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Two Canonical Romanian Writers Fictionalized: Florina Ilis's Biofictions

Abstract: The collapse of the Communist regime in Romania in December 1989 triggered a series of fundamental transformations. One of these – the unsettling transition from ideological to postmodern, relativistic truth – only gradually gained acceptance among Romanian intellectuals. Post-1989, contacts between Romanian cultural elites and their Western colleagues intensified, formerly inaccessible domestic archives and hidden library stacks were opened, and Romania itself began living in a new paradigm of truth, whose essence was historicity. Everyone knew that Eminescu, the indisputable Romanian “national poet” had blurry episodes in his biography, or that the Transylvanian poet Lucian Blaga had been persecuted by the Communist regime in the final decade of his life. At the same time, the myths constructed around the two poets continued to grow both in scholarly circles and among the general public. This is the cultural and historic context of Florina Ilis's two biofictions: the first one dedicated to Mihai Eminescu, and the second one to Lucian Blaga. This article unpacks the relationship between Florina Ilis' writings and biofiction as a (sub)genre by analysing the two novels in light of the genre's theoretical framework.

Keywords: Biofiction; Postmodern Thinking; Postmodern Literary Techniques; Michael Lackey; Counterfactual History; Florina Ilis; Mihai Eminescu; Lucian Blaga; Romanian Literature.

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According to David Lodge, the biographical novel or biofiction – a term coined by Alain Buisine in 1991 – „takes a real person and their real history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel's techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography”¹. These fictions, featuring famous historical figures, are not confined solely to the period bridging the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the contrary, they have fully enjoyed the mixed episteme of our last sixty years, with postmodernism functioning as a generous umbrella for this type of novel-writing. Literary theorists define *biofiction* as a hybrid literary genre born from the fusion of biography writing and fiction. Postmodernism has provided an especially fertile ground for this new approach, by lending it a few constitutive paradigms: the understanding of historicism as relativism, new assumptions about the “soft” ontology and epistemology of the past, virtual worlds with their open system, the erosion of the novel-writing's so-called neutrality and objectivity, and an understanding of history as “broken”, fragmented, and able to generate narrative intertextualities. Biofictions begin with biography, which

is understood as fluid and volatile reality, then employ an anchored imagination stage combined with narrative techniques to ultimately reach virtual reality. The champions of this new discipline, with Michael Lackey being the most prominent one, downplay the narrative autonomy of classic biography writing – grounded in verified facts and documents – by insisting that each biography, no matter how close to reality it claims to be, is nothing more than initiatory fiction writing.

In the *Afterword* to his volume *Authorizing Early Modern European Women – From Biography to Biofiction* (2022), Michael Lackey sketches a short history of the ways in which the main literary historians and theorists of the first half of the 20th century – Georg Lukacs, Carl Bode, Paul Murray Kendall, Fredric Jameson, or Jonathan Dee – had downgraded and even ridiculed the classic historical novel. One of their fervent critics, Jonathan Dee, even suspected that they share some sort of “God complex”. Dee argued that the problem was „a faulty conception about the way the literary form functions and signifies”². This could be explained by the fact that literary theorists had interpreted this type of fiction as a subclass of biography and historical novel-writing, which also implies that the hermeneutical framework used to define it was obsolete. In striking contrast, Lackey insists that biofiction is an independent and specific literary genre, capable of generating a different type of reality and truth than classic biography, as well as legitimate philosophical, psychological, and moral underpinnings.

Another of Michael Lackey’s seminal hypotheses concerning the birth of biofiction is formulated in his study

– *Death-Bringing History and the Origins of Biofiction*, from *Biofiction and Writers’ Afterlives* (2020) – where Lackey suggests this subgenre has mostly emerged in reaction to the dominant understanding of history as the ultimate scientific knowledge: „biofiction came into being as an aesthetic reaction against the historical novel. Instead of picturing the historical forces that shape and determine the human, the biographical novel gives readers a model of a figure that defies or evades environmental conditioning or cultural determinism by shaping and determining the world around him or her”³.

