history" has been superseded by postmodernist thinkers. Writing against the grain, Don DeLillo, as a postmodernist writer, does not only challenge history writing (historiography) but also creates a literary world that blends historical facts with fiction in order to question and raise our awareness of the constructed nature of historical reality. Hence, Don DeLillo invites us as readers to revisit History. In *Libra*, a novel about JF Kennedy assassination, DeLillo tells us 'what might happened' instead of 'what happened' as a way to put the historical discourse into question. That is, he tends to create new horizons of viewing historical reality.

2. Aims of the study:

Using the postmodernist tenants, this article aims to categorize DeLillo's *Libra* with the realm of the postmodernist historical novel with its emphasis on the constructed nature of both literature and history. In particular, this paper aspires to show that *Libra* is a good example of the postmodernist historical novel as it displays many of the features of a genre that Linda Hutcheon has called the historiographic metafiction novel.

3. The Historical Novel and the Postmodernist Historical Novel

The rise of the historical novel as a literary genre was a direct response to the new formulated conception of history in the second half of

the eighteenth century. One of the most prominent forerunners who dealt with the evolution of the genre and its origins was Georg Lukàcs. In his most influential work *The Historical Novel* (1962), Lukàcs introduces his theory of the genre stating that the historical novel is “the direct continuation of the great realistic novel of the eighteenth century” (p.31). So, most of the features of the historical novel are derived from the realist novel.

By and large, the realist novel differs from the classical and renaissance epics, romances, comedies and tragedies in many respects. These latter usually do not draw attention to the real human experience. Accordingly, Ian Watt (2000) maintains the historical novel is elaborated in order to give “a full and authentic report of human experience” (p.32) and thereby the novelist ought to be loyal to human experience. To achieve such objectivity, novelists, as a result, brought many changes to plot, characterization, time, place, and the use of language. In this regard, Defoe and Richardson, for instance, “did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend, or previous literature” (Watt, 2000, p.14), but they tended either totally invent plots in their works or refer to contemporary events.

Referring to characterization, contrary to romance, in the realist novel, which seeks to give a sense of objectivity, characters are no longer stereotypical, but they are ordinary people. Also, the use of time and space dimension in the realist is much particularized. In this regard, it is important to note that it is time and space dimension which contribute to the originality of the novel as a new literary form. Instead of the timeless stories of previous tradition, the realist novel uses “causal connections” which creates a cohesive structure. Therefore, the novel moves from disguise and coincidence to be more true to reality. In addition to time dimension, the spatial dimension is very detailed within the realist novel because this latter attempts to reflect on the individual's everyday life.

Another focal point to the realist novel is the use of language. This use of language ought to be in the service of giving the truth value to the realist novel. Accordingly, Watt (2000) points out: “the previous stylistic tradition of fiction was not primarily concerned with the correspondence of words to things, but rather with the extrinsic beauties which could be bestowed upon description and action by the use of rhetoric” (P.28). To give an air of objectivity, novelists tend to adapt a new prose style; a style that is different from the previous accepted canons of prose style. Therefore, the realist novel uses a language which is referential.

In sum up, the principles of the realist novel are basically drawn from the verisimilitude. Of course, most of the principles brought to the novel, in particular, realist novel, aims at giving the novel a sense of objectivity; that is, to depict the everyday life of the individual more truthfully.

As mentioned earlier, most of the tenets of the historical novel are derived from the premises of the realist novel. The historical novel finds expression with the works of Sir Walter Scott who was the forefather of this genre.

The historical novel, which is an amalgamation of history and fiction, is rather a hybrid genre. Attempting to define the genre, Sarah Waters states that the historical novel is “a knotty one to pin down,” which includes “multiplicity of different types of fictional formats,” such as: romance, detective, horror, postmodern, fantasy and so on (Waters as cited in De Groot, 2010, p. 3). Correspondingly, Jerome de Groot considers “the intergeneric hybridity and flexibility” of the historical novel as one of its most defining features. In fact, this latter makes the genre a space for literary experiments. From Scott to postmodern writers, De Groot (2010) notes, historical fiction has been a fertile land which provided writers with changing themes and different formal resources: “A historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention” (p.2).

