

Universitatea „Aurel Vlaicu” din Arad
Școala Doctorală Interdisciplinară
Facultatea de Științe Umaniste și Sociale
Domeniul de doctorat Filologie

**AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO KATE
MORTON’S NOVELS VIA KELLY AND WHITE**

SUMMARY

Conducător de doctorat:
Conf. Univ. Dr. Habil.
MIHĂILESCU Clementina Alexandra

Student Doctorand:
IENCIU (POPA) Camelia Ioana

ARAD 2023

The idea of establishing a powerful connection among literature, psychology and history has long been regarded as one of the main concerns for contemporary literary critics. However, in order to comprehend or even to interpret one of the previously mentioned fields, it is of utmost importance to possess basic knowledge about the other two.

This doctoral thesis starts from the premise that, personality and history cannot, and they should not be given an accurate definition, but instead, readers and writers should take into account the major role they play in the fictional novels. Therefore, this thesis is directed along the path of interdisciplinary approach to fictional literature focused on George Kelly's theory of personality illustrated in *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, and on Hayden White's theory of narrative presented in *The Content of Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. It suggests that the manner in which historical fiction, and more specifically, fictional stories, appear in the 21st century is comparable to the way in which Gothic fiction or neo-historical fiction appeared in the past.

To provide clear evidence for this idea, this work combines the two chosen theoretical frameworks with works of historical fiction, a genre that has had a significant impact over the past few years. The carefully analysed and interpreted

novels are written by the Australian author, Kate Morton, and they are entitled *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, *The Forgotten Garden* and *The Lake House*. Thus, while delving into the pages of this doctoral thesis, the reader is kindly invited to embrace the complex, multi-coloured nature of fiction, history and psychology.

The structure of the thesis embraces five essential chapters. Therefore, Chapter I is entitled *George Kelly – A Personality Journey* and intends to present the history, several definitions and distinct theories of personality. The dissertation begins with a chapter whose primary objective is to establish a theoretical skeleton regarding personality and its distinct theories. George Alexander Kelly remains one of the greatest and most significant psychologists and personality theorists of the middle of the 20th century. In almost all the books related to psychology, he is regarded as the inventor of Personal Construct Theory.

The first part of this chapter, based on a detailed, meticulous analysis of George Kelly's biography, explores the psychologist's early life, his education and professional career. Therefore, the main purpose is to underline all the small, accurate steps he had taken before he became a well-known psychologist. George Kelly was born on April 28th 1905, in a small town in Kansas. Some of his early education was

received at home, but nevertheless, in 1926, he graduated with a degree in Mathematics and Physics.

At first, his intention was to become an aeronautical engineer, but he changed his mind after he spent a year at University of Edinburgh, and came back to the United States, holding in his hands a bachelor's degree in education. That was the key moment which convinced him to generate interest in psychology. Even if Kelly's widespread reputation belongs to his contributions to personality psychology, the truth is that, his remarkable contributions began in clinical psychology, during the years spent at Fort Hays State University. He also worked as an aviation psychologist during World War II, but shortly after the war came to an end, he became a professor and lectured at numerous universities throughout the world. The psychologist did not publish many books in his lifetime, but, one thing is for sure – he wrote and lectured extensively. George Kelly died unexpectedly on March 6th, 1967, when he was compiling a new book.

Additionally, this chapter brings into discussion the history, definitions, importance and distinct theories of personality, all presented and described in a nutshell. Personality psychology belongs to the category of one of the most comprehensive and integrative branches of the psychological sciences. Defining personality is not an easy

assignment, and the different answers given by people, theorists or psychologists have found expression throughout history in distinct fields such as philosophy, religion, law, art, politics or science. Each person understands the term 'personality' in different manners and, perhaps, this is the main reason why there can be found so many personality theories.

One of the most important aspects of each personality theory is grounded in the fact that it has to deal with the image of human nature. Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson are only several names that belong to the psychodynamic theories which emphasize the unconscious. People's consciousness can hardly embrace various significant characteristics of personality hold beyond awareness.

Sigmund Freud is the theorist who elaborated the first theory of personality, entitled psychoanalysis. He explains that most part of our personality is unconscious and that the individuals' instincts are merely sexual and aggressive. Carl Jung is well-known for the theory named 'analytical psychology.' He considers the unconscious as being notably important, but in many other aspects he disagrees with Freud. For instance, in Jung's opinion, there are many other valuable instincts besides sexuality and aggressiveness. Alfred Adler is another famous name who invented another theory of

personality, the ‘individual psychology.’ Unlike Freud or Jung, Alfred believes that the unconscious is meaningless and that personality is not shaped by instincts at all. In other words, the essential purpose of this part is to present the theorists that contributed to the ideas that shape personality.

This chapter also presents a precise analysis of cognitive theories, and especially on Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory. It focuses on the first volume, *A theory of personality*, and explores several important aspects related to personality. George Alexander Kelly unquestionably belongs to the category of giants within the area of psychology, but, even so, he has not received the attention he deserves.

His two-volume magnum entitled *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* appeared in 1955, and consists of a distinguished collection of tightly packed ideas about an innovative theory of personality and its usage in a clinical setting. The first volume, *A Theory of Personality*, comprises three major chapters. The first chapter is entitled *Constructive Alternativism*. The term is considered the central philosophical assumption which supports Personal Construct Theory. However, not only Kelly’s theory, but all psychologists’ theories represent just another interpretation of the universe. Moreover, Kelly supported the argument that people are aware to anticipate the future only by taking into account the basis of

their experience. The psychologist presents possible ways in which people express their desire to comprehend both events and other personalities.

The American psychologist explains personality by focusing on the people's feelings, personal experiences and conscious thoughts. Kelly compares people with scientists in terms of organizing and perceiving their world, by developing hypotheses regarding the environment and testing them in opposition to the reality of daily life. In other words, people can observe the events of their life and understand or interpret them in their own way within a pattern or system. A pattern requires a prediction whose aim is to formulate a response and guide actions. But, in order to understand personality, it is essential to comprehend those patterns, the ways in which the people's world is organized and constructed. Moreover, Kelly mentions that the events themselves are not as important as their interpretation.

The name of the second chapter is *Basic Theory* and it proposes a new theory of personality. In this chapter, Kelly introduced the Fundamental Postulate and then he elaborated the theory by means of eleven corollaries: Individuality corollary, Commonality corollary, Range corollary, Sociality corollary, Construction Corollary, Organization corollary, Dichotomy corollary, Choice corollary, Fragmentation

corollary, Experience corollary, Modulation corollary.

Individuality corollary claims that people perceive events in different ways, so they are different from each other in their own construction of events. Commonality corollary refers to the similarities among people in interpreting events. The Range corollary illustrates that each personal construct possesses a limited range of convenience. Sociality corollary reveals Kelly's opinion of interpersonal relations. He explains that understanding another person's construal processes is more essential than actual similarity because people can only establish meaningful relations and play a crucial role in a social process only if they understand each other.

The Construction Corollary is based on similarities among repeated events. Organization corollary highlights the relationships among constructs. Individual constructs are organized into a pattern, focusing on people's views regarding their similarities and differences. Dichotomy corollary includes two mutually exclusive alternatives. It should be mentioned that all constructs are bipolar or dichotomous, a feature that helps to anticipate future events correctly. In close connection with the previous one, Choice corollary focuses on the people's freedom of choice. Fragmentation corollary illustrates that people may face the possibility of having contradictory constructs within the overall construct system.

Experience corollary reflects exposure to new experiences, which can be described as successive interpretations of events. The last corollary known as Modulation points to the way in which people modify their constructs, in relation to new experiences.

The author focuses on formal, abstract theoretical explanations. Chapter Three is entitled *The Nature of Personal Constructs* and it draws the readers' attention to a vivid elaboration of the theory, whose intention is to bring everything to life. Therefore, his revolutionary and original ideas about the nature of human being were highly appreciated. The theory leaves many unanswered questions, but it still maintains a substantial base of support in Canada, Europe and Australia.

Chapter II is entitled *Hayden White and the Theory of Narrative*. It starts from the assumption that White's writing and teaching include an uncommon, but positive energy, which is worthy of consideration, an energy which expostulates the historians' conventional knowledge in terms of archival research and historical analysis, and thus, they are given the opportunity to furnish more useful accounts of the past than movies or even historical novels would provide.

There are closely examined the first part of his contribution with a view to illustrating some general

information about White's biography. White was born in Tennessee, he studied at Wayne University and also at University of Michigan, he was interested in medieval history and spent two years in Rome, an experience that helped him to discover some good literature and acquire new notion related to Italian language.

The second part of this chapter focuses on eight essays collected in *The Content of Form* between 1979 and 1985 and pointed out that all essays were written at distinct times, for distinct objectives, they sorted and presented in some way, the theory of narrative. Ricoeur, Barthes, Droysen and Foucault are some of the philosophers and historians mentioned by White.

There is presented *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality* which explores White's focus on Barthes' ideas concerning narrative. According to his theory, narrative is international, transhistorical and transcultural. White draws attention upon the main features of both subjective and objective discourse; he illustrates and explains two distinct types of the discourse: the real and the imaginary one; White expresses his opinion about historians and the historical narrative; the writer presents the three basic kinds of historical representation: the annals, the chronicle and the history proper.

Additionally, there is explored the essay entitled *The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory* focused on the subject of narrative, as a type of discourse and on the historical methods applied by most of the narrative historians. The central idea is that the narrative cannot exist without history. White is also interested in explaining some of Barthes and Strauss and Ricoeur's original ideas.

The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation stresses the powerful meaning of the concept 'politics'. The theory of imagination is another topic of interest in the third chapter, analysed by Edmund Burke, Schiller, Hegel and Kant. As concerns the fourth chapter entitled Droysen's *Historik: Historical Writing as a Bourgeois Science*, the accent falls on historiographical composition and the type of phenomenology of historical writing. The writer also proposes four types of representation, and offers valuable information about the significance of the past. On the other hand, in Foucault's *Discourse: The Historiography of Anti-Humanism*, the style of the writer's discourse is analysed. White mentions the following main characteristics: the combination of extravagance and obscurity; the tendency towards the oracular and imitations of negative apocalypse; the rejection of authority, including logic and conventional narrative; the search for a space, rather than a ground.

There is also an attempt to expand upon Fredric Jameson: *Getting Out of History: Jameson's Redemption of Narrative*, where the notion of 'history' appears in several ways in order to create confusion among the readers. 'Causality' is another word that draws White's attention. In the seventh chapter, *The Metaphysics of Narrative: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History*, Paul Ricoeur is interested in a brief analysis of the narrative, narration and narrativity and in illustrating three main types of narrative discourse: mythic, historical and fictional.

All his ideas are comprised in a three-volume book entitled *Time and Narrative*. The last chapter, *The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History*, describes one of the best examples of texts, *The Education of Henry James*, in which the ideological status and the historically evidentiary nature are explained.

Considering all of the facts, nowadays, Hayden White remains a powerful source of inspiration among philosophers, historians and literary scholars across the humanities. His exceptional skill of playing with ideas and jumping into undiscovered territories ranks him among one of the most impressive and innovative historians of all times.

The following three chapters of the doctoral thesis are focused on a practical analysis of Morton's writings. It is a

significant part due to the fact that it presents a meticulous analysis of her novels, it underlines not only the author's style, but also several features and sources of inspiration which lie behind the enchanting pages of her books.

Chapter III is entitled *A Twofold Approach to Kate Morton's The Clockmaker's Daughter*. The practical part of the thesis starts from the hypothesis that the American psychologist, George Kelly, is a skilful master in the world of psychology, while the American historian, Hayden White, dominates the historical field. After several mentions that have been made of some of the most meaningful features of Kelly's theory of personality and White's theory of narrative, it is self-evident that an interdisciplinary dialogue among psychology and history could exist.

There are attentively examined different definitions of literature, which are subsequently connected with the Australian author, Kate Morton. Literature itself and, especially a notable book, emerges from the author's brain and heart. The writer takes the decision to introduce himself into the pages of his book and, more importantly, those pages become part of his life and instinct interrelating with his individuality.

Some general, prevailing facts about her biography are also presented. She was born in 1976 in Berri, but she spent

her childhood in Tambourine Mountain, alongside her parents and her sisters. She was an introverted, shy child who showed a great curiosity for art and literature. The three people who have had a great impact upon her development as a writer were her mother, Didee, and the teachers Herbert and Rita David. The writer's extraordinary talent of storytelling inspired her to discover the passion for art, drama and books. She studied Dramatic Art at Trinity College, graduated a summer course on Shakespeare at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and also attended English Literature courses at Queensland University.

Belonging to the 21st century fiction literature, Kate Morton plays a major role not only in the Australian literature, but also within the research context of my thesis. She is the marvellous author of six novels (*The House at Riverton* – 2007; *The Forgotten Garden* – 2008; *The Distant Hours* – 2010; *The Secret Keeper* – 2012; *The Lake House* – 2015; *The Clockmaker's Daughter* – 2018), which can be found nowadays in all the libraries around the world. Her novels fascinate the readers, as she has a special gift to bring the characters and settings to life and make the real world disappear.

There are explored the sources of influences that contributed to the creation of her six writings. All her novels

should be read at a particular moment, more precisely, when the reader's soul longs for a book which does not allow to be easily discovered. It may be easily observed from the very beginning that Morton has a tendency to complicate her writings and this is a feature that differentiates her from many other writers. Reading her books is almost like having a sophisticated puzzle that must be solved without any help.

The second part of this chapter is based entirely on Morton's latest and most appreciated novel, *The Clockmaker's Daughter*. Firstly, it is illustrated a general background of her enchanting historical fiction and secondly, Kelly and White's theories have been expanded upon. There is a strong connection between Kelly's theory of personality and *The Clockmaker's Daughter* because the writer concentrates on all the characters' inner emotions, thoughts and on their personal experiences. Each character possesses his or her own personality traits. For instance, the ghost is solitary, pessimistic, quiet and heavy-hearted, while Edward Radcliffe is a caring, educated and attentive man.

The part assigned to George Kelly comprises an elaborated interpretation of his *Constructive Alternativism* and of his eleven corollaries. As regards the former topic, Morton's characters are receptive to a numberless variety of interpretations, and the most plausible example is the event

that happened at Birchwood Manor in the summer of 1862. Lucy, Edward and Inspector Wesley present their own theory, they possess a hypothesis framed in order to explain the event and, therefore, there is no objective reality that place restrictions on the readers' interpretations. The latter topic is the most complex one, as it presents an implementation of Kelly's eleven corollaries on *The Clockmaker's Daughter*.

White's theory of narrative from the perspective of Morton's novel is analysed as well, and it is underlined the meaning of the most frequently encountered notions in the historian's book. The theory of narrative is formed of a story and a discourse. On the one hand, the story consists of a set of events and presents the content of those happenings, and on the other hand, the discourse explains the way in which the content is communicated.

Beyond what has been stated, there are mentioned and exemplified various techniques and elements, representative for both the story and the discourse. The reader can find in the novel all five elements essential to every story. *The Clockmaker's Daughter* has a plot (based upon the major event that took place at Birchwood Manor), a setting (England, between 1862 and 2017), many characters (Elodie Winslow, the spirit of Birdie, Lucy Radcliffe, Edward Radcliffe, Leonard Gilbert, Juliet and Tip Wright, etc.) several points of

view (objective, subjective, limited omniscient) and also a conflict (external and internal). The reader can also discover three of the most essential techniques adopted within a discourse, respectively a framed narrative, flashback and unreliable narrator.

Thus, Kate Morton remains one of the most appreciated writers in our time. She is a gifted author who plays nicely with words and emotions, awakens the readers' curiosity and craving for reading, but, most importantly, she unravels mysteries. Many lives and places lie in her hands, and the books that she writes are full of magic, feelings and secrets.

Chapter IV is entitled *An Interdisciplinary Approach to Kate Morton's Novel The Forgotten Garden*. By balancing different generations, the author connects the past and the present on a variety of levels, making possible an interpretation of Kelly and White's comprehensive theories.

There are carefully analysed the author's various sources of inspiration that contributed to the writing of *The Forgotten Garden* and, after presenting an overall context of *The Forgotten Garden*, all the attention is concentrated on the novel's summary. The summarization is concise and it is divided into three important parts: Nell O'Connor and her intriguing story (1913 – 2005); Cassandra O'Connor and her enigmatic story (1975 – 2005) and finally, Eliza Makepeace

and her dramatic story (1900 – 1913).

The writing embraces a variety of plots, themes, characters and settings that occasionally cross paths, but each narrative has to be explored independently for two reasons. On the one hand, it facilitates the solving of a number of complex puzzles and helps the reader to really understand the essence of the story. On the other hand, by analysing each story separately, the practical part is easier to approach, and the task of finding similarities between the author's writing and the two theories is successfully accomplished.

The most extensive part of the chapter concerns George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory applied to Kate Morton's novel. There are explored each individual character's personality traits and their inner feelings, thoughts and behaviour, but the most important and relevant features emphasized are those of the three main female characters, who go through an entire cycle of life. Their personality is shaped according to the time and situation in which they are found, and, even if they belong to different generations, Eliza, Cassandra and Nell experience the same sense of solitude.

Subsequently, the attention is turned to Constructive Alternativism and its enforcement on *The Forgotten Garden*. As Constructive Alternativism allows the readers to interpret the plot in any creative and distinctive way, their perspective is

not restricted by any objective reality and, thus, Eliza Makepeace and her peculiar story serve as an ideal illustration of Kelly's concept.

The Forgotten Garden underlines the idea that the main characters are entirely free to change any constructs or even replace them with different ones because they are uncontrolled. According to Constructive Alternativism, the book comprises only one reality, despite the fact that it is constantly viewed from different angles.

In addition to what has been stated, this chapter requires a succinct and accurate exemplification of Kelly's fundamental postulate and eleven corollaries in *The Forgotten Garden*. The novel beautifully tackles the characters' psychological processes and their personality is exceptionally sketched, as it appears as an endlessly evolving process.

There is also explored a possible, imaginary bridge between Hayden White's theory of narrative and Morton's novel. The writers place a special emphasis on the past, history, reality and fiction. However, White classifies the discourse into a real and an imaginary one. History belongs to the first category, whereas Morton's outstanding novel covers both types of discourse. Similar to *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, despite the category it belongs to, *The Forgotten Garden* encompasses five indispensable elements. It has a plot

(based upon a lost child, a terrible secret and a mysterious inheritance), a setting (Australia and England, between 1900 and 2005), numerous characters (Eliza Makepeace, Nell O'Connor, Cassandra O'Connor, Rose Mountrachet, Adeline and Linus Mountrachet, Nathaniel Walker, Christian Blake, Mary Martin, etc.), a point of view (third-person narrative) and a conflict (external and internal).

Equally important and interesting aspects debated within this chapter are the fundamental modes of historical representation. Unquestionably, *The Forgotten Garden* is an acceptable work for exemplifying the chronicle as an essential type of historical representation, although it does not present a well-organized story, with a definite beginning, middle and end. White's *The Content of Form* tackles the annals which are the most explored modes of historical representation, but the author chooses not to emphasize the idea of recording occurrences year by year

In the final part of this chapter, there are mentioned the three primary categories of narrative discourse, but the emphasis falls on the mythic discourse. The fairy tales are included into three distinct passages from the novel; they have a different aspect and represent a combination between myth and magic realism. Having a well-defined role, the stories are regarded as a literary device known as the frame story.

Finally, it may be concluded that the current chapter aims at identifying the main characteristics that bring together three well-known names from three different fields of study, and their innovative ideas. To put it all together, every single piece of writing becomes valuable if its writer finds the proper time, imagination and uniqueness to create it.

Chapter V is entitled *An Interdisciplinary Approach to Kate Morton's Novel The Lake House*. The final chapter of the practical part of the thesis represents a clear attempt to clarify the brilliant manner in which fictional literature can establish an interdisciplinary connection between psychology and history, while turning to good account both Kelly and White's distinguished theories. Kate Morton, famous for her persuasive, creative way of writing, successfully employs all her writing skills in order to present an engaging story in *The Lake House*, where the past and the present eventually get acquainted in an unusual, but fascinating coincidence of circumstances.

There are discussed the two different paths followed by Morton in order to complete the writing of *The Lake House*. The first and most meaningful process is the inner journey, which guides the author towards the original and noteworthy concepts that started filling her gifted mind. It is a wise, chosen method that highlights her abilities, as it relies on

her capacity to face reality by merely exercising mental creativity. Secondly, the use of the outer space is successively maximized and, more specifically, it is grounded in genuine locations. Cornwall remains her primary source of influence, a special and inspiring location, loaded with great significance, while other places mentioned are Trerice, the author's favourite house, or Portloe village.

There is presented a concise summary of Kate Morton's highly appreciated historical fiction novel, *The Lake House*. Its success is attributed to the excellent blending of the distinctive elements of the historical book with the analysis of issues related to themes like loss, generational trauma or family secrets. The author portrays life in accordance with her beliefs and value judgements and, within this frame, she opens the readers' eyes to the hidden and unexplored realms through inspiring feelings and emotions, as well as she guides them toward understanding the purpose of life and existence.

For a better comprehension of the story, *The Lake House* follows three separate tales about children, which depicted a lost baby, an abandoned child and finally, an adopted infant. Notably, each story is emphasized separately, in an effort to weave them together and thus, intensify the suspense. The main plait of the braid tackles the mysterious disappearance of Theo Edevane and many theories related to

the subject; the second braid focuses mainly on Sadie Sparrow's life story; the last one draws attention to the characters' personal traumas, inner conflicts and memories.

After concluding a brief analysis of Morton's novel, where the author is moving backward and forward between the historical, realistic genre and the fantastic, idealistic novel of ideas, George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory is employed to the greatest possible advantage as a methodological instrument in order to uncover the secret of its complex, multidimensional meaning. In order to exemplify Kelly's theory of personality, it is of utmost importance to emphasize the characters' inner and outer experiences, and therefore, Bachelard's intimate space is also an aspect that should be taken into account.

As concerns the various types of interpersonal relationships illustrated in *The Lake House*, they are successfully decoded by using the set of eleven corollaries, which are all meant to pave a way that could offer a correct understanding and interpretation of those expectations based on experience. However, differently from *The Clockmaker's Daughter* and *The Forgotten Garden*, where each corollary is taken individually, in *The Lake House*, the analysis can be done in tandem. Fragmentation, Individuality, Commonality and Sociality Corollary are highly connected to one another,

while Experience Corollary supports the Kellian Corollary of Choice. Taken separately or together, each corollary represents an essential piece of information that contributes to solving the case of Theo Edevane's disappearance. Such methodological devices have proven themselves to be extremely helpful instruments to illustrate the complexity of the characters' personalities which can not pass unnoticed in Morton's novel.

Special attention is also paid to history and fiction, and, more importantly, an attempt to place them in the same melting pot. It has been shown that *The Lake House* is much more than just a fiction, as the novelist has the power to connect the past to a distant location that is absolutely worth seeing, a place where some features become more familiar than others.

Consequently, with the help of Hayden White's theory of narrative, it the author's ability to immerse the reader into an authentic historical realism is demonstrated. The last novel discussed includes the most common elements between White, the representative of historiography, and Morton, a prominent figure of fiction. The subjects tackled in the last part of this chapter include the importance of the past and the effect it has on the present; the attention placed on history and reality; the major five components of the story; the three main types of historical representation (history, chronicle and annals); and

finally, relevant ideas concerning the narrative discourse.

In the light of the above mentioned ideas, it could be said that the practical part of the thesis aimed at exemplifying the relationship among psychology, literature and history. Language is used as a valuable tool of communication in literature, a field which intersects with disciplines such as history, psychology or philosophy, in order to interpret personality and human behaviour.

George Kelly, Kate Morton and Hayden White are all interested in human beings, their fears, conflicts, desires, reactions and perceptions of the world, and they also show their particular interest for individual and social concerns.