

Fields and Frames in Historical Fiction about the Salem Witchcraft Trials: An Analysis of *Salem Witchcraft; or the Adventures of Parson Handy, from Punkapog Pond (1827)*.

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Historical fiction has been defined as a hybrid genre, in the sense that it both contains a historical reality and an imagined reality. This hybridization or mixture of ontological spheres has sometimes been used to criticise this genre, due to the fact that it is neither history nor fiction and, thus, it violates some of the conventions established for each of them (Rigney 2001: 16-17). On the one hand, historians argue that historical novels do not reproduce the past as it actually happened. On the other hand, literary critics establish a lack of unity in this kind of works, because if the historical and the fictional components can be set apart, there is no unity of content.

However, every work of historical fiction needs to include these two components because it is what distinguishes it from other fictional genres (ibid: 20). That is, the interplay between invented story elements and historical ones is the distinctive feature of the genre of historical fiction. Nevertheless, this lack of agreement among critics has led to a study of this genre in terms of truth telling and fictionality, without trying to analyse how these elements mix together (ibid: 17). However, it is important to be aware that historical novels are fiction, and thus, they cannot be valued only on the basis of their faithfulness to history but also because of their literary value (Henderson 1974: xiv; Rigney 2001: 20).

There are different criteria on which the distinction between a historical novel from a novel is based. Avron Fleishman (1971:4) talks about fictional characters living in the same world than historical people as the main difference between them. Moreover, he talks about a 40- or 60-year separation between the life of the author and the time of the novel (ibid: 3). For Amado Alonso (1984: 80), a historical novel is the one that tries to rebuild a past way of life. Finally, Harry B. Henderson (1974: xiv) establishes the time prior to the life of the author as the defining criterion for them.

The area in which most of the debate about historical fiction has been held is the one about the uses of history in fiction, in which three restrictions have been established (McHale 1987[2000]: 87-88). The first one is that the official record should not be contradicted. This limits the freedom of the artist to the so called “dark areas” of history, i.e., the elements of which we have no information or in which the official history is not interested. The second

restriction is that the cultural system of a specific era should also be maintained unchanged so that characters should not behave in a way improper for the time in which they lived. Thus, this is related to anachronism. Finally, logical and physical laws should also be compatible with the ones of reality. Otherwise, the text would contradict the rules of classical historical fiction.

As regards the actual integration of the historical materials in a fictional work, Ann Rigney (2001: 22-23) talks about three strategies: selection – some elements of the historical reality are used whereas other are omitted -, transformation – in the sense of adaptation and revision of existing historical contents -, and finally, addition – that is, the actual invention of events and characters. Obviously, these restrictions are not always respected, and postmodernism is a good example of a violation of all of them. In any case, every historical element introduced in the literary work experiences a transformation, because it stops being independent and belongs to a new system of relations and meanings. This transformation has been called “analogous configuration” by Barbara Foley (1986: 68, 84) and the result is that all elements in a work of historical fiction have the same status and thus, the criticism of lack of unity we mentioned before disappears because all the elements enjoy equal status.

As we have mentioned before, and as the examples of basic requirements for a historical novel to be considered as such and the restrictions on the uses of history in fiction show, the studies of historical fiction were and are still based on the historical component of the works under study or on the prevalence of one over the other. This emphasis can be more clearly seen in Table 1 below, in which we have summarized the different typologies of historical fiction that had been made in the last years paying attention to the different terminology used and the element(s) chosen as the criteria for classification.¹

TYPOLOGIES OF HISTORICAL FICTION			
AUTHOR	TERM	CLASSIFICATORY ELEMENT	TPOLOGY
John Williams (1973)	Historical novel	Characters and events	Novel of invented characters and events.
			Novel with some historical characters, events and setting
Joseph Turner (1979)	Historical novel	Characters and events	Documented historical novel.
			Disguised historical novel.
			Invented historical novel.
Barbara Foley	Documentary	Contract between author	Pseudofactual novel.

¹ We have tried to present the most widely known classifications, bearing in mind that it is impossible to use every single classification that has been done.