The rise of the historical novel coincides with the birth of a new “historical consciousness”. This new historical consciousness, Lukàcs (1962) explicates, is brought by the social forces of the nineteenth century atmosphere: “it was the French revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a *mass experience*, and moreover on a European scale” (p.23). Similarly, in “The Development Toward Historiographic Metafiction in the American Novel”, Kurt Müller (1994) argues that the rapid socio-economic changes brought by industrial revolution and political events set the ground for the rise of historical consciousness: “people became aware of the singularity of their own epoch, and the fates of individuals were increasingly felt to be inextricably bound to the collective events and general process of history” (p.35). According to Lukàcs (1962), the Enlightenment philosophy of “man’s unalterable nature” was the main reason behind man’s improper understanding of “historicism”. However, this philosophy was lately

superseded by the Hegelian philosophy which “sees a process in history, a process propelled, on the one hand, by the inner motives forces of history and which, on the other, extends its influence to all the phenomena of human life, including thought” (p.29). In brief, it is due to these social forces resulted from post revolution atmosphere that man was taught of his historical nature; i.e., a nature which was not unalterable, but it is rather in perpetual dialectical progress.

Most of the theories about the historical novel are derived from Georg Lukàcs' seminal work *The Historical Novel*. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukàcs (1962) affirms that the Scott novel is the epitome of the historical novel for many reasons. First and foremost, comparing Scott to his forerunners, Lukàcs argues that he was the first writer who reflected this new historical consciousness in his work:

The so- called historical novels of the seventeenth century (Scudéry, Calpranéde, etc.) are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume ... and in the most famous “historical novel” of the eighteenth century, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, history is likewise treated as mere costumery: it is only the curiosities and oddities of the *milieu* that matter, not an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch. What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age. (p.19)

As stated above, it is this newly-awoken historical feeling which distinguishes Scott's novels from his predecessors. Therefore, his novels seek to depict the social forces that lead a certain character to behave in a certain way. That is, the historical novel ought to be more concerned with the motives of the characters' attitudes rather than with the costumes of characters.

The Scott novel distinguished novelty lays particularly in his different treatment of characterization. Talking about characterization, to convey a sense of objectivity, Scott uses a certain type of characters. According to Lukàcs (1962), this “historical faithfulness” is evoked in “the human – moral conception of his characters”, and this latter is the very reason why his characters are never “eccentric figures, who fall psychologically outside the atmosphere of the age” (p.60). Moreover, Scott usually chooses characters that belong to lower classes because he believes that average people usually do not know how to avoid expressing their true

feelings. So, Scott associates his characters with strong passions, because passions, such as love, hatred, would remain the same at every age and thus his characters would not seem out of the age. More interestingly, to invoke a sense of reality, Scott uses historical figures. These historical figures are employed for the sole purpose which is to indicate the past time only. In this regard, for Scott, Lukàcs (1962) states, "the great historical personality is the representative of an important and significant movement" (p.38). In brief, although Scott uses historical figures in his novels, they are in turn so marginal that they are used only to invoke the past age.

Here it is noteworthy to say that the historical novel has been founded to be more faithful to reality as it was much more obsessed with the ways how to create a sense of reality preserving such historical reality founded in the historical records. In other words, over time the conceptualization of the historical novel has been influenced by the question of representing historical reality, i.e.; the issue of whether the historical novel is true to historical truth and how this latter achieve such claim to truth. Therefore, this question of historical truth or historical accuracy has always been the main reason for differentiating between the historical novel and the postmodernist historical novel, in particular, Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction".