Biofiction generally refers to those fictitious narratives whose protagonists, well-known historical figures, such as politicians, artists, writers, and scientists, are projected onto a hybrid biographical screen where the factual truth of their lives is expanded beyond the possible, and into the realm of the surreal. These scenarios tend to blur the factual limits between objectivity and invention, or between biography and imagination, presenting the lives of their main characters as constructed narratives. The result is a lax, fluid conglomerate made of verified facts, the authors’ own interpretations, and the following transposition into fiction. For example, by trying to clarify the possible confusions generated by preexistent knowledge and prior beliefs, Michael Lackey openly asserts that „biofiction is *fiction*, and not biography or history”⁴. This means that when using historical figures as protagonists, the authors of biofictions do not necessarily develop a form of historical or biographical writing.

Accordingly, everything starts from the assumption that biography and biofiction function independently, with all

the consequences resulting from this split. Two such consequences, key to biofiction, are the author's right to alter reality as well as their will to establish „a certain kind of truth contract with readers”⁵. To put it differently, by emphasizing the precedence of fiction over historical truth the author becomes less responsible towards facts, and more creative in their interpretation, even if the protagonists are well-attested historical figures. Thus, the author's will for truth ceases to be synonymous with the factual truth of their characters, irrespective of how thorough their previous documentation efforts had been. Ultimately, the balance inclines towards fictional truth and towards the author's own creative vision.

According to Russell Banks, author of the biographical novel *Cloudspitter*, whom Michael Lackey quotes in support of his arguments, history acts only as the background of a “higher truth”⁶ about what it means to be a human being. Obviously, such “higher truth” becomes possible only in post-truth times, within the confines of postmodernist discourses on the relativity of truth and its consequences. One can certainly point out though some nuances: post-truth is not equivalent to the claim that truth has ceased to exist; rather, it means that truth has become the victim of its various interpretations, dependent on the dominant ideological discourses of a certain historical moment, and – maybe first and foremost – on Stephen Colbert's so-called “truthiness”. The latter is a concept which underscores every author's right to formulate their own truth. Friedrich Nietzsche is the philosopher, who, beginning with the second half of the 19th century, had challenged the substance of truth, paving the way for extensive philosophical

debates, and for the recognition of new spiritual and literary subgenres. We should also mention Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, even if downplayed by Michael Lackey, who considers it an illogical and even nihilistic response to the crises of truth. Obviously, Lackey privileges biofiction, which he deems more logical and, from a cultural point of view, a more responsible aesthetic choice.

When analysing everyday literary practice though, the distinction between historiographic metafiction and biofiction is not always clearcut. The two subgenres share quite a few narrative techniques and tools. Romanian writer Florina Ilis, whose novels are discussed further, is a case in point.

In a paper dedicated to German biofiction, Michael Lackey mentions Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in a rather controversial manner: „I now believe that his text is when biofiction first came to fruition and is, in many ways, the work that provides a blueprint for the best biofictions over the last 140 years”⁷. Lackey's main argument is that Nietzsche himself had stipulated that there was a clear difference between the real Zarathustra and his own hero. The German philosopher had fictionalized the prophet's real-life persona and had transformed him into an instrument of Nietzsche himself, meant to embody a certain way of life and thinking; only someone who downplays history in favour of personal feelings can do this. However, once we dig a bit deeper into Nietzsche's thinking, it becomes obvious that Zarathustra's image is an expression of his will to do away with everything that subdues the vital force of life and creativity. The latter is, in his philosophical system,

the beacon of every existence, ranked even higher than intellect and knowledge. Nietzsche had formulated this idea even before *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in his 1874 essay, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. In Lackey's interpretation, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is the epitome of the so-called "transcendental subject" of the biographical novel, one opposed to the "representative subject" of the historical novel theorised by Georg Lukács.