TYPOLOGIES OF HISTORICAL FICTION				
AUTHOR	TERM	CLASSIFICATORY ELEMENT	TYPOLGY	
(1986)	novel.	and reader.	Historical novel.	
			Modernist documentary novel	Fictional autobiography
				Metahistorical novel.
Brian McHale (1987).	Historical novel	Realeme introduction	Classic historical fiction	
			Modernist historical novel	
			Postmodernist revisionist historical novel	Apochryphal or alternative history.
				Creative anachronism.
			Historical fantasy	
Naomi Jacobs (1990)	Non-fiction novels	Historical characters	Fictional biography	
			Fictional history.	
			Recombinant fiction	
Marie-Laure Ryan (1991a, b)		Accessibility among worlds	True fiction	Romantic lifes.
				Dramatized history
				Non-fiction novels
			Historical and realist fiction	
			Historical fabulation	
			Realistic ahistorical fiction.	
Lubomir Dolezel (1997)		Relation between historical and fictional world	Historical fiction	
			Counterfactual historical fiction	
			Factual narration or "faction".	
Jorgen Johansen (2002)		Relation between historical and fictional world	Co-factual narration	
			Counterfactual narration	

Table 1. Typologies of Historical Fiction.

After the analysis of all these typologies and of the studies that have been done in the field of analysing historical fiction, it is clear that there are two main fields of study: the introduction of historical components in literary works, and the elaboration of typologies.

Our proposal in the present paper belongs to the first one and its main contribution, as we will see now, is the attention received by the fictional component, something that has been almost forgotten because of the enormous importance given to the historical component.

Thus, our analysis is a step further in the study of historical fiction because, not only historical manipulations are going to be analysed but also the elements created in the mind of the artist and how both of them join together to result in an alternative version of what happened in reality.

The system of analysis of historical fiction that we propose is divided in three stages and it shows some similarities with Benjamin Hrushovski's (1981; 1982: 83-87; 1988: 645-46) three dimension-model for the analysis of literary works. He proposes the following dimensions: the dimension of Speech and Position, in which the placement of the speaker is analysed; the dimension of Meaning and Reference, in which the focus of attention is placed on the meaning of words depending on the frame of reference in which they appeared, the combination of such frames in bigger units called Fields of Reference, and some regulatory principles, such as irony and point of view; finally, the dimension of the Organized Text, pays attention to the formal aspects of the literary work, in which different segments such as chapters and paragraphs appear.

However, neither the order nor the content of these dimensions agree with our proposal, as it can be seen in Figure 1 below.

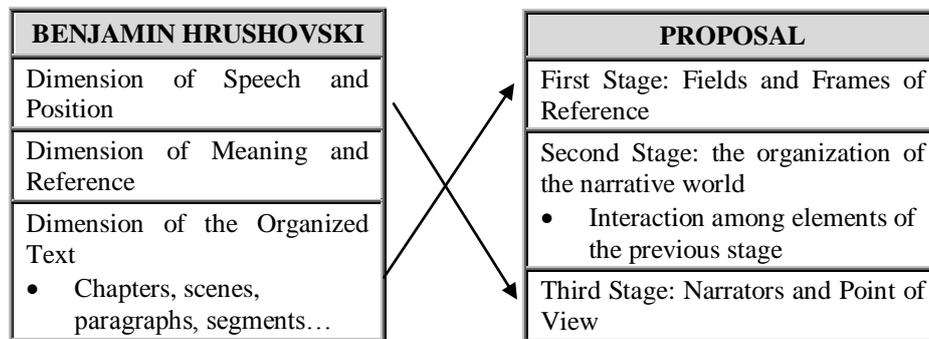


Figure 1. Differences between Hrushovski's dimensions and our proposal of analysis.

The starting points of our analysis are the concepts of field and frame of reference. A frame of reference is defined by Hrushovski as “any semantic continuum, to which signs may refer” (Hrushovski 1981: 20). Thus, it is what a text is about, and it can be an object, a scene, a person, a situation, a mental state, a story, an ideology, etc. (Harshaw 1984: 12). Thus, it determines the meaning of words, in the sense that the same term can have different meanings depending on the frame of reference in which it appears (Harshav 2007: 5). Frames of reference are made up of referents, which can be defined as “anything we can refer to or talk about, may it be a real object, and event, and idea or a fictional non-existent object” (ibid). In our proposal of analysis we have limited the number of referents to four types: events, characters, time, and place.