Unlike the traditional historical novel, postmodernist historical novel problematizes historical truth suggesting "truths", in plural, instead of the one "Truth." That is, as the past (reality) is inaccessible, truth is, hence, contextualized and what is supposed to be "truth" is just a (re)presentation of it. In fact, many historians such as Dominick LaCapra and Hayden White agree with postmodernist thinkers who believe that the past or (his)tory does exist but just as a text form. In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*³⁵, Fredric Jameson (1982), for instance, contends, "history is not a text," but "it is inaccessible to us except in textual form." Likewise, Linda Hutcheon (1988), in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, argues that history is a real object, but it is impossible to recover the "real story" because history is always mediated through texts. She states, "... in arguing that *history* does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts" (p.16).

Hutcheon even goes further arguing against Jean Baudrillard's view of reality; who claims "the loss of originals" or "the loss of the real" in all domains of life. Being extremist, Baudrillard (1988) proclaims that in a

postmodernist society, the real has been replaced by “simulacrum” through a process of “simulation” to the extent that this latter has become more real than the real; it has become “hyperreal”: “simulation...is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal” (p.1). Consequently, Hutcheon (1989) states that “the postmodern [...] is not degeneration into “hyperreality” but a questioning of what reality can mean and how we come to know it” (p.32).

Basing her arguments on poststructuralism, Hutcheon believes that language, as a means of getting to the past, cannot reflect reality. That is, language creates and shapes reality. In other words, in Hutcheon's philosophy, truth (reality) is textually based as far as it is defined by language. In brief, in Hutcheon's dogma, what is supposed to be a historical truth in the traditional historical novel, it is believed to be just a (re)constructed truth in the postmodernist historical novel. For this particular reason, She calls such type of novels, which question historical reality, as “Historiographic metafiction” as a way of distinguishing the traditional historical novel from the postmodernist historical one. She defines Historiographic metafiction, a genre that refutes the very idea of historical truth and accurate knowledge of the past, as follows:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (Hutcheon, 1988, p.93)

As stated above, historiographic metafiction examines the relationship between historiography and fiction. So, to bring to the fore such complex relationship between history and fiction, historiographic metafiction puts ample emphasis on subjectivity, intertextuality, reference and ideology. In doing so, many devices are employed. Within this context, Hutcheon (1988) explains that historiographic metafiction usually employs either multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator so as to question the text's claim to truth; i.e., to problematize the issue of subjectivity. Hutcheon even goes further when she states that neither of these two modes provide “a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with certainty” (p.117) due to the second mode contains “over –assertive and problematizing subjectivity” (p.161). Illustrating this latter point, Hutcheon explains that Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1982) is a historiographic metafiction novel as

it uses an overtly controlling narrator, Tom Crick, who is a teacher of history. Throughout the novel, as a history teacher, Tom Crick attempts to give meaning to his present situation through questioning his past and trying in turn to narrate the history of Fenland. Nonetheless, Crick finds himself that he is usually unable to narrate the past events as he is uncertain about them. In this regard, Hutcheon (1988) maintains postmodernism “establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past. It both installs and then subverts traditional concepts of subjectivity” (p.118). Here, it can be noted that to problematize and to question the notion of subjectivity, historiographic metafiction, paradoxically, both uses and abuses traditional narrative voices.

In addition to the use of different narrative voices, historiographic metafiction also uses intertextuality. This use of intertextual references aims at emphasizing the textuality of history. In this regard, Hutcheon (1988) mentions that postmodern fiction rejects “the notion of the work of art as a closed, self-sufficient, autonomous object deriving its unity from the formal interrelations of its parts.” (p.125). Postmodern fiction, in fact, takes the text not to the real word but to “world of discourse, the ‘world’ of texts and intertexts” (Hutcheon, 1988, p.125). This means that any revisiting of history is intertextual because the past is textualized, and each trace of the past can only be seen through texts.

More interestingly, Hutcheon (1989) further draws our attention as readers to the fact that any historical trace is open to interpretation and re-interpretation and thus is always a subjective process, “if the past is only known to us today through its textualized traces (which like all texts, are always open to interpretation), then the writing of both history and historiographic metafiction becomes a form of complex intertextual cross-referencing” (p.81). That is, textual traces of the past are a mere representations of that past through which historical narratives are constructed. Then, historiographic metafiction texts present accounts which construct a representation out of representation.

