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Article

The Study of Literature and Culture Online (Theory and Application)

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1) Theory and Method

The question is this: How does new media technology impact on the study of literature and more specifically, what is online work and research in the humanities in general and in the study of literature in particular? What are the implications of new media scholarship and new media technology for knowledge transfer and knowledge management? In the following, these questions are discussed with focus on aspects of the current situation of the study of literature and culture including issues of theory and methodology. *Tasks a) define new media technology b) define "literature" c) define the field of the "humanities" d) define the field of the "social sciences" e) explain differences between scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences*

1.1 Frameworks of theory and methodology are tools one employs for study and research. Theory and methodology are important as tools of thinking and of structuring the object per se and the process of research and study. When it comes to theory and methodology, the study of literature is -- more so than any field in the natural sciences -- a rather rigid field that resists paradigm shift. In the last thirty years or so, the humanities do not look kindly upon observational, operational / functional, and "scientific" paradigms of research. Theories of literature tend to be self-referential with specific sets of terminologies but which are often not explicitly defined. The self-referentiality of research in literature is, among other things, manifest in the exclusion of material available in other disciplines and languages. For example, it is not exceptional to find publications by internationally recognized scholars who venture to interpret a particular text or begin to outline a theoretical approach without introductory mention of similar work done by others or work done elsewhere, especially when this has occurred in a different language. This could not happen, by and large, in the natural (basic) or medical sciences and for a good reason. In view of advances in new media technology and the information revolution and their speed it is crucial that the study of literature (and culture) reevaluate and renovate itself.

It is proposed that this reevaluation and renovation is to occur with regard to the said new media, that is, specifically the internet and the world wide web (see "What is the Web?" <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mattkaz/history/what_is_the_web.html>) and their impact on scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, including the study of literature when viewed in a global context (see Grabovszki <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/1/>>). Online research, following the development of technology and the increase of data (primary as well as secondary literature) is already of some importance in several fields of scholarship while in business and its various areas it is of course a given; in time it will become an additional and powerful tool in scholarship no matter what field. With regard to literature per se and the matter of the world wide web, here is a quote from an article by Robert Lepage, the internationally renowned Québécois-Canadian playwright who recognizes the advantages and positive meaning of a global and new media-oriented view for his own

plays as well as contemporary Québécois-Canadian literature as a whole. Lepage argues that the world wide web and "its spread is part of the reason why Quebecers are so abruptly questioning their identity and coming to such new conclusions. New technology leaves no room for xenophobia. How can Quebec sell its Internet products if it continues to have an isolationist image? And if you send me an e-mail, and you don't have all the accents and the c and the little hat [circumflex] -- what is so French about it? So a lot of people decided to write in English. These things may seem trivial, but they are hints of a much bigger shift" (69). *Tasks a) discuss "what is the world wide web?" and what is the "internet" b) define research in the study of literature c) define research in the natural sciences*

1.2 It ought to be self-evident that the world wide web and the internet provide possibilities for the study of culture and literature scholars in the humanities must exploit. However, for various reasons, there is much resistance among scholars in the humanities including scholars of literature toward all aspects of new media technology and new media scholarship. The issues surrounding new media technology and scholarship including the matter at hand, namely online research of literature and hypertext are clearly complex and range from epistemology and philosophy to the question of funding, the question of globalization and knowledge transfer, copyright, and so on (see Ryan). One thorny issue involves the question of content on the web and the relative lack of quality scholarly texts on the web is, indeed, a matter of concern. For example, why is there still a lack of a high-quality corpus of secondary literature for the study of literature on the web in peer review, in full text, AND in open access? And then there is the said reluctance -- at times explicit hostility -- of scholars in the humanities towards new media and the web. This is no trivial matter for scholarship nor is it trivial in the pedagogy of the humanities either. The professoriat may not be aware but it is no secret that whether it is undergraduate or graduate students, the number of students who use the world wide web as their primary and first source of information in their scholarship has exploded in the last few years. When it comes to considering the impact of the web, this is deemed a positive one. Considering some of the negative impacts of the web, in first-year English literature courses the occurrence of students submitting papers simply copied from material available on the web or by simple purchase of papers from sites providing such a service is increasing exponentially (there are now methods and software to detect such plagiarism, however). As said, even in graduate school many students use the web for basic research. Yet, the existence of bona fide scholarly online journals in the humanities is negligible while the social sciences are doing better in this and the natural and medical sciences are of course way ahead. When it comes to online publishing, here is an example: On the web page of the US Library of Congress there is a large number of links to webpublishers in the sciences while there is not a single one such publisher listed for the humanities to date. At best there is strong caution toward new media scholarship including doubts about the quality of material currently available on the web. While this in many instances justified the task is not to put up barriers against new media scholarship but to make sure that good scholarly material becomes available on the web. Granted, there are some infrastructural problems, too, which affect the situation of the web and the internet in general and there are two such problems of major impact: One is the obvious problem of different technological development and availabilities among regions of the world and the second one is the infrastructure of telephone line and cable providers and their economics. Technologically advanced societies of Europe are at this point handicapped in the development of the internet in comparison with North America (the U.S. and Canada) for the simple reason that local calls are expensive in Europe while they are much less to minimal in North America. Clearly, in Europe the monopoly of the state telephone companies will have to be modified and this has started to begin: Whether it will evolve to similarly easy access to telephone lines or other ways of web access -- such as cable TV -- remains to be seen (soon enough, web access via satellite will also evolve). Further aspects of online material -- and thus research online -- include a range of matter such as the question of stability (both as to the reliability of servers and the stability of links in web sites, i.e., "dead links"), the question of archiving and the preservation of online data as compared with (or opposed to?) hard-cover material, the types and speed of access (e.g., DSL versus cable versus satellite). *Tasks a) discuss your experience at university with regard to the use of the web and e-mail b) discuss aspects of copyright and plagiarism with regard to the web c) discuss aspects of access to the web in different parts of the world*