Frames of reference grouped together form fields of reference, which are defined as “a large universe containing a multitude of crisscrossing and interrelated *frs* of various kinds” (Harshaw 1984: 231). Thus, a field of reference is simply a group of frames of reference, and

“the world of a novel is a highly complex multi-directional Field of Reference” (Hrushovski 1981: 20).

In Figure 2 below, we have represented graphically the relation between these three terms. The result is that we have a field of reference; inside it we can find different frames of reference and, finally, within each frame of reference we can find a number of referents.

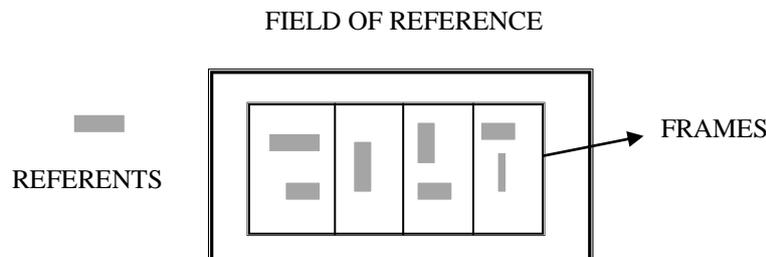


Figure 2. Relations among Fields, Frames and Referents.

However, if we only distinguish a field of reference inside a work of literary fiction, our objectives are not fulfilled. Thus, we have to distinguish between two types of fields: the External Field of Reference (EFR for short) and the Internal Field of Reference (IFR for short) (Hrushovski 1981: 20-22; Harshaw 1984: 229; Hrushovski 1984: 15). The first one is made up of all the references to the real world, while the second is the actual creation of the author and thus, we can refer to it as the fictional world. This distinction is very important because it provides a solution for the presence of extratextual elements in literary texts.

Both fields are an absolute requirement, not only in a work of historical fiction, but in any literary work. In the case of the EFR, as there is no pure fiction (Ricoeur 1983[1984]: 69; Harshaw 1984: 243; Fokkema 1991: 47; Berkhofer 1995[1997]: 67), as authors always introduce elements from the world in which they live, there is always going to be some elements of this type. Thus, the EFR is what can be accessed to outside the text, i.e., the real world, a philosophy, ideologies, conceptions of human nature, other texts, etc. (Hrushovski 1981: 21; Harshaw 1984: 243). In the case of the IFR, it is what gives its uniqueness to a literary work; it is what distinguishes it from other types of texts (Hrushovski 1981: 20-21). In both cases, we are talking about intertextuality (Martínez Fernández 2001: 79), that is, the relation among different texts, as it can be found in all types of texts, even in historical ones, as they are constantly using primary sources and previous works (Rigney 2001: 94-95).

If we look at Figure 3 below, we have a literary work divided in two: an EFR and an IFR. Then, each field is divided in different frames, and inside each frame we can find different referents. The arrows joining both fields mean that the moment a historical element

is included in a literary work and it is modified, it moves to the IFR; on the other hand, although an element belongs to the IFR, with the passing of time, it can become true, as in the case of some of the works by Jules Verne, that were absolute fiction when they were written but some years later some of the technological elements became true.