In short, unlike the historical novel, historiographic metafiction problematizes how the past has been reconstructed instead of trying to give a sense of past reality. Thus, historiographic metafiction is “a novel about the attempt to write history that shows historiography to be a most problematic art” (p.112).

4. *Libra* and the (Re)presentation of Historical Reality

In *Libra*, DeLillo fictionalizes the events surrounding the President John F. Kennedy assassination. In doing so, he creates amalgamation of historical figures and fictional ones presenting a different history of the time. In fact, the assassination event has left many theoretical conclusions and has also opened the historical discourse into the present.

In questioning the reliability of the historical accounts, DeLillo offers other versions of the same event. Therefore, the novel is narrated from three different levels: a biography of the assassin Lee Harvey Oswald; a plot to make an attempt on the life of JFK and the efforts of a CIA retired agent to write a "secret history" of the event. The three narrative levels work together so as to underline the inherent confusions within the official records.

Hence, DeLillian world often questions the assumed historical truth that has been popularized in the traditional historical novel. In this sense, as his world problematizes historical reality, it is appropriate to say that *Libra* fits well the genre that Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction.

So, apart from classifying *Libra* exclusively within the realm of historiographic metafiction, this study also tends to show that *Libra* generally belongs to the postmodernist historical novel. Therefore, depending on the historical analysis method would offer clear understanding of the historical events included in the novel.

Generally speaking, DeLillo, as a postmodern writer, does not want to tell us what we already know about a determined historical fact or figure; he rather intends to invite us as readers to rethink the past in a critical way. In other words, his own depiction of a particular historical event is not haphazard. In his essay "The Power of History", DeLillo (1997) succinctly states the philosophy behind his work as a novelist: "The novelist does not want to tell you things you already know about the great, the brave, the powerless, the cruel. Fiction slips into the skin of historical figures. It gives those sweaty palms and head colds and urine-stained underwear and lines to speak in private and the error of restless nights. This is how consciousness is extended and human truth is seen new."(p. 63)

Therefore, in *Libra*, a novel written 25 years after JF Kennedy's assassination, DeLillo is not supposed to tell us what we already know about the events surrounding JF Kennedy's assassination, but he shows a great resistance to the official story of the "lone gunman" that is popularized by the Warren Report as he tries to bring to the fore the untold stories. In other

words, DeLillo seeks to provide us as readers with a new reading of the event, a reading that has been eliminated from the Warren Report.

In fact, his approach towards history writing becomes highly pronounced when David Ferrie, one of his characters, declares: "There is something they aren't telling us. Something we don't know about. There's more to it. This is what history consists of. It's the sum total of all things they aren't telling us" (DeLillo, 1988, p.321). So, this phrase announces clearly how *Libra* should be read, i.e., it is a metafictional key for how we might read *Libra*. In fact, It is due to this "sum total of all things they aren't telling us", the DeLillian world seems to suggest that historical reality is not "out there" to be found, but it should be rediscovered, recreated and reconstructed.

Therefore, as Historiographic metafiction, *Libra* blends assumed facts with fiction to the point that there is no clear dividing line between the imaginary and the real suggesting the constructed nature of both history and fiction. As John Duvall (2008), in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, argues:

Although his [DeLillo] focus remains steadfastly on American postmodernity, in mature works such as *Libra*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, DeLillo's social critique often proceeds from a form that Linda Hutcheon has termed "Historiographic Metafiction". For Hutcheon, the postmodern novel blends the reflexivity of metafiction (fiction that calls attention to itself as fiction or fiction that thematizes its own fictional production) with an explicit questioning of what counts as official history. Historiographic metafiction intentionally and self-consciously blurs the boundary between history and fiction, exploring the gaps and absences in the historical archive. (p. 3)

As a historiographic metafiction, *Libra* uses different metafictional elements in particular: multiple points of view and a controlling narrator. To challenge the reliability of any historical narrative, DeLillo employs twenty-nine multiple points of view; all of which reflect the fabricated process of any historical narratives. These twenty-nine different points of view which constitute both of major and minor characters who attempt to consider the assassination are unable to provide the true history of the incident. In this regard, Hutcheon (1988) argues that this mode of narration cannot provide "a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with certainty" due to the fact that it includes "a pluralizing multivalency of points of view" (p.117).