Moving beyond Nietzsche's so-called biofiction, Michael Lackey analyses a series of alleged biofictions by German authors such as Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, Lion Feuchtwanger, Klaus Mann, Heinrich Mann, Bruno Frank, Bertolt Brecht, and Hermann Broch. Among his key findings we can list the theses that history serves life, those concerning the epistemological ambiguity of biofiction, and the idea that authors of biofiction manipulate the lives of real persons not only to provoke in readers some sort of creative scepticism related to the systems of truth they are accustomed to, but also to expose „our deep-level foibles, which will certainly generate some pain”⁸.

Another essential pillar in the genesis of biofiction is, according to Todd Avery's seminal *Pseudo-Quotations and Alternative Facts: Lytton Strachey and the Ethics of Biofiction in the Post-Truth Moment* (2020) – within the edited volume *Biofiction and Writers' Afterlives* – the work of Lytton Strachey. He was „that Mephistophelian modernist at the heart of the Bloomsbury Group”⁹ who, especially in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918), had proposed a mode of writing Virginia Woolf had referred to as “New Biography”. This meant the elaboration of proto-biofictions where the artistic

invention of facts – including invented quotes, fictitious sources, and other such texts – served to illustrate the biographer's freedom of spirit. The emphasis lay here on the ethical dimension of celebrity culture. Avery demonstrates that, even earlier than our post-truth era, proto-fiction experiments had indeed interested writers. This idea was echoed by Ian McIntyre who, in 2018, argued: „objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than the appeals to emotion and personal belief”¹⁰.

Although Michael Lackey insists that they are separate fields, biofiction is sometimes associated with historiographic metafiction, not least due to a theoretically common thread leading to Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. There are various arguments in favour of this closer relationship, beginning with the idea that both history and fiction are based on narrative conventions, and ending with the ability of biofiction to question historical authority and truth claims. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the textual nature of our historical knowledge. Following Linda Hutcheon, Martin Middeke lists under the umbrella of biofiction „[a]ll the novels and most of the plays discussed here [he speaks about *Biofictions*] in poetological terms belong to what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, they are characterized by their overt historical referents”¹¹. The “overt historical referents” are recuperated by Valentina Vannucci in *Lettura anticanoniche della biofiction, dentro e fuori la metafinzione. Il mondo 'possibile' di Mab's Daughters* (2014), where she challenges the ambiguity of this definition by arguing that “it might refer either to the fictions whose historical correlatives are subdued by the semantics of designation or to those texts

in which the identity of the characters can be traced back to real persons.”¹²

Apart from the socio-political or cultural episteme which characterises the historical novel, biofictions tend to promote non-typical protagonists, whose thinking is usually outside the box, making them less representative. Therefore, according to Michael Lackey, “central to biofiction is the authorial commitment to foreground the agential behaviour of figures who have been strategically denied individual autonomy, which, in part, explains why authors consistently gravitate toward certain types of historical figures.”¹³

Florina Ilis, born on the 26th of August 1968, is an outstanding figure of contemporary Romanian experimental literature. Currently working for the Bibliographic Research and Documentary Department of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, she is also a lecturer in Japanese Literature and Civilization at the Faculty of Letters. Following the publication of her first book, *Haiku și caligrame* (*Haiku and Calligrams*, 2000), written together with Rodica Frentiu, the Head of the Department of Oriental Studies at the already mentioned Faculty of Letters, Ilis completed her doctoral program in 2005 with a domestically pioneering dissertation dedicated to the morphosyntax of the cyberpunk fiction. Her thesis was published a year later. From her first three novels – *Coborârea de pe cruce* (*The Descent from the Cross*, 2001), *Chemarea lui Matei* (*Matthew's Call*, 2002), *Cruciada copiilor* (*The Children's Crusade*, 2005) – it is the last one which has meanwhile become an acclaimed international success. *The Children's Crusade* was distinguished with the *Prix Courier International*, awarded

to an international author translated into French. Chiefly relying on complex, post-modern writing techniques, Florina Ilis' following novels offer readers an extremely sophisticated twinning between reality and its fictionalizations. Two of these novels, fictionalized accounts of the lives of two of the most important Romanian writers – the poets Mihai Eminescu and Lucian Blaga – are discussed in this article.