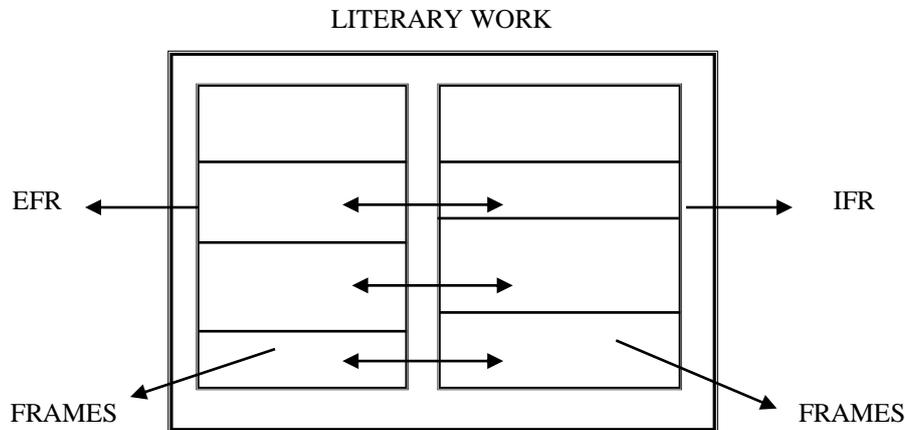


Figure 3. Fields of Reference within the literary work².

However, we need to go a step further and introduce a further distinction, in this case as regards the frames of reference. The reason is that if we have distinguished between an EFR and an IFR, the frames included within each of them cannot be similar.

This is the reason why we are going to use two different types of intertextuality studied by two authors. On the one hand, Michael Riffaterre, in the year 1978 established that intertextuality comes from two different sources: particular texts and what he called the “universal cultural stock” or “sociolect” (Riffaterre 1978: 1-22). This last term refers to “the repository of society’s myths” (Riffaterre 1984: 164). A few years later, Jonathan Culler (1981: 103-4) introduced the distinction between the presence of a text in another text (which matches Riffaterre’s first category), and “anonymous intertextuality”, which is the equivalent to Riffaterre’s “sociolect”.

However, although the distinction is established by these two authors, they did not use a clear terminology to distinguish among these two types of frames. That is the reason why we have used Umberto Eco’s terms “intertextual frames” and “common frames” (Eco 1979[1984]: 20-1). The first ones are what can be found in other texts, while common frames are in culture. Besides, intertextual frames are already existing narrative situations, while

² Each field has been represented with a different number of frames in order to show that they do not need to contain the same number of elements. In fact, depending on the size or the number of frames and referents each field contains, the work of historical fiction can be considered more or less faithful to the reality it intends to represent.

common frames are the storage of knowledge and rules for practical life (Eco 1979[1984]: 32, 217). As an example, we can say that “war” would be considered a common frame, while the America Civil War is clearly an intertextual frame. If we go back to Figure 3 and we add this last distinction between common and intertextual frames, we get the final configuration of a work of fiction in terms of Fields and frames of reference (see Figure 4 below).

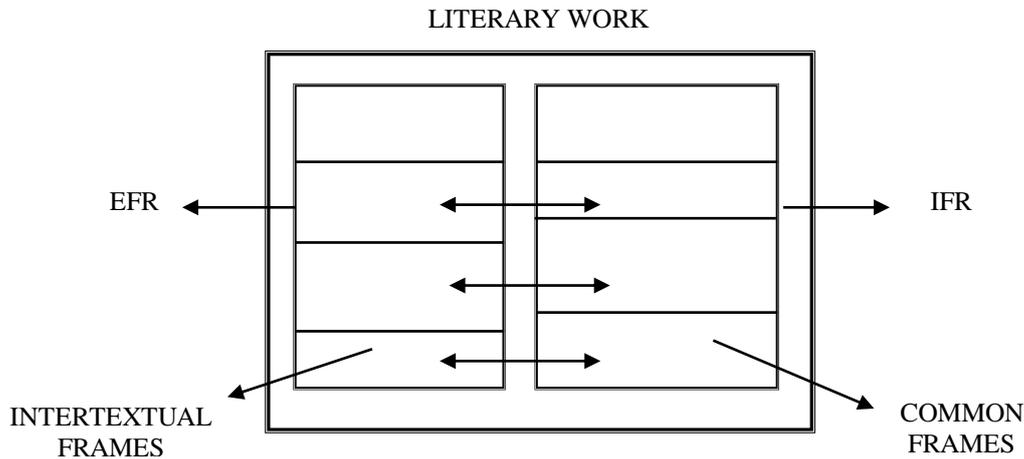


Figure 4. Fields and Frames of Reference within the Literary Work.