In *Libra*, Historiographic metafiction is also manifested in two characters: Lee Harvey Oswald and Nicholas Branch. The former is the real assassin of John Kennedy and the latter is a retired CIA agent who is asked to write a full account of the event, to write a “secret history”.

In *Libra*, DeLillo plays the role of the biographer of Oswald. Consisting of twenty four chapters; nearly half of the novel throws light on the life of Oswald as it is presented in the Warren Report or as it is fictionally created by the conspirators such as Win Everett. Hence, DeLillo interweaves facts about Oswald from the Warren Report with invented ones from the scripted version from the conspirators’ plot to the extent that the “real” Oswald becomes indistinguishable from the “scripted” Oswald reflecting Baudrillard’s world of hyperreality where the loss of originals. However, DeLillo does not deny the existence of Oswald, but like Hutcheon, questions our ability as readers if we could know the real Oswald in a word- centered world. Indeed, Branch discovers the impossibility to know who Oswald “really” was, he even calls him the “multiple Oswald” (DeLillo, 1988, p.300). Through Oswald, DeLillo puts history writing (historiography) into question bringing into light the contradictory facts that constitute the historical archive (the Warren Report):

How can Branch forget the contradictions and discrepancies?

These are the soul of the wayward tale. One of the first documents he examined was the medical report on Pfc. Oswald’s self-inflicted gunshot wound. In one sentence the weapon is described as 45-caliber. In the next sentence it is 22-caliber. Facts are lonely things.

Oswald’s eyes are gray, they are blue, they are brown. He is five feet nine, five feet eleven. He is left-handed. He drives a car, he does not. (DeLillo, 1988, p. 300)

More interestingly, *Libra*, as a historiographic metafiction, does not only use multiple points of view, but also uses a controlling narrator. In fact, it is through the figure of Nicholas Branch, DeLillo introduces *Libra* as Historiographic metafiction. In *Libra*, Branch plays the role of the controlling narrator. Branch is asked to write a “secret history” of JF Kennedy’s assassination which he doubts that “no one will read” (DeLillo, 1988, p.6), but we readers rejoin his task as we follow his own comments on the Warren Report.

In *Libra*, we meet Branch as much more a critical reader of the information given to him by the Curator rather than as a critical writer of the event. That is to say, DeLillo uses Branch as a way to reflect the impossibility of the accurate representation of the past. To depict the event empirically, Branch discovers the futility of his task: "it is premature to make a serious effort to turn these notes into coherent history. May be it will always be premature. Because the data keeps coming. Because new lives enter the record all the time. The past is changing as he writes" (DeLillo, 1988, p. 301)

Criticizing the Warren Report, Branch acknowledges that history as a text equates language, and thus is bound by "multiple interpretations":

[...] There is also the Warren Report, of course, with its twenty-six accompanying volumes of testimony and exhibits its million words. Branch thinks this is the megation novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred.

Everything is here.... Thousands of pages of testimony, of voices droning in hearing rooms in old courthouse buildings, an incredible haul of human utterance. It lies flat on the page, hangs so still in the lazy air, lost to syntax and other arrangement, that it resembles a kind of mind-spatter, a poetry of lives muddied and dripping in language. (DeLillo, 1989, p. 181)

Branch spends fifteen years reading the information about the assassination without writing a word because he decides to deal with the historical reality empirically, that is, not to select and not to give order to the events. As a metafictional element, Branch's role as a controlling narrator doubles DeLillo's. That is to say, throughout the novel Branch as a CIA analyst has been charged with writing a report that makes sense of the assassination. However, although he is well equipped with all the textual evidence, he is unable to construct a fully unified narrative because of the aforementioned reasons. This latter is explained in terms of a refusal of any closure. As a historiographic metafiction, *Libra* ends without closure as Branch cannot write the "secret history" of the event. In this respect, Hutcheon explains that postmodernism challenges the notion of "totalization", showing that there is no closure to the analysis of a certain fact, only problematization. That is, the 'total history' is de-totalized (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 62).