The two postmodern biofictions published so far by Florina Ilis, *Viețile paralele* (*Parallel Lives*, 2012) and *Blaga în căutarea numelor* (*Blaga in Search for Names*, 2025), both considered “docufictions” by the critics, employ considerable creative freedom when compared to the typical historical determinism of historical novels. These books fictionalize the lives of Mihai Eminescu and Lucian Blaga by refusing to obey the usual hagiographic discourse, or the factual, documented timeline of their lives, opening both stories towards a seductive, multilayered hermeneutics. Putting it differently, Florina Ilis aimed her tremendous documentary effort in the preparation of the two novels not towards the objective reconstruction of the real biographies of the two protagonists, but towards two complex fiction generating mechanisms. These mechanisms merge the two poets' real lives, their personal legendarium, their memory as crystallized by the exegesis as well as the marginal, real or imaginary, personal projections of their lives.

Biographical accuracy is rarely a privilege of biofiction. But in Florina Ilis's novels it proves to be quite important, and it is based on the author's meticulous research. Ilis spent endless hours in libraries and archives before starting to work on the text. Extensively mentioned at the end of the

novel dedicated to Blaga, the book's bibliography section is disseminated throughout its narrative texture. One can find here, along with the biofictional projections of many of the poet's well-known verses, a few personal love letters (extracted from a volume dedicated to Blaga's relation to his late muse, Elena Daniello, edited by Helene Rodica Daniello and Ilie Rad in 2023), as well as critical considerations and diary excerpts, without any clear delineation between what can be documentarily proven as objective fact, and what remains mere fiction.

The other novel, *Viețile paralele* (*Parallel Lives*), focuses on Romania's national poet, Mihai Eminescu, and includes medical records, diary excerpts, critical interpretations and fragments taken from other novels whose protagonist is the poet, as well as real or apocryphal texts, official public discourses, and pieces of correspondence. The authenticated background of most of the documents strengthens the credibility of those fabricated ones, for example the texts taken from the Securitate's (the Secret Police in communist Romania) informant archives, especially when their specific texture of truth is shaped by actual historical events. This pseudo-documentary licence allows the author to playfully insert her own initials, *F.I.*, into the text, although her alleged critical frustration aimed at her own endeavour bursts sometimes into rhetorical exasperation: "Oh, God, a Muse again! How difficult is to creep into her skin!"¹⁴

Familiar with the hidden rules of biofictions, the shadow of sleuthing engages Florina Ilis's novel on multiple levels, starting with an author who buries herself in the various, contradictory archives

and bibliographies holding the secrets of her future characters. Alternatively, this fictional reconstruction is staged like an accumulation of detective investigations and discoveries, with clues and indices accumulating one after another, generating narrative scenarios whose true nature is not always confirmed. Many of the dreamlike scenarios woven into these novels – such as those in which both poets come under the scrutiny of the Securitate or become the targets of various symbolical and cultural conspiracies – bear the unmistakable marks of a detective story. Moreover, by being treated as fictional hypotheses, they keep getting fictionalized and continuously recycled..

Florina Ilis's premeditated intertextuality transforms her novels into interactions offered to her readers, into semantic messages deployed from within the deep core of a fiction towards a reader who is already familiarized with the protagonists and is invited to reread some of the texts which are already familiar to him. Especially Ilis' second novel is saturated with a considerable amount of Blaga's verses, well-known to the average Romanian reader from their high school years. From this perspective, the intertextual pact functions as a reconstructive scenario for Blaga's entire creative laboratory, disseminating symbols that resonate across his entire work and life. It is not by accident that the very first Blaga quotation ("I am searching a name...caressing the waters, burning the sins"¹⁵) establishes a direct connection to the novel's title – *Blaga in Search for Names* – which also displays multiple biofictional and theoretical openings, as the poet's search for names mirrors his desire to engage with multiple layers of truth. The

readers may know as well that this search is conditioned by a formative childhood complex, which Blaga explained in his autobiography – *Hronicul și cântecul vârstelor* (*The Chronicle and Song of the Ages* – from which we learn that the future poet had experienced genuine difficulties in reaching the catharsis of speaking, staying mute until he was four.

Literary historians usually portray Mihai Eminescu as a melancholic, prone to illness and always in love Romantic dreamer, who had experienced a tragic dissonance with his epoch and the people living in it, except for the storyteller Ion Creangă and the critic, and Eminescu's cultural patron, Titu Maiorescu. Surpassing this type of one-dimensional, stereotyped hagiography, the novel *Viețile paralele* (*Parallel Lives*) starts with the assumption that every author is, first and foremost, as Plutarchus once decreed, a chronicler of lives. *Parallel Lives* weaves together not only Eminescu's biography and lifetime work, but also the criticism dedicated to his oeuvre, with all its mythologizing and ideologizing attributes, as well as the conspiracy-driven scenarios linked to Eminescu's life and even the imprecations of his detractors. The whole scenario is wrapped up into a sophisticated, counterfactual history network, which expands to the utmost the poet's and his writings' chronological and historical frontiers, integrating into this narrative even the plots emerging during his distinguished posterity. One such example is the story of the Securitate's fictional investigative intrusion into the poet's everyday existence. Ilis makes this effort of altering his biography to "unwrap" the "real", more humane Eminescu, setting him apart from the myths

and preconceptions surrounding his life and work. Clearly, the Securitate's fabricated involvement reinforces the narrative's drive to fictionalize one's present.

The authors of biofictions generally enjoy special rights when playing with historical facts and perspectives. This might also mean that to these authors the characters display certain anachronistic ideologies and socio-political beliefs, which are objectively incompatible with the intellectual context of their lives, but which prove nonetheless to be relevant for the overall narrative. The authors of biofictions are therefore seemingly aware of the hierarchies of ideas prevalent in those times, and feel free to project them onto their characters. The supposition that Eminescu was the victim of a malicious scheme instigated by the Securitate is a clear transgression of historical accuracy. However, this idea is fictionally grounded in the common assumption that the poet, who died in a psychiatric clinic, was murdered for political reasons.

Florina Ilis's *Parallel Lives* fictionalizes as well Eminescu's illness and his forthcoming death by integrating in the novel many authentic secondary characters, such as the poet's lover, Veronica Micle, or Maiorescu's sister-in-law, Mite Kremnitz, who will become the protagonists of a novel entitled *Mite*, written by Romanian literary critic Eugen Lovinescu. Other, collateral characters are Mrs. Slavici (the wife of Romanian poet Ioan Slavici), the person who informed Maiorescu that Eminescu had lost his mind, a collapse scenario which, at that time, and given the poet's frequent, bizarre outbursts, appeared to be inevitable. Other real-life characters are the poet Macedonski, one of Eminescu's

relentless critics, and Dr. Suțu, in whose clinic the poet spent his final days.

Like the Securitate agents involved in the counterfactual plot of harassing the poet, some other characters are purely imaginary. This special category includes those admirers and cultural protagonists who have significantly contributed to the poet's national emotional representation. The narrator depicts Eminescu first as a patient in Dr. Suțu's psychiatric hospital in Bucharest, then as a patient in Dr. Obersteiner's Vienna clinic, followed by his return home, the coerced confinement at the Neamț Monastery, which also housed people with mental health issues, and finally, Eminescu's final days spent in Bucharest. The biofictional reconstruction of the poet's later years collates different viewpoints and perspectives, while the diegetic expositors are expanded theoretically into a multiplicity of crisscrossing perceptions. The multiple games with various interchangeable perspectives also include the poet himself, as it is well-known in Romanian literary circles that many of the avatars deployed in his work – Toma Nour, Dan, Dionis, Ieronim, Ioan Vestimie – are his own autobiographical projections.