In order to see how this way of analyzing historical fiction works, we are going to apply it to the first work of fiction written about the Salem Witchcraft Trials, the most famous witch hunt that happened in North America. Very briefly, what happened was that in the year 1692, 19 people were hanged as witches in Salem Village, more than 150 were in jail, 4 died in prison and one old man was pressed to death. All this was originated by a group of girls which showed symptoms of being possessed³. Puritans thought that the fight against the Devil was one of the most important things they should do, and thus, they could not allow servants of Satan to live next door.

From that year by the end of the 17th century, many theories have arisen, many people has been blamed for what happened and still today there is no agreement on what really happened. At the beginning of the 19th century, when the American people were searching for national themes in order to develop their own literature, the Salem Witchcraft Trials were perfect for their interests. This historical event meant one of the key moments in the colonial history of New England as they were a turning point as regards the power of religion in all

³ Due to the enormous amount of historical works on this topic and the existence of many interpretations of what happened in Salem, we have used the commonly accepted explanation.

aspects of daily life and they involved the end of Puritanism and a move towards a more democratic government: “The Salem outbreak of 1692 stands as the most turbulent and shocking episode in seventeenth-century New England, an episode which departed dramatically from all that preceded and followed it in Massachusetts” (Cohen 1998: 1). Besides, George Dekker (1987: 63-64) thinks that “at first sight the subject might seem a splendid one for historical romance since nothing could be easier than to present the victims as apostles of progress and their judges as reactionary powers of darkness”.

However, little attention has been paid to the literary aspect of this historical event: “The Salem Witchcraft Theme, in spite of the attention it has received from historians, has been singularly unproductive of scholarly articles or full-length books dealing with its treatment in the imaginative literature of America” (Willett 1958: 2). The reason is that only four works have specifically dealt with the literary representation of what happened in 1692: two articles, “New England Witchcraft in Fiction” (1930) by Harrison Orians and “Essay Review: Salem Witchcraft in Recent Fiction and Drama” (1950) by David Levin, and two unpublished dissertations, *Salem Witchcraft in American Literature* (1958) by Maurita Willett, and *The Tradition of Salem Witchcraft in American Literature* (1970) by James W. Clark Jr. However, from the second half of the 20th century, historians have begun to refer to literary works in their own books (Leisy 1950; Hansen 1969, 1974; Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974; Thomas 1977; Karlsen 1987; Robinson 1992; Rosenthal 1993; Gould 1995; Adams 2008; DeRosa 2009⁴) so the interest on the representation of this historical event in the literary field is on the increase.

From the analysis of all these works – both the specific and the historical ones dealing with it – we have come to three conclusions. The first one is that historians – and authors of fiction – have paid more attention to these events and their literary aspect than literary critics. Second, when these works are studied, nearly all the emphasis is placed on the historical component, thus only paying attention to the accuracy of the events presented. Finally, this emphasis on the historical component has led to confusion among two very different groups of literary works: the one dealing with witchcraft in New England, and the one which specifically deals with what happened in Salem. There were witchcraft accusations in many places during the 17th century. Even the first accusation and hanging of the new world did not happen in Salem but in Charlestown in the year 1648 (Hall 1991[1999]: 3-4). Thus, it is

⁴ There are more than 30 authors that deal with the literary representation of the Salem Witchcraft Trials so we have only included those that we consider more relevant.

important to distinguish specific cases from what happened in New England as regards witchcraft cases. We consider that this problem can be solved using the distinction between common and intertextual frames we have just proposed. The reason is that in order to construct a corpus of literary works on the Salem Witchcraft Trials it is essential to find an intertextual frame of reference on this historical event in every single work to be included in it. For all these reasons there is a clear need for new studies that deal with the works that actually use the events of Salem, and with the fictional element that all works of historical fiction include.

Once we have seen the proposal of analysis, we are going to develop the analysis of the first work of historical fiction that deals with the Salem Witchcraft Trials⁵: *Salem Witchcraft; or the Adventures of Parson Handy, from Punkapog Pond* (1827).⁶ The analysis of this specific work is very important, as it means the starting point of the literary configurations of this historical event. In the 19th century, 22 works of fiction on this topic were published, but more than 100 have been written since the 20th century. This great number of works and the time span in which they have been published makes it necessary to carry out a diachronic study. Thus, it is essential to study what happened in the first works, in order to see the elements that still exist, the ones that are more frequently repeated, as well as those that were only used at a certain moment or within a specific literary trend.