However, unlike Branch, DeLillo's ability to use 'emplotment' enables him to give his alternative account called *Libra* suggesting the constructiveness of both history and fiction. As Hutcheon (1985) suggests:

Like historians, they [writers] must use 'emplotting' strategies of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination of the elements of a story, and they must also deal with 'veritable chaos of events already constituted.' But they have another set of conventions to confront as well: those of fiction. What we end up with is a new, curiously paradoxical form that we call 'Historiographic metafiction' rather than historical fiction. (p.302)

All in all, in *Libra*, DeLillo, along with his narrator and his characters, inhabits a world where man is struggling to understand and to accept uncertainty and indeterminacy. That is, all truth, for DeLillo, is relative because no one could ever grasp the external world in its entirety as Oswald once writes in his "Historic Diary", "There is a world inside the world" (DeLillo, 1988, p. 153).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, DeLillian World blurs the line between the real and the historical in order to suggest that reality always eludes us, i.e., we will not know the "real" assassination story. But "fiction rescues history" from its confusions as it brings to the fore the possibility of the many truths. Of course, DeLillo, in *Libra*, attempts to negotiate the two possibilities around the JFK assassination which are: the official lone gunman story of the Warren Commission Report and the multiple possibilities of conspiracy theory. That is, the official lone gunman story goes in parallel with the fairly straightforward biography of Oswald, and chapters focusing on the plots of various government and anti-Castro agents to stage an act that would signal their displeasure to Kennedy in the wake of the failure of the US-backed invasion of Cuba. Blending fact and fiction, DeLillo proposes different readings of the Kennedy assassination; i.e., he rather suggests different historical representations of the event that are not included in the official history (The Warren Report). Therefore, *Libra* can be seen as a good example of what Hutcheon calls Historiographic metafiction as it uses many metafictional devices, such as: multiple narrative voices and a controlling narrator in order to question historical (re)presentations and any assumed historical truth. In particular, *Libra*, as a historiographic metafiction, challenges the notion of "total history" and refuses any kind of closure as it

provides more different interpretations of the same historical event rather than providing any answers leaving the readers free to elaborate their own ideas about a certain historical moment. In sum, strongly immersed in postmodernism, *Libra*, as a historiographic metafiction, invites readers to question official history through bringing new horizons of reading historical events. Thus, reading *Libra* using conspiracy theories could offer new interpretations of the Kennedy assassination instead of the popularized story of “the lone gun man”.

Bibliography :

- [1] Baudrillard, Jean (1988). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- [2] De Groot, Jerome (2010). *The Historical Novel*. New York: Routledge.
- [3] DeLillo, Don (1988). *Libra*. London: Penguin, 2011.
- [4] ---. (1997). “The Power of History”. *The New York Times Magazine*. 7 Sep 1997, pp: (60-63).
- [5] Duvall, John (2008). *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Hutcheon, Linda (2004). *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. NY and London: Routledge.
- [7] --- (2002). *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- [8] --- (1985). “*Running in the Family*. The Postmodernist Challenge,” in *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*, ed. Sam Sdecki. Montreal: Véhicule. (301-13)
- [9] Jameson, Fredric. (1982). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. New York: Cornell University press.
- [10] Lukacs, Georg (1962). *The Historical Novel*. Trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell. London: Merlin Press.
- [11] Müller, Kürt (1994). “The Development Toward Historiographic Metafiction”. *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*. Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh. (35-51)
- [12] Watt, Ian (2000). “From the Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding.” *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 363-381. Print.