Lucian Blaga in Search for Names focuses on the protagonist's most challenging years, namely his final ones, between 1952 and 1961. Fictionalized "events" occurring during this period are organized in such a way as to provide a series of creative retrospections centred around the different "Muses" of the poet – embodiments of Goethe's "eternal feminine" – such as: Cornelia Brediceanu, the poet's wife, Domnița Gherghinescu-Vania, the focal point of a creative period marked by conflicts with rival Virgil Gheorghiu, but also a version of

Madame Chauchat, from Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, the late lovers Eugenia (Inej) Mureșanu, Coca Rădulescu and Elena (Ellen) Daniello. The latter is also the most prominent of them all, due to the published letters exchanged between her and the poet. Each episode illustrates the idea that "love makes the verses, not solitude"¹⁶, and that "one cannot go on without eros"¹⁷. In other words, creation is always enhanced by the eternal feminine and by love, as the will to create becomes the central motif of the novel, transcending even morality, because "it is only the creative existence that counts"¹⁸.

The novel opens with a chapter describing a dream, in which the poet's anxieties, caused by the restrictions imposed on him by the Communist regime, mix with his sharp Faustian pact obsession, generated by the translation of Goethe's *Faust* in a period when Blaga had been demoted from university to a small office at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Cluj. The Establishment's emissaries are featured in this dream, all of them having grotesque names: Mititelu, a real Mephistopheles (his name can be translated The Small or The Pigmy), his subordinates, called allegorically Pisica (Cat), Căine (Dog), Țapu (Goat), Berbecuț (Ram) and Lupu (Wolf). They all enter Blaga's Faustian dream pact with a special offer (a bet, as they call it): nine years of creation and love in exchange for their protection, because the writer's dreamy avatars share the belief that the creators, especially the writers, "are the best nourishment for the Devil"¹⁹.

The preconditions for the narrative game thus set, the introductory chapter unfolds into several fractal-like projections and weaves into the text a number

of reconstructed literary myths and symbols. All are taken from Blaga's literary portfolio, for example the Devil from *Arca lui Noe (Noe's Arch)*, a posthumous autobiographical novel, and poems from different creative periods. The poet's system of philosophy is also integrated into the plot: Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, praised by Michael Lackey as essential for the biofiction's identity, is a book which the poet explains to one of his muses, Cornelia. We also meet many marginal figures, like Ion Muşlea, Mihai Beniuc, Ion Chinezu, Valeriu Puşcariu, Leon Daniello or Mrs. Bolchiş, Lucian Blaga's daily lunch host. The author emphasizes on almost every page the seminal importance of love in the economy of creation. The chapters illustrate Florina Ilis's sophisticated ability of mixing literary conventions, ideologies, philosophical concepts, and the mechanisms of everyday psychology in order to skillfully generate hybrid narrations and subtle theoretical exposures meant to legitimate not only the fluid connexion existing between the fictions of reality and the realities of fiction, but also their spongy collateral discourses.

The author's theoretical propensity appears ubiquitously in both novels dedicated to Eminescu and, respectively, to Blaga. The first of them, *Parallel Lives*, is the reconstruction of a Romantic melodrama, related to the synthesis of Romantic sensibility codes. Florina Ilis inserts into her narration fragments of metafictional commentaries, some of them openly ironical, especially when coming across the rigid stereotypes of mainstream critical discourse. Such insertions also appear in the second novel, dedicated to Blaga. Here is an example: "On the other hand,

dear reader, if you start to believe that the poet had been nothing more than a womanizer or something like that, the fault is only mine, because I was unable to properly interpret the witnesses' testimonies or the information revealed by the bibliographies, and to encase them in the best literary wrapping possible; being myself unable to read between the lines, I might have misunderstood Blaga's marvellous love lyrics."²⁰ The fragment is extracted from a fake dialogue proposed to the reader, but which actually proves to be the writer's own inner reflection, intended to lift the curtains concealing the backstage mechanisms of the narration and to place the topic into a playful context. .

A biofiction structured by the protagonist's erotic-creative episodes, and by the presence of successive muses accompanying the poet's work during his lifetime, the narrator's plan to ironically glue together poetry and eros is also presented in advance to the supposedly understanding and participative reader: "It's common knowledge, dear reader, that every poet's heart bursts into flames when he gets near a beautiful woman. I'm not compelled to tell the whole truth and you might suspect me that I have willingly ignored a lot of interviews belonging to those who had been close to the poet and who have had testified otherwise. Or that I have no knowledge about the great number of love missives sent by Lucian Blaga's to his many muses or that I ignore the historical reality, so thoroughly reconstructed by the highly documented biographies dedicated to the poet."²¹ Here we have another example: "How dare I say, dear she-reader, that love lyrics jump out of nothing or that they are only a clever invention of the mind?"²²

From a narratological angle, Florina Ilis's novels testify both to the fragmentation of the protagonists' lives, and to the insertion of the counterfactual and speculative episodes into their texture. We may refer as well to the permanent intertextual "dialogue" with the protagonists' literary oeuvre, as both Eminescu's and especially Blaga's works are permanently referenced throughout the novels. Ilis relies on their biographies, the lasting interpretations formulated by critics, and the scenarios built upon their national myths. There are also instances when the process of mythologizing is called upon only to be deconstructed by means of relativistic prisms. For instance, in the first novel, the title itself – *Parallel Lives* – suggests that Eminescu might have had a plurality of plausible existences. Therefore, he is depicted as a hybrid fictional entity, inhabiting the space between the real and the imaginary. To sum up, the novel's main objective is the creation of a multifaceted entity which, regardless of existing factual biographies, emerges as the reflection of a plurality of stories and discourses.

Florina Ilis selects authentic details from her protagonists' existences, but enhances and reorganizes them in order to create an image that is both factual and, at the same time, a plurality of portraits, similar to the process of fictionalizing described by Russell Banks and quoted by Michael Lackey in *Biofiction*²³. These portraits are different from their historical model, yet sufficiently recognizable by a reader who, although familiar with the subject, wants from the writer something which resonates with their own literary ideal. The outcome of this process is an extremely vivid representation of both writers, who become in

this way more prominent as fictional entities than they ever were in their everyday lives.

The second novel, dedicated to Blaga, focuses on the existential and intellectual dilemmas of the *fictional Blaga*. The text presents, usually as dramatic dream scenarios, a series of creative and philosophical inner conflicts. As the title suggests, the most important of them is the formula of existence, understood as an incessant search. To Blaga, this implies that extending life beyond its natural span will always take precedence over what can be achieved through words. This ultimately tragic discrepancy is compensated by the great number of roles the poet had played during his lifetime: a diplomat, a poet, a philosopher, a husband, a father, a lover or a translator, and through the various fragmentations of the Blaga myth in his life and legacy.

Coming back to biofictions understood as "higher truths", Florina Ilis's novels provide readers with two artistic personas and formulas which are much closer to fullness than the two poets had ever been. The writer considers the ideal, *artistic truth* of her protagonists' lives, rather than the partial, yet genuine truth they had embraced at different stages of their human existence. This procedure shows the fact that biofiction has the power to make reality complete by zooming out a perspective. According to Florina Ilis, the true purpose of biofiction is to fabricate "impossible facts having the appearance of authenticity"²⁴.

Because of their intricate construction, which combines real, open narrative frames and alternates them with other, fictional, discrete ones, Florina Ilis's two biofictions subscribe to the classic definition

of the subgenre, as formulated by Malcolm Bradbury who, commenting on biographies' higher 'truth' purposes stated that: "Biographies are, after all, plots, shaping and structuring the idea of a life; and literary biographies are the plots of the lives of plotters who are likely to leave some trace in the biography of their own professional sense of the plot's strange ambiguities."²⁵

Palimpsestic plots convert the historical subjects into literary symbols – the

thesis accredited by Lackey – by forming a transitive life-creation equation. Within the two novels discussed in this article such literary symbols allude to the threat of typification and inertial sedimentation by exploring the main characters' inner dimensions. Simultaneously, the surplus truth offered to the readers outplays the impulse to transform these two well-known, canonical writers into some subjects of fan fiction or hero-worship.

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NOTES

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5. *Ibidem*, p. 2.

6. *Ibidem*, p. 2.
7. Michael Lackey, "German Biofiction from Nietzsche to the Present", in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, Volume 38, no. 1, 2023, p. 1.
8. *Ibidem*, p. 6.
9. Todd Avery, *Pseudo-Quotations and Alternative Facts: Lytton Strachey and the Ethics of Biofiction in the Post-Truth Moment*, in Layne, Bethany (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 26.
10. Ian McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2018, p. 5.
11. Martin Middeke, Huber Werner (eds.), *Biofictions: the Rewriting of Romantic Lives on Contemporary Fiction and Drama*, Rochester – Woolbridge, Camden House, 1999, p. 4.
12. Valentina Vannucci, *Lecture anticanonice della biofiction, dentro e fuori la metafinzione. Il mondo 'possibile' di Mab's Daughters*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2014, p. 100. „potendo alludere sia a quelle fiction i cui correlativi storici obbediscono alla semantica della designazione, sia a testi dove l'identità dei personaggi è riconducibile in modo definitivo a quella di personalità note”.
13. James Fitzmaurice, Naomi J. Miller, Sara Jayne Steen (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 273.
14. Florina Ilis, *Viețile paralele*, București, Cartea Românească, 2012, p. 429. „Uf, doamne, muză! Ce greu mi-e să intru în pielea unui asemenea personaj”.
15. *Idem*, *Blaga în căutarea numelor*, Iași, Polirom, 2025, p. 7. „Caut nume... mângâierea apelor, arderea păcatelor”.
16. *Ibidem*, p. 10. „iubirea face vers, nu singurătatea”.
17. *Ibidem*, p. 88. „nu se poate artă fără eros”.
18. *Ibidem*, p. 314. „numai existența creatoare contează”.
19. *Ibidem*, p. 26. „delicioase ființe pentru Diavol!”.
20. *Ibidem*, p. 90. „Dar, pe de altă parte, cititorule, dacă vei rămâne cu impresia că poetul era un crai sau ceva asemănător, e numai vina mea, fiindcă n-am știut ce interpretare și expresie să dau mărturiilor contemporanilor, informațiilor bibliografice și, nepricepându-mă să citesc printre rândurile scrișorilor de dragoste, n-a înțeles frumoasa poezie de dragoste blagiană”.
21. *Ibidem*, p. 90. „Se știe, dragă cititorule, că inima oricărui poet prinde aripi în preajma femeilor frumoase. N-aș relata întreg adevărul și m-ai suspecta că ignor cu bună știință nenumăratele interviuri ale celor care l-au cunoscut și în care se arată contrariul. Sau că nu cunosc scrișorile adresate de Lucian Blaga muzelor sale ori că nu am știință despre realitatea istorică, redată fidel cu ajutorul foarte documentatelor biografii care i-au fost dedicate”.
22. *Ibidem*, p. 90. „Cum să afirm, dragă cititoare, că poezia de dragoste se naște din nimic sau numai dintr-o iscusință mai deșteaptă a minții?”.
23. Michael Lackey, *Biofiction. An Introduction*, *Ed. cit.*, p. 2.
24. Florina Ilis, *Viețile paralele*, *Ed. cit.*, p. 404. „intâmplări imposibile cu înfățișare de a fi adevărate”.
25. Bradbury, M., “The Telling Life: Some Thoughts on Literary Biography”, in E. Homberger, J. Charmley (ed.), *The Troubled Face of Biography*, Basingstoke-London, Macmillan, 1988, p. 139.