Very simply, the argument of this work is the following: Faithful Handy arrives to Salem Village, to live with the Hobbes – mother and daughter. But soon, he feels attracted to Patience Peabody. Beautiful Hobbes is jealous of Patience and she accuses her of being a witch. However, Faithful discovers the plot against Patience and puts an end to it.

After analyzing this work in terms of its fields and frames of reference, we have identified four intertextual and three common frames. In the case of the intertextual ones we have the general beliefs in witchcraft, the Puritans, the Indians, and the Salem Witchcraft

⁵ It is traditionally held that the first literary representation of this historical event is a narrative poem entitled *The Sorceress, or Salem Delivered* written by Jonathan Scott in the year 1817 (Orians 1930: 55; Willet 1958: 60; Clark 1970: 90; Vetere 2003: 141). However, the reference on the title has nothing to do with the historical events and it has to be included within the group of works of fiction that deal with the general topic of witchcraft in New England.

⁶ This anonymous work was originally published seven years before as “Salem Witchcraft: An Eastern Tale” in *The New York Literary Journal and Belles-Lettres Repository* 3 (1820): 329-35, 417-20, 4 (1820): 17-27. Due to the difficulties in finding the original work, we have decided to use the 1827 edition.

Trials. In the case of the common frames, we have found the love triangle, religion and the lost manuscript.

For each of the frames we have a number of referents. In the case of the general beliefs in witchcraft, we can find the things witches can do against their neighbors (Anonymous 1827: 22-23), the different types of demons (45-46), the laws against witches and witchcraft (46-47) and the 19 recommendations to relieve the symptoms of the victims (38-39). Besides, the names of several authorities on the topic of witchcraft such as Cotton Mather (22, 24, 49, 50), Glavill (24), and Burton (45), and their works, are also mentioned. In the intertextual frame on the Puritans, the only referent is Hugh Peters, a former minister of Salem Village (Adams 1892: 375). In the case of the Indians, the only information we find is the name of one of the tribes, “the Netops” (30). Finally, the most complex of the three intertextual frames is the one dealing with the Salem Witchcraft Trials, in which we can see dates, names of places, and names of people, all of them having something to do with the actual reality of the witchcraft proceedings.

The same happens with the common frames. In the case of the love triangle, we can talk about jealousy and revenge as the consequence of complex love stories, but in this case the plot is discovered and we can see a happy ending. In the case of religion, it belongs to the cultural knowledge of the time that only through prayers Satan could be destroyed. Finally the use of the lost manuscript allows to put distance with the telling of the events and thus, to introduce a different vision of the events. In this particular case, the story told is in a manuscript found in a church in Connecticut: “The foregoing particulars were found recorded in an old manuscript under the seat of a pulpit lately pulled down in Connecticut. The Editor of the Courant politely loaned it to the Editor of the Magazine alluded to in the advertisement, who had them modernized and dramatized by an eminent writer of the newspapers” (Anonymous 1827: 70).

Once we have identified all the elements, it is important to establish the modifications that the intertextual frames have experienced. In the case of the general beliefs in witchcraft, the novel mentions that the work by Glanvill is *History of Witchcraft*, while the title of his most famous work is *Sadduscismus Triumphatus* (Kors and Peters 2001: 370-79). Another aspect that has been modified is the introduction of 19 things a doctor can do to relieve the symptoms of possession. This cannot be found in any of the most important manuals on witchcraft at that time. The nearest thing to this is what can be found in one of the most important works on witchcraft, the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Hammer of the Witches* in

which several methods of detecting witchcraft and preventing being possessed can be found (Summers 1971: 164-93).

In the case of the Puritans, the main character of the literary work, Parson Handy, arrives to Salem Village to be the new minister with a letter of recommendation from Hugh Peters, a famous “Puritan fanatic and preacher” (Adams 1892: 374). He was minister of Salem Village, but he died 32 years before the events of Salem, on 16th October, 1660 (376). Thus, he could not have written a letter of recommendation to Parson Handy.