1.3 But back to learned journals published online, that is, as they relate to online research and

the study of literature. "What is online research?" may be an obvious proposition: We use the world wide web and material found in web sites and data bases to do research just like we do with material in libraries in hard-copy form; increasingly, also primary texts can be used online. However, in the inter-relationships of work in the humanities, the study of literature, and new media scholarship and technology, to answer a simple question like "what is online research?" can become complicated. And the discussion about this extends, obviously, to all sorts of matter such as the contentious issue of distance education in all of its facets, etc. The perception of scholars in the humanities of the emergence and significance of web journals and thus, in general, the forms and content of scholarly material available on the world wide web, as said, is of extreme caution. It is true that some web journals do not have comparable scholarly content traditional hard-copy journals offer. But this can be changed and the time constraints and financial constraints hard-copy journal suffer under will make it ultimately imperative that knowledge transfer and scholarly communication will demand the switch to ejournals on the web (see, e.g., Rosenzweig). That an online journal in the public domain has much potential is obvious and here is the example of from the history of *CLCWeb* with regard to the use of its material: In the first available period of statistical analysis of the *CLCWeb*'s access and online use, 13-30 April 1999, the journal received 1,950 hits. This means 108 hits per day on the average and for an esoteric subject such as comparative literature and culture this shows high-level and involved use. The web traffic statistics also show -- among many aspects of the ways, length, precise use of specific sections of the journal, various technical aspects of access, etc. -- that *CLCWeb* has been accessed from a large number of countries, incl. many countries outside North America and Europe and from the data it is possible to determine that the majority of the users are from institutes of higher learning. A further element of the situation of new media and online journals is the question of funding, that is, the costs of the production and maintenance of online journals. In different countries the funding of journals, hard copy or online, is done differently of course. However, in all cases funding is of major concern and an important element for obvious reasons. Most journals published online in all fields opt for paid subscription similar to traditional hard-copy journals and there are several companies and institutions performing such for-profit service such as the Muse Project of Johns Hopkins University. In the spirit of knowledge transfer and access to knowledge in the free-access mode made possible with and on the world wide web, it is institutions of higher learning who ought to carry the costs from internal as well as external funding such as government funding or private sponsorship. While this is indeed the case in a few instances, there is similar resistance towards online publishing in government agencies and as discussed previously with regard to scholars in the academe. In Canada, for example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) refused to even consider funding of the online journal *CLCWeb* -- first established at the University of Alberta and published on the server of the Faculty of Arts of the university -- precisely because the journal lived in the public domain. After several attempts of explanation and clarification the journal was advised by an SSHRC official that because *CLCWeb* does not have minimum 200 paid subscribers, it is ineligible for funding (e-mail correspondence). The explanation that *CLCWeb* is apriori in the public domain and thus cannot have paid subscribers, logically, was not accepted and the large web traffic with the ejournal -- which clearly showed that *CLCWeb* is being used/read by the scholarly community -- did not make an impression either. Obviously, this particular government agency is in a traditional mindset and its policy makers -- and that include academics -- have not followed the developments made possible by new media technology available for scholarship. Scholarly communication and knowledge transfer on the world wide web ought to be facilitated by open and competitive funding by government agencies, just as are other types of scholarly activities. Online journals ought to be able to compete for such funding because government agencies use taxpayers' money in the first place and this way some of that money is returned to the taxpayers (scholars) as well as taxpayers' offspring (students), just like in other areas of scholarly activity. As the example introduced here shows, the policies of the SSHRC have not followed the emerging situation of scholarship in the humanities where online journals in the public domain perform the said meaningful service for the scholarly community and where they perform knowledge transfer on an international scale previously unheard of (on this, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The New Knowledge Management" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss1/8/>>). *Tasks a) discuss financial aspects of the publishing of scholarship online b) define and discuss data of web traffic and use of online material*

c) explore and discuss aspects of online research with regard to content and open access

1.4 There are many theoretical and methodological frameworks available for the study of literature and each framework has its advantages and this which to use is always a matter of contention and controversy (on this, since Edward Said's 1983 *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, there is a slowly expanding corpus of work; see Cohen; Jay; Kamuf; Simpson; Sosnoski; Veese; for a theoretical discussion of the problematics of knowledge transfer, see Gibbons). Here, it is proposed that the theoretical framework of "comparative cultural studies" and the methodology embedded in the "systemic and empirical study of culture and literature" be employed. Of some importance is that while the proposed framework is a construct that is deemed advantageous and application-oriented, it is a framework that includes methodology and that both theoretical framework and methodology take into account the importance of new media technology and scholarship. Comparative cultural studies is a new field of study where the notion of "comparative" is merged with the field of cultural studies from the basic premises of the discipline of comparative literature meaning that the study of culture and culture products -- including but not restricted to literature, communication, media, art, etc. -- is done in a global and international context with a plurality of methods and approaches, interdisciplinarity, and if and when required including team work. In comparative cultural studies it is the processes of communicative action(s) in culture including literature and the "how" of these processes constitute the main objectives of research and study. However, comparative cultural studies does not exclude textual analysis proper or other established fields of study. In comparative cultural studies the framework of and methodologies available in the systemic and empirical study of culture are favoured. Evidently, it is not proposed here that literature ought to be studied with one specific approach; rather, it is proposed that several approaches may be applicable. It is suggested, however, that the intersection of systems theories, attention to data and the processes of data collection (the "empirical"), and advances in the information sciences and new media technology offer solid avenues to affect the study of literature. Systems approaches to literature are theoretical frameworks and methodologies which allow implicitly for the absorption and for the expansion of the information sciences and the new media technologies perspective. In the framework, the notions of operationalism and functionalism are of some importance, including the insistence on the repeated application of the framework (for an introduction of the contextual systemic and empirical approach see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, "From Comparative Literature" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2/>>, "The New Humanities"). The systemic and empirical approach -- in its varieties of sub-approaches -- in particular has generated a large corpus where the application of new media technology and information science tools occurred. This can be seen clearly, for example, in the bibliography of the contextual systemic and empirical approach: the bibliography covers, in addition to studies exclusively in the systemic and empirical approach, neighbouring disciplines such as cognitive science and psychology, and reading and readership research (audience studies), where the use of statistical methods, data bases, etc., relying on various methods involving computers take a large proportion (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography of Work in Contextual" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/7/>>). *Tasks a) find and explore scholarly work in comparative literature b) find and explore scholarship where the contextual systemic and empirical approach is applied in scholarship*

1.5 With works such as Pierre Lévy's *La Machine univers. Création, cognition et culture informatique* (1987), *Les Technologies de l'intelligence. L'Avenir de la pensée à l'ère informatique* (1990), and *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (1996), Jean-Pierre Balpé's *Hyperdocuments, hypertextes, hypermédia* (1990), George P. Landow's *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992) and *Hypertext 3.0* (2006), Norbert Bolz's *Am Ende der Gutenberg Galaxis. Die neuen Kommunikationsverhältnisse* (1993), Mark Poster's *The Second Media Age* (1995), Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss, eds., *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory* (2000), Marie-Laure Ryan's *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology* (Ed., 1999) and *Literary Theory and Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (2001), Paul Delany and George P. Landow, eds., *Hypermedia and Literary Studies* (1994), or Derrick de Kerckhove's *The Skin of Culture: Investigating the New Electronic Reality* (1995), the problematization of information technology and its relationship with literary and culture theory has undergone significant debates and continues to do so. That the internet

and the web are or ought to be obvious matter in pedagogy, where the use of hypertext as a tool has much to offer, is being increasingly accepted (see, for example, Miall; Jones; for a discussion of hypertext see Shields; for the use of hypertext specifically in literary studies, see, for example, Browner; Cumming and Sinclair). The implication is that with hypertext the traditional way of teaching by means of lectures is -- while not necessarily replaced -- certainly given an expansion in several ways, because of the range of textual and visual possibilities that hypertext can handle. This is, in a sense another version of the systemic approach because of the range of the possibilities to explicate a literary text by moving -- potentially -- to any and all types of secondary and supplementary information and material -- in essence whatever the particular text allows for in its content and in its wider parameters of genesis, production, and processing. This new perspective of literature and pedagogy is systemic because it is presented in an observing and rational, systematic and organized manner, and at the same time it allows for a wide spectrum of the text's exploration. In addition, strictly textual and narratological features, for example, in hypertext, can also be explicated and explored.

1.6 The operational and functional aspect of the impact of new media technology and the information sciences have implications beyond the simple observation that pedagogy, for example, may benefit from the use of online research including hypertext. In an operational sense, technology, in general, is at a stage of constant and rapid innovation and expansion. However, all is not a strictly positive development. At a conference on the status of the information highway in 1994 focusing on questions of technology, business, and industry, many leading figures of the information industry warned that the real effect of the electronic revolution will occur ten to fifteen years into the future (see McNish). This time frame clearly refers much of the present enthusiasm to a more cautionary and relaxed attitude. Another cautionary opinion, by Siegfried Zielinski, focusing here on the question of technological application in a macro context, is with regards to the "electronic text," which "is distinguished by the attempted take-over of the whole process of the production of signs, their storage, duplication, distribution and the users' interaction with the allocation of signs on offer by symbolic representation. The basis has been provided by information technology which is now able to break down those particles which were formerly the smallest of the semiotic process: the discrete characters, sounds and images can be converted into symbols, their computation and the processing of these computing operations done by machines and programmes. Microelectronics, digitalization, semiconductor technology and communication networks, which organize the transport of information at the speed of light -- these have become the determinatives of a technoculture which, on a new qualitative level, are picking away at the traditional fabric of communication architecture and its internal relations" (Zielinski 132). Michael Conrad argues further, suggesting that computer science, in its whole range from word-processing to artificial intelligence and especially in the area of problem solving is not as convincing as some of us believe. Conrad suggests in his conclusion that "At this point in time there is a real danger that our society will be driven in the counterproductive direction by convinced administrators and a committed computer science work force, neither of which is properly educated to analyze the complexity of problems being addressed and the capabilities of the machines used to address them. This social formation is aware of the problems that are emerging, but appears to believe that these can be overcome by technical solutions, to be found in software engineering, artificial intelligence technique, and advanced architectures" (Conrad 7).

1.7 Both Zielinski's and Conrad's opinions are valid cautionary notes in the context that new media, information science, and computer technology are, while also conceptual and theory-impacting, in the first instance tools. Hence the suggestion above that aspects of new media technology and the information sciences may aid us foremost on the operational and functional side of literary studies, such as online research. At the same time, this is not to underestimate the impact and importance of computers, new media technology, and the information sciences in their epistemological implications. The information highway, as the daily media suggests, affects -- in industrial societies of the Western world -- virtually all areas of human interaction, in other words, communication and culture. Beyond the every-day impact of the computer and information and media technologies, their influence becomes particularly important when the areas of communication studies and media studies are considered. Siegfried J. Schmidt, for example, has proposed, from a systemic and empirical point of view, that the study of literature is in need of revival and that this revival can be done most

effectively by a focus on the notion that literature should be studied in the context of communication and media studies (e.g., 1991, 1993; for work by and about Siegfried J. Schmidt in literary studies, philosophy, communication and media studies, systems theory and literature, etc., see Barsch, Rusch, and Viehoff <<http://www.schmidt.uni-halle.de/>>). This prescribes that while attention may still rest primarily on literature, other forms of artistic expression which are in connection with literature (e.g., adaptations of novels to film, theatre, the visual arts, and radio, web art, etc.) and their distribution and consumption be also studied. Naturally, as distribution and consumption and their mechanisms strongly, if in some ways not even entirely, involve the mechanics of techno-culture including aspects of the information sciences and new media technology, these then become prime foci in the study of literature. But in general, there is evidence that besides written (printed) and oral cultures (products of "tecto-culture") there seems to develop a parallel culture that is very active, productive, and innovative but that is known to a limited and not as of yet fully recognized group of individuals who work artistically on the world wide web. In other words, this parallel culture of "techno-culture" is produced mainly via electronic means. *Tasks a) define "tecto-culture" and "techno-culture" b) list items and areas of new technology in media and communication which in your opinion make a lasting impact c) discuss the how of impacts of new technology in media and communication in culture and communication (i.e., describe the process of the impacts)*

1.8 Obviously, the advances of techno-culture impact cultural participation per se and thus the study of cultural participation in the context of cultural studies, including literature, should be a concern of literary scholars. In the case of literature, while textual studies -- including the whole range of new critical approaches, lexicographical-empirical analyses, cognitive psychological studies of reading, and hermeneutics, etc. -- still represent advances in knowledge and new discoveries, the study of literature should be performed in the systemic mode as proposed here, not the least because of the systemic postulate of system self-referentiality and its a priori recognition of a techno-cultural (computer technological, new media technological, information scientific) perspectives. This implicitly suggests that in addition to a systemic framework and methodology, more cooperation and interaction is necessary between technocratic and theoretical knowledge. It is often the case that while the technocrat lacks theoretical sophistication, the theorist lacks the technological knowledge. In many instances these two areas of knowledge cannot be combined in one person and this is particularly noticeable in the humanities in general and in the study of literature in particular. For this reason more team-work and interdisciplinarity are necessary in the study of literature, that is the cooperation, team-work, and inter-disciplinarity of the experts of technology with those of the humanities. A further component of techno-culture including the study of literature and culture would be the frequent application of theoretical frameworks, thus returning to the demands of operationalism and functionalism in the study of literature. This process would confirm, for instance, Zielinski's conclusion that, for better or worse, cultural participation "has become an operational relation" (137). And further yet, Pierre Laurette suggests that the process of transformation occurring by the impact of the information highway should be considered from a "global epistemological perspective where enduring philosophy comprises a referential framework where, in turn, the horizon of departure includes a relation and contact between theories, disciplines, and objects/subjects of research. ... In a local perspective this should take the shape of pragmatic analyses and a differentiated knowledge, methodologies, and technologies from the information and cognitive sciences in a critical as well as practical (pragmatic) epistemology. This approach should allow for a meaningful evaluation of the impact and importance of new developments in the information sciences on both society in general and on the humanities in particular" (136).

1.9 This blueprint for an epistemological schema is supported by Peter M. Spangenberg's proposal that "systems theories and radical constructivism emanate from the point of view that cognitive and communication-discursive realities and properties are the result of and are based on self-constructed autopoietic systems" (70). The suggestion is that if the world can be explicated through systems and by the study of processes, this will be done by systems which resolve cognitive and communicative questions and problems in a differentiation between self-referential and outside-referential frames and so through the postulate of "observationality" (Spangenberg 70). The epistemological argument for systems thinking is forwarded by Schmidt, who suggests that "cognitive systems influence communication as a social system -- if not causally -- in that, for instance, they create media products

based on their history of socialization and by employment of collective knowledge with view on social systems and in expectation of operational conditions which are in existence there" (1993, 251). In sum, the proposition that a theoretical framework and its application -- whose objective is to study the impact of the electronic revolution and technoculture on culture, for instance -- may be best placed both epistemologically and operationally/functionally within tenets and parameters available and already explored in systems theories. And this suggestion is particularly applicable in and for the study of literature.

1.10 A further aspect of the theoretical bases of the intersections of new media technology, the information sciences, and new media scholarship including online research and e-journals is the notion of communication and system in a socio-semiotic context. The attention here is on thinking about how a tool we call "the information highway" impacts on and changes our communicative interactions and ultimately, how this impact and the resulting changes reorient the study of literature. Here, the theoretical points of departure are notions found, in addition to the systemic and empirical approach, in socio-semiotics, and Niklas Luhmann's social interaction and systemic approach (see Luhmann 2000). The designation "socio-semiotics" draws attention to an aspect of semiotics that prescribes that we investigate "the structure of all possible sign systems, and the role these play in the way we create and perceive patterns (or 'meanings') in sociocultural behaviour" (Crystal 399). In the context of the objective here, while "communication" as a form of human interaction may be defined in a semiotic sign in systemic perspective, it is modified in the context of Luhmann's thought and the cognitive-science oriented notion of constructivism (for material on constructivism and radical constructivism as applied in literary and culture studies, see Riegler <<http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism>>, see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Constructivism" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/ccsconstructivism>>). In the proposed (theoretical and applied) approximation of Luhmann's systemic model and (radical) constructivism with the concept of socio-semiotics, a further factor emerges. Again this factor is the notion of operationalism and functionalism. The notion of function is, of course, conceptualized in semiotics. From a semiotic point of view, in the social sciences and psychology, for example, functionalism means "structures, which fulfil the objective to maintain a system" (Nöth 154). This semiotic definition converges with the notion of system and operationalism of the Luhmann- and constructivism-influenced framework of the systemic and empirical approach. The notion of communicative function with reference to language is again very similar to Luhmann's systemic concept of social interaction. Winfried Nöth defines communication as one of the primary functions of semiotic systems, in which the system is "utilized as a medium of communication, in other words, as an instrument of social interaction" (157). However, the difference in the understanding of the role of system between the semiotic and the systemic or constructivist notion is that the literary system -- a system within larger system of social interaction and communication -- is both in existence a priori and it is (open or semi-permeably) self-referentially motivated. With reference to literature and the study of literature, the researcher's task is to observe and to describe how the system operates. In other words, the observation of the how is the operational and functional task of the observer. This how of the observation and description has, however, several basic operational components. In other words, operationalism refers the observer to proceed in a certain manner which is predetermined by systemic factors. Among others, this procedure involves the observation and description of a second order observation (see Maturana). Second order observation simply means to take into account the observation of the observer.

1.11 In its most basic level, this second order observation involves description, such as the objective of my discussion here, namely the systemic impact of the new tools of communication, collectively termed "the electronic highway" or the "electronic revolution," or "electronic technology." In other words, how does it occur and what is the impact of tool-generation and the use of tools of the information highway in the understanding and the study of literature and culture? I propose that from an operationalist point of view, the process and implementation of information technology suggest that the tools of the information highway, in other words, information technology itself, impact not only the primary activity, that of social interaction, i.e., communication in all of its semiotic and other aspects including literature, but also the activity of the study of literature. Or, to use Pierre Lévy's words, the information technology and the information highway will become "the norm, a new system of writing and a metamorphosis of reading" (*Les Technologies* 42). It is evident that society in the

industrialized Western world is much preoccupied with information technology and the process and impact of the information highway and their collective potential (and industrially and technologically less advanced societies are rapidly following suit). To illustrate the local situation in English-speaking Canada from a historical perspective, here is data from the early years of the web revolution: The references ranged from the straight technical to the more socio-semiotic. For example, at the time when the interest in electronic communication first really reached the general public, in the 13 May 1994 issue of the *Globe and Mail*, a full 22 page advertisement under the title "Superhighway to Information Heaven" with key articles appeared, covering subjects from Cable, Education, Glossary, and Internet to Technology, Telecommuting, Telemedicine, and Telephone. By 1997, the *Globe and Mail* has devoted pages to electronic communication and the art on the world wide web with articles about on-line magazines and youth culture; see, for example, "The Home Page" (1 November 1997): C12. Today, in 2001, all virtually all newspapers in most languages devote sections to new media and new media technology. Of course, detractors of the most varied kind do abound just as before. In the 31 May 1994 issue of the *Globe and Mail*, in the article "Books a Dying Art? Don't Believe It," Pulitzer Prize winner E. Annie Proulx discusses the impact of the electronic media and argues that "In a curious way the computer emphasizes the unique virtues of the book. ... Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen" (A19). Proulx also writes that the "electronic highway is for bulletin boards on esoteric subjects, reference works, lists and news -- timely, utilitarian information, efficiently pulled through the wires." While the author of the article is right in her perception that the electronic highway is indeed a "tool" of communication facilitating the process of information and she may be right in her prediction that the screen is not going to replace the readers' preference for the tactility of a book, she also misses the view of a larger picture. Proulx, along with book historian Geoffrey Nunberg, is one of the few who believe that the electronic revolution and the web and internet are not going to replace reading as a cultural standard activity, while Sven Birkerts, for instance, in his book, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (1994) describes the situation of reading culture as already lost. And with regard to the information highway as easy access to data for research, in literary studies there are dissenting voices who suggest that the hasty, improper, and uninformed usage of the world wide web result in poor research papers by students (see Knowlton).

1.12 The larger picture is that while the electronic revolution is primarily a creation of tools for communication, it at the same time impacts the process of communication in its foundations. In Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and theory of communication, there is a differentiation between medium and form whereby medium is defined by such examples as light, air, or noise, and on a higher level by money, power, and freedom, while form is defined by such concepts as language, organization, or institutions (see Bolz 44-45). Analogously, then, the information highway is another type of medium (see also Nunberg). It appears, however, that Luhmann's theory stops here: it negates dialogue with the technology of the new media (see Bolz 50) and arrives, essentially, at the same conclusion as Proulx and reflects on the existence of society built on George Steiner's "sacred texts." With a divergent opinion, Bolz argues that Gutenberg's invention results in the book becoming both medium and form (192). But he proceeds with the argument that typography (in essence, the technology of the printed word) represents the *raison d'être* of the Gutenberg galaxy and its subject is the passive, non-responsive reader (194). Against this static state Bolz argues, with László Moholy-Nagy and Marshall McLuhan, for example, that creativity, information, and communication in its latest shape, hypertext, become radically temporal and provisory (198-99). This creates, in his opinion, a release from the typographical prison, from the prison of the "hard copy" (200). Bolz suggests that typographical reading has given way to screen reading, at least so with children in schools today. This understanding converges with, for example, Pierre Lévy's, who argues that "reading, by transcending oral culture, inscribes the new age of humanity into a new cycle of social memory. Similarly, the Information Sciences recode the previous cultural content into a new mode of communication" (*La Machine univers* 41). Lévy also recognizes, albeit in a more conceptual way, that audience and readership is impacted by new forms of communication and information retrieval. While I agree that this is the case in many countries in their urban schools, this may not be the case altogether even in technologically most advanced countries. It is another matter that there is good reason to hypothesize that the screen reading mode is an inevitable reality, including the various ways of communication on

and with the computer screen. I do agree with Lévy that the prominence of screen reading and screen communication does indeed result in a different construction and process of communication in that the concept of reality is substituted by function and that classification and causality is substituted by configuration, and that thinking in the reflective mode is under the constraints of the necessity of immediate response. The most immediate and important impact the electronic revolution will have on literary studies is the cumulative result from the electronic revolution's equally cumulative effect on social interaction, immediately and also secondarily connected. For example, while the above discussed impact on the reading of books may not happen in the way E. Anne Proulx suggested, the information highway will have and already has had, presumably, an effect on audience and readership. Not necessarily on the first level of the actual reading of a book, however. Rather, this impact is cumulative in factors of secondary or tertiary activity, such as the reasons for reading a book and the how of dealing with the book after its reading. For example, it would give us empirical evidence and further food for thought if we knew what the frequency of the reading of a particular novel may be after the viewing of a film or video.

1.13 George P. Landow discusses a range of areas where electronic technology, that is, the "information highway" including hypertext, impacts the process and the outcome of the study and the pedagogy of literature. Most importantly, Landow's explanations of the nature and effect of the electronic technology and hypertext touch on both the situation of social interaction, in general, and on the shape and form of the literary system he calls the "nonlinear network" (23-27). Drawing, among others, on J. Hillis Miller, Landow, too, sees the convergence of impact based on the "limitations of print culture, the culture of the book" (28). An important result of Landow's, but also of Bolz' discussions, about the mechanism and impact of electronic technology is the suggestion that the literary system as postulated by Schmidt, for example, in its autopoiesis, conceptualized and defined within the larger Luhmannian system of communication, appears to lose its semi-permeable self-referentiality (for thoughts on print culture and its systemics, see also Kernan). In other words, the implications of the electronic highway are the decentralization and the proliferation of communicative possibilities and, at the same time, "electronic linking shifts the boundaries between one text and another as well as between the author and the readers and between the teacher and the student" (Landow 33). In my view, information technology and new media scholarship and their ramifications impact the study of literature in one area in particular and that is the area of audience studies including readership research (for work in audience studies in the context of cultural participation and systemics, see Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/audiencestudies>>). Consequently, if the audience is impacted by change and if the readership of literature is undergoing profound changes as to how literature is read and processed in Western society, the study of literature and literary theory will also undergo significant alteration. This alteration then is not only in the domain of the first order, that is in the factoring of computer use and speedy communication such as e-mail, and in the pedagogical possibilities of hypertext but more importantly in the foundations of communication, literary and other. Finally, these shifts also postulate that literary research and communication research be concentrated on field work (see, e.g., Podmore).

1.14 In returning to the most obvious operational effect of the information highway, that of the access to data, I would like to touch on a controversial question of literary scholarship, namely the problem of basic data gathering as it affects the results of scholarship. The electronic highway and new media technology have impacted and is in the process of further facilitating the access to data and the creation of reading i.e., hypertext and thus online research. On a basic level, the access to data I am referring to what Anne Proulx describes as "bulletin boards on esoteric subjects, reference works, lists and news — timely, utilitarian information, efficiently pulled through the wires" (A19). This accessibility to primary data, for instance access to the international bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America online (by scholars with access to a university library with a subscription to the MLA), should make the prevalence of repetitiveness in literary scholarship unacceptable. My contention here is that too often what is suggested as new and original in scholarship has appeared before. The researcher claiming originality does so in face of lacking sufficient primary research of his/her topic. This mechanism is facilitated by established forms and methods of presentation of argument in literary research. In literary studies one frequently encounters works which are uninformed in the sense that the author neglects similar research done elsewhere. I

am aware that many other factors, such as the lack of knowledge of languages -- particularly in North America, or power plays, for example in French intellectual circles where explicit references or footnotes to what is decided by the author to be common or "insider" knowledge are consciously omitted, when in actuality the matter is only known to the few in the particular, let's say, a Parisian inner circle -- may also play a role resulting in conscious or subconscious omission of knowledge. But often it is simply the lack of primary data accumulation and the ensuing acquisition of familiarity with the similar subject of inquiry that is the cause of the said problem. It is difficult to predict whether advances in information technology will remedy the sorry status of data access I am speaking about and, more importantly, whether the access to data online would affect a more rigorous way of literary scholarship. In my opinion, even if we cannot hope for a radical change, at least there will be, undoubtedly, an increase of literary scholars who will employ the information highway including the production and the use of scholarly material online and thus demonstrate competence of primary and secondary information gathering, production, and use, hopefully resulting in a higher level of knowledge as well. *Tasks a) define "tecto-culture" and "techno-culture" b) discuss your experience with secondary literature for any topic and with regard of a primary source of literature c) discuss E. Anne Proulx's notions with regard to reading and the computer screen d) discuss the role of theory and methodology in the study of literature and culture*

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2) Application

2.1 Reading and Analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Michael Ondaatje's and Anthony Minghella's Adaptation of the Novel to Film, *The English Patient*

For the application of the proposed framework and practice of online research above, Ondaatje's novel is used. The book is available in most libraries and in paperback in bookstores. After reading the book, return to this site and follow the tasks built-in the research paper presented here. Clearly, the research paper here is but one of many ways and possibilities of interpretation of the novel. However, the research paper is an example of thinking and methods as proposed in the theory part above and as such it is useful to exercise the said theory and method for and in online study of literature. Most, although not all, tasks in the application are to be performed online (i.e., with search engines and occasionally followed by traditional library work).

2.2 Research Paper: "Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, 'History,' and the Other"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/8/>>; and the text as follows): in this article, I discuss the historical background of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Anthony Minghella's adaption of the novel to film. From the historical background of the "Almásy theme" I relate the author's treatment of the historical data to the notion of the Other, here in the context of the suggestion that Ondaatje's concept is both specific (the cosmopolitan Central European) and universal (for other earlier and/or revised versions of this article, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature* "Cultures," "Social"; Michael Ondaatje's, "Michael Ondaatje's" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/8/>>, "Social Discourse"). *The English Patient* was published in 1992 and won the Booker Prize in the same year and it also received a number of other awards such as the Trillium Prize. In 1996 it was released as a film, produced and directed by Anthony Minghella with the cooperation of Ondaatje, and received seven Oscars. *Tasks a) define prizes for literature and list a few (for the Nobel Prize in Literature, see <<http://www.nobel.se/literature/>> b) research data about the prizes The English Patient received c) research prizes for film d) compare aspects of prizes for literature and film*

2.3 In her article, "Michael Ondaatje and the Problem of History," Ajay Heble observes that "Ondaatje has repeatedly been engaged in an attempt to incorporate marginal figures out of the historical past into a non-historical genre" (97). While this observation is written with reference to Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) and *Coming through Slaughter* (1976), it applies to *The English Patient* as well. Several characters in the novel are indeed such "marginal figures out of the historical past." At the same time, we should acknowledge that Ondaatje's method of using "marginal figures" from history does not make his prose works "historical" novels in any sense of the word (I am referring here to the genre popular since the nineteenth century in Western literatures). On the contrary, his postmodern use of the historical produces poetic fiction that "manages" history, as Heble observes: "The force of Ondaatje's texts thus resides in their ability to articulate a tension between ... an insistence on what Ondaatje calls 'the truth of fiction' -- on his imaginative account of the past as being narratively faithful to the way things might have been" (98). *Tasks a) define "historical novel" in particular re Georg [György] Lukács b) who was Georg (György) Lukács?: write a description of 300 words about Lukács's work*

2.4 *The English Patient* is a literary, that is, fictional text that succeeds in representing life -- underlining its fullness, complicatedness, inexplicability, fragmentation, and its subtextual richness which cannot be represented by traditional uses and linear narrative of historical "facts." Thus, an interpretation of the interrelation between the historical subtext, its fictional rendition, and in the latter the perception of the Other may be useful for readers and viewers of Ondaatje's work. Some critics say that Ondaatje's work, in general, is "postmodern" (see, e.g., Bjerring). To me, it is certain that his prose is lyrical and poetic, just as Alberto Manguel suggests "prose exquisite, polie avec la précision et la beauté d'une marqueterie" (80; "Exquisite prose polished with a precision and beauty of inlay" [as in woodworking]; my translation). In addition, I propose that Ondaatje's notions of

historicity, his use of historical data behind the fiction, and his notions of the Other ought to be considered in an applied analysis of the text within and with the comparative literary and cultural approach (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "From Comparative Literature" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2/>>). Ondaatje's concern with the historicity of his novel is evident on a different level too: After I had begun my research on Almásy in early 1993, I wrote a letter to the author asking him about his knowledge of the "English patient," Almásy. Ondaatje explained to me that, beyond the sources he cites in his "Acknowledgements" in *The English Patient* (305-07), he was unaware of the history of any of the characters of his novel (Ondaatje's telephone calls, 5 April and 20 April 1993). He explained that he had never heard or read about the history and/or questions concerning Almásy in Hungarian and German sources, he did not know that Lady Clayton East Clayton died in plane crash one year after her husband's death (see below), etc. On the other hand, Derek Finkle, in an article entitled "A Vow of Silence" suggests that Ondaatje has always been cognizant in most exacting terms of historical backgrounds in his writing. We simply do not know whether or how much Ondaatje researched and knew about the historical background of Almásy. As it will become evident and as I explain below, the historical background of the novel and knowledge about it is of some importance, and so from several perspectives. *Tasks a) define the concept of "postmodernity" b) research and discuss "authorial intent"*

2.5 In *The English Patient*, Almásy, the Hungarian aristocrat (if not in precise rank: see below, certainly in demeanor, behaviour, and contacts), cartographer, explorer, and military officer is depicted as the Other in the novel. The reader does not know for a long time who the "English" patient is. But when we find out that the patient is Almásy and that he may be Hungarian, the mystery of the Other is not diminished. This construction of elusiveness is both cumulative and specific. For instance, Ondaatje's use of the metaphor *félhomály* (semi-darkness, dusk, half-light, twilight) he borrows from the Hungarian -- in Hungarian poetry, this is an often-used and established concept -- can be paralleled, for instance, to a description we find in one of Almásy's texts: "The Arab children were wonderfully amused when I spoke to them in their own language. A little girl immediately asked me if I were an Egyptian. When I said no, the choir of children shouted: "You are lying, lying, you are Egyptian, we can see it from your skin!" I took my sunglasses off and asked them whether Egyptians had blue eyes. The crowd became silent and finally the little girl decided: "Your mother was Egyptian" (Almásy, *Rommel seregénél Líbyában* 87; my translation). It is the undetermined-ness, un-definability, the Otherness, that characterizes in many ways the Almásy theme of the novel and the film. But how and what is this Almásy theme? The historical data about the "English Patient" Almásy are oblique and they are analogous to the fictional Almásy of the novel -- and this may be one of the reasons of my own and many other readers' fascination with the novel and its historical background. László Ede Almásy, Count of Zsadány and Törökszentmiklós, second son of the ethnographer, zoologist, and Asia-explorer György Almásy (1864-1933), was born 22 August 1895 in the family's castle, Borostyánkő, and died in Salzburg 22 March 1951 (Schrott and Farin; Török; *Encyclopaedia Hungarica* vol. I. 41-42, 250; *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* 23). The place of his birth, Borostyánkő, today Bernstein in Burgenland, Austria, is of interest in itself as related to displacement and the Other: the Austrian federal state Burgenland is a construct of areas from provinces previously on Hungarian territory since the arrival of the *magyar*-s (Hungarians) in the Danube Basin in the ninth century A.D., an area that was ceded to Austria following the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War (for the history of Borostyánkő/Bernstein, see *Encyclopaedia Hungarica* 250). In the 1990s-2000s, Bernstein Castle has become hotel and the property of Andrea Berger, née Almásy, the daughter of László Ede [de] Almásy's brother, János (to date, the most detailed account of Almásy's background and life is John Bierman's *The Secret Life of Laszlo Almaszy: The Real English Patient* [2004], including references to Almásy's homosexuality -- or bisexuality -- that "even in today's open climate ... remains a taboo subject in Hungary" [253]; on this, see also below). *Tasks a) what is the history of the state Burgerland in Austria immediately after the First World War? b) discuss the concept of "The Other" in*

literary and culture theory

2.6 Almásy's merits include the discovery of the lost and legendary oasis Zarzura in the Lybian desert, the discovery of prehistorical paintings in the caves of the Uweinat mountains, the cartography of the Lybian desert (his name is preserved in an area called "Djebel Almasy"), the development of civil aviation in Egypt and the building of the Al-Maza airport, scientific and geographical data accumulation in Egypt, the Sudan, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Abessynia, and Tripoli, and several works published in Hungarian, French, and German about his travels, discoveries, and experiences in the Second World War (for a partial list of his texts, see the Works Cited). In his youth, he studied engineering at the University of London and was employed for a period by the Austrian car manufacturer Steyr. In 1949 he established a distance flight world record by towing a glider-plane from Paris to Cairo. Just before his death in 1951 in Salzburg, he was appointed director of the Desert Institute in Cairo (for biographical literature see Schrott and Farin; Török 1992, 21-22, 1998; *Encyclopaedia Hungarica* vol. I. 41-42, 250; *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*; *Révai nagy lexikona*; Bagnold; Brenner; Kasza; Kospach; Kröpeli; Murray; Perlez; Seubert; Weis; Schrott and Farin list scientific literature where Almásy's Africa exploration and cartography is described, 18-19). In addition to Ondaatje's novel and Ondaatje's and Minghella's film, Almásy's life inspired four more novels: John W. Eppler's *Rommel ruft Kairo. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Spions* (Gütersloh, 1959) and his *Geheimagent im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zwischen Berlin, Kabul und Kairo* (Preussisch Oldendorf, 1974), Hans von Steffens's *Salaam. Geheimkommando zum Nil 1942* (Neckargemünd, 1960), and Zsolt Török's *Salaam Almásy. Almásy László életregénye* (Salaam Almásy: A Fictional Biography of László Almásy) (Budapest, 1998) (see Schrott and Farin 19).

We can begin with the questions about Almásy's identity with regard to his aristocratic title, count. While Hungarian encyclopedias and genealogical sources do not leave any doubts about Almásy's aristocratic rank, János Gudenus and László Szentirmay -- whose book about the fate of Hungarian aristocrats after the Second World War is acknowledged as an authoritative source -- suggest that Almásy could not have been an aristocrat (I add here that while in English "aristocracy" often means nobility in general, more precisely "aristocracy" means the ranks of titled nobility such as baron, count, duke, etc., while otherwise there is "nobility" of non-titled ranks: in the history of Britain, for example, such non-titled ranks include[d] "squires"; in German, French, Austrian, Hungarian, etc., history, they are "middle nobility"). In their book, the authors take their source from Peter Bokor's book, *Zsácutca*, where Bokor writes that Count Almásy was assigned to the German army as a liaison officer and that in July 1944 he helped Vince Görgey, a Royal Hungarian army officer to escape to Berlin with the aid of the German SS (35). With reference to the question of count or no count, Gudenus and Szentirmay's suggestion is that Almásy was a member of the branch of the Almásy family that did not receive the title of count and remained in the ranks of the middle nobility (although other sources published between the two world wars list consistently this branch as "counts," e.g., *Révai nagy lexikona* Supplement A-Z, 49-50.). Gudenus and Szentirmay write: "In the aristocratic line of the Almásy family there was no László. Surely the reference is to László [de] Almásy, the renown Africa explorer and discoverer, whom the Hungarian General Staff, in his rank as a reserve officer of the Royal Hungarian Army, assigned to General Rommel as a desert expert. After the war he was exonerated and declared innocent of war crimes. In Egypt he is highly regarded and several institutes are named in his honour" (Gudenus and Szentirmay 106; my translation; for the court documents of his trial as a war criminal, see Népbíróóságok Országos Tanácsa [People's National Tribunal] No. 1428-1947, Budapest). *Tasks a) write a brief biographical sketch of "Almásy, the English patient" based on data in the novel only b) search and write a brief biography of László [de] Almásy based on other sources found online c) who was General Rommel?*

2.7 In my own research about Almásy and his title, after going through Hungarian genealogical literature, I received confirmation from Szabolcs de Vajay, a noted Hungarian genealogist and expert of the history of the Hungarian aristocracy that László and his branch of the Almásy family were not

granted the title like the other branch that received the title in 1771 (see, e.g., Kempelen I 75-78; Nagy I 19-23; Vajay, personal letter, 24 October 1994, Geneva, Switzerland). On the other hand, there is evidence that Almásy received the title orally from the last Emperor of Austria-Hungary, Karl, during or just after the ill-fated attempt of the emperor in 1921 to drive with Almásy from Switzerland to Hungary to reclaim his throne as King of Hungary. Almásy's rank and title of count was not recognized by the Hungarian parliament, the legal location where ranks and titles of nobility were passed scrutiny and registered until 1947 (see Schrott and Farin 7-8). I am not aware of any documentation suggesting that Almásy even attempted to have his title recognized legally. In any case, Almásy used the title and Hungarian sources published between the two world wars -- such as the *Révai nagy lexikona* -- listed him with the title of count. Indeed, genealogical sources refer to several cases where Emperor Karl bestowed titles and nobility orally in the last days of the monarchy; in some cases this has been recognized officially, in some it has not. In the case of Almásy, although the rank and title have not been officially recognized, their use by Almásy is not necessarily an act of usurpation, at least in my opinion. What is of interest for my discussion, again, is the elusive nature of the matter, as with many things of and about Almásy, in real life and in Ondaatje's novel. Questions and misinformation about Almásy abound; for example, in the otherwise authoritative and often-quoted book about German military counter-espionage in the Second World War, the author, Gert Buchheit, writes:

Who was this Count Almaszy? Laszlo Almaszy, Count of Szombathely, was born about 1895 in the castle of Bernstein in Burgenland, then still in Hungary. The Almaszys are ancient Hungarian magnates, whose title of count was abrogated after their participation in the 1849 Kossuth revolution. Despite of it all, the Almaszys were committed monarchists. Janos, the older one of the two brothers, married a sister of Prince Esterházy, who almost went bankrupt after he bought the stables of the exiled Emperor Karl in 1918 for safe-keeping until the return of the monarch. It was in this milieu that Laszlo Almaszy grew up. He became a commissioned officer, a well-known gentleman rider and later an exceptional gentleman driver. It was in this capacity that he participated in the epoch-making drive from Mombasa to Cairo with Prince Liechtenstein. When Emperor Karl attempted a Putsch from Switzerland [into Hungary], Almaszy drove his monarch in a secret, thirty-hour drive through Austria. (Buchheit 234; my translation; the original German is without Hungarian diacritics)

2.8 Buchheit further recounts Almásy's desert travels and discoveries in Africa, his military career, his war years and intelligence work with General Rommel. He closes with "And what has happened to Count Almaszy? He is supposed to have died a few years after the Second World War in Egypt" (Buchheit 238; my translation). Buchheit's description suggests that he did not do much research on Almásy and he is unfamiliar with Hungarian history, that is, when it comes to detail. For instance, nobility in Hungary could not be abrogated for any reason (for a historical and legal explanation of this, see Ölyvedi Vad 68-75); the Almaszys could not possibly have been counts of the city of Szombathely, since the Middle Ages the seat of a bishopric; Buchheit also confused Sir Robert Clayton East Clayton (baronet) with an engineer by the name of P.A. Clayton, who was a companion of Almásy and the baronet (see Buchheit 239; Almásy, *Récentes...* 43), etc. Nevertheless, the interesting factor here is again the question about Almásy's elusive identity, an analogue to his fictional counterpart in the novel. Plus, if it is indeed true that Ondaatje was not aware of Almásy's historical data as he claims, his construction of the fictional Almásy in its elusiveness and the Other thus overlapping with the said historical data confronts us with a remarkable coincidence of constructions of history and identity. *Tasks a) define "identity" in the context of national, cultural, racial, gender, etc., perspectives*

2.9 I continue: Along with the questions about his origin and as yet not researched activities of his German counter-intelligence activities with General Rommel, Almásy's historical life includes curious incidents that point to an interesting marginality strikingly similar to his fictionalized story in Ondaatje's novel. Of interest are, for example, Almásy's own chapter five of his *Récentes explorations*, "Herodote et les récentes explorations du Desert" or his discovery of Hungarians who settled in Egypt in the sixteenth and again in the eighteenth centuries on an island on the Nile: another aspect of "history," the Other, and elusiveness. Almásy's ethnographic and anthropological discovery was the

result of a chance encounter with an Arab sheik, who, upon learning that Almásy was Hungarian explained to him that he, too, was "Hungarian" (*magyar*). As it turns out, there were in 1996 about 14,000 such *magararab*-s (Hungarian Arabs) in Egypt in the areas of the Wadi Halfa, Cairo, Assuan, and Kom Ombo, descendants of two waves of immigration: The first in the sixteenth century consisting of soldiers captured during the Ottoman-Turkish and Hungarian wars and settled there by Suleiman II and the second in the seventeenth century of settlers who moved there on their own (see *Encyclopaedia Hungarica* Vol. 2, 389; see also Almásy, *Levegőben ... homokon* 104-08). Almásy first traveled to Africa in 1926 when he organized a hunting expedition with Prince Antal Esterházy to the Sudan. In 1929 he organized another expedition with Prince Ferdinand von Liechtenstein, this time by automobile from Mombasa to Alexandria. In 1931 he attempted to fly from Hungary to Egypt with a small airplane but crashed in Syria (yet another "coincidence" between history and fiction?). His serious and scientifically-oriented cartographic, historical, and anthropological travels on the Nile with Sir Robert Clayton began after 1931. Clayton was "a young aristocrat taken by sports, who had a pilot's licence, and who was out to do adventure. Sir Robert came to see me in Hungary and offered his collaboration enthusiastically" (Almásy, *Récentes explorations* 4; my translation). Robert Clayton was born in 1908, fifth and last baronet of Marden and of Hall Place (*Burke's Peerage* 535). He was a British aristocrat who was interested in geographical discovery and in travel. Immediately after his marriage on 29 February 1932, the young baronet "set out with Count L.E. de Almasy to explore the unknown are of the Lybian Desert north of the Gilf Kebir, and to find the legendary lost oasis called Zorzura. After being lost for several days in the desert and suffering hardships the expedition returned without achieving its object" (*The Times* [6 July 1932]; the source includes a full account of the adventure, a map, and illustrations). In a few weeks Sir Robert was dead. He developed a disease similar to infantile paralysis and although respiration was induced by an automatic apparatus, he deceased on 1 September 1932 at the age of 24 (*The Times*, "Obituary" 12).

Zorzura is mentioned by Herodotus and in the *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, in the latter as the "city of copper." And then, in 1933, Almásy and his group discovered the oasis Zorzura: the discovery was presented in 1934 in London, at the British Geographical Society's meeting, by Wing-Commander H.W.G.J. Penderel and Dr. Richard A. Bermann, Almásy's companions (Bermann 450-63). The members of the successful expedition were Almásy, Dr. László Kádár, a geographer and geologist of the University of Debrecen (Hungary), Hans Casparius, a photographer, the Jewish-Austrian journalist and writer Dr. Richard Bermann, Commander Penderel, two Sudanese chauffeurs, and a cook. Bermann, in turn, is also of interest: the surname Bermann was a pseudonym, his real surname was Arnold Höllriegel, and he was a well-known author in Austria who died in exile in the USA in 1939. He published the description of the discovery in Zurich in 1938, in a volume entitled *Zorzura. Die Oase der kleinen Vögel* (*Zorzura: The Oasis of the Small Birds*) (on Höllriegel, see *Richard A. Bermann alias Arnold*). In Penderel's and Bermann's descriptions of the expedition, it was Almásy's research and guidance that made the expedition a success (see Bermann 453). Kádár published his memoirs in 1972 in which there is a detailed description of the Zorzura expedition and Almásy's work and activities. *Tasks a) define the genre of travel and exploration literature b) find novels about travel and exploration published today*

2.10 Now to continue with historical data about Lady Clayton, the fictional lover of Almásy in both the novel and the film: the historical data about Lady Clayton East Clayton born Dorothy Mary Durrant (Katherine Clifton in the novel) is less oblique than those of Almásy, but they are equally striking in the context of the novel. For example, for the fictional Katherine Clifton "there was a line back to her ancestors that was tactile, whereas he [Almásy] had erased the path he had emerged from" (*The English Patient* 170). Dissimilar to Almásy, the historical data about Lady Clayton is clear: she was "a very experienced pilot ... [she] was also a talented sculptor, and her home, as well as the vicarage of Leverstock Green [her father, Arthur Durrant, was the vicar there], contained many examples of her work" (*The Times*, "Obituary" 12). She accompanied her husband in several desert expeditions and

after his death she expressed that "I am only carrying on my husband's work. We always did this sort of thing together. He left with his work unfinished. I want to try and finish it off" (*The Times*, "Obituary," 12). However, her own expedition in the Lybian desert after the death of her husband, where she flew her own plane, was unsuccessful. There is no indication in the accounts whether she accomplished this expedition with Almásy; in her brief account of the expedition, she writes that she was accompanied by a Commander Roundell (*The Times*, "The Lost Oasis" 11). That Lady Clayton and Almásy knew each other from previous expeditions with her husband is obvious; however, in 1933 when Lady Clayton East Clayton organized an expedition with Commander Roundell, Almásy and his group had a parallel expedition at the same time (see Penderel 455; Bermann 457-58). After her return to England in May 1933 from this expedition, she led another expedition to Lapland. Five days after her return to England, on 15 September 1933, she fell to her death during a short flight at Brooklands. Inexplicably, Lady Clayton appeared to have climbed out of the cockpit and fell out of the plane (*The Times*, "Lady Clayton Killed" 10f). The accident has never been explained although an official inquest was held (*The Times*, "The Brooklands Accidents" 19a). Lady Clayton Dorothy Durrant's scientific interests and knowledge, her interests in aviation, her artistic talents as a sculptor, and her risk-taking attest to her exceptionality as an individual and as a woman of her time. It may be of interest why her friends nicknamed her "Peter" (*The Times*, "Lady Clayton East Clayton. A Correspondent Writes" 14c). These exceptional qualities, in the context of her time, are not recognizable in *The English Patient*, in the novel or in the film: Ondaatje, evidently, did not create Katherine Clifton based on her historical persona. *Tasks a) define the concepts "expatriate," "emigrant," "immigrant," "refugee," "exile," and "ethnic."*

2.11 Almásy's history becomes difficult to chart after 1939, when the Second World War and its preceding political and societal upheavals began to wreck havoc everywhere. In 1936 and 1939, Almásy was a flying instructor in Egypt and this is the time when he was active in the development of Egyptian aviation. However, already in 1935 his activities in Northern Africa became an issue with the secret and intelligence services of England, Egypt, and Italy, as well as Germany (see Shaw; Schrott and Farin 12-17). As we know, Almásy was a reserve officer of the Royal Hungarian Army and he was first drafted to active duty, followed by an assignment to the German army, to the "Desert Fox," General Rommel, who was campaigning on his mythologized battles in North Africa. Obviously, Almásy must have been assigned to desert duty owing to his expertise of the Sahara and Northern Africa. Most sources about Almásy's activities in the latter part of the 1930s and then during the war when he was with the German army appear to agree that it is virtually impossible to establish whether Almásy was or was not a Nazi sympathiser although there is evidence that he approved of Hitler's economic and social policies (see Schrott and Farin). At the same time -- that elusiveness again -- Raoul Schrott and Michael Farin write when describing the film made of the 1926 Sudan expedition of Almásy and Prince Liechtenstein that while the film and the people in it exude the arrogance of colonialism, only Almásy appears camera-shy and detached (8). There are, however, voices who tell another story as I will describe below. As to my notion of the "Almásy theme" of Almásy and Otherness, Almásy's history with General Rommel is equally suggestive as well as elusive: he had, allegedly, a homosexual relationship with the general.... Rommel's and Almásy's relationship has been reported after the release of the film in 1996 by a nephew of the general, who lives in Italy today (see Schrott and Farin 16). This has been confirmed, third-hand, from another source: I came into correspondence with one Richard Bond of