Finally, in the case of the intertextual frame on Salem Witchcraft, only one accusation happened, while in the historical reality more than 150 people were condemned. However, the biggest difference is that the person accused was not hanged, while in Salem everybody who was accused lost his/her life – except the ones who confessed –, until the authorities put a stop to the hangings. In this literary work, the falsehood of the accusation is revealed and that explains that the accused young woman was set free. In the historical reality, this never happened, as everything the accusing girls said against their neighbors was considered as proof of their pact with Satan. This presentation of only one accusation can be seen in later works of the 19th century, and thus, it has to be considered when doing a diachronic analysis of the literary representation of this historical event.

Once we have seen the modifications, the next step is the analysis of the relation or influence among the different frames of reference, because this is what establishes the narrative configuration of the historical event within the literary work. The relation established among the general beliefs in witchcraft and what happened in Salem – two intertextual frames – is to show the influence of history in fiction; in the case of the puritans, it gives the social background necessary to justify the accusations of witchcraft.

In the case of the relation among common and intertextual frames, the love triangle shows the influence of literature in the configuration of the historical reality, because at the time when this novel was written, the seduction plots and the sentimental novels (Fiedler 1960[1984]: 89; Boyer 2001: 454; Reid 2004: 22) were one of the most important genres of fiction. In this literary work, the love triangle has replaced the fights among neighbors and the inexplicable calamities – i.e., the loss of cattle or the ruin of crops – as the cause of the accusation. Thus, what this novel shows is that love problems are what triggered such accusations, which were used as a way of taking revenge. Then, this common frame of reference has fully changed the historical reality, adapting it to the literary field and it should

be taking into account in further analysis of the literary representation of the Salem Witchcraft Trials in order to see if this modification can be found again.⁷

In the case of religion, it serves to emphasize the importance of the ministers in the fight against Satan. Finally, the lost manuscript, as we have said before, gives temporal distance to the telling of the events and this helps to criticize what happened during the witchcraft persecutions. Besides, it is one of the distinctive features of gothic literature (Willett 1958; 62) and it was very frequently used at the beginning of a national literature in the United States, because the writers of novels were not very well considered and this strategy protected them. In addition to this, the most conservative sector of 19th century society thought that “fiction was simply an elaborated form of lying” (Ruland and Bradbury 1991[1992]: 28). Thus, many writers used the lost manuscript as a way of establishing the truth of what they were telling in their works.

After all we have seen, we can establish certain conclusions as regards our proposal of analysis of historical fiction based on the distinction between and IFR and an EFR. It has allowed us to establish the first work of fiction to be included in a corpus of literary works on the Salem Witchcraft Trials because the presence of an intertextual frame dealing with them is compulsory. Thus, we have rejected the consideration of *The Sorceress* as the first fictional work on this historical event. Moreover, it allows us to list and analyze the intertextual and common frames that are added to a specific historical event, as well as to study the referents that are included inside each of them.

In addition to this, it seems very useful to make synchronic and diachronic studies of the introduction of a specific historical event in different literary works, at the same time that it is possible to make individual and group studies of the representation of a given historical reality.

The analysis of the intertextual frames establishes the accuracy of the extratextual information included in the literary work, at the same time that the complexity or amount of information included in a work of fiction can be established – that is, there can be more or less complex intertextual frames dealing with a given historical event. Moreover, it has been proved that it is necessary to study the common frames, i.e., the fictional elements, included in works of historical fiction, as they influence the literary configuration of the historical reality and, according to the results obtained in the work analyzed, they show many of the

⁷ In fact, I have carried out this analysis and in 17 of the 22 works of fiction written in the 19th century, the common frame of the love relationships is the leading motif of the action.

characteristics of the literary trend within which they were written. If this type of analysis is performed in works of fiction written at different times, it could be possible to see how different fictional genres and ways of writing have influenced the literary representation of a historical event. Thus, the study of tendencies, recurrences, similarities and differences among works and time eras can be done.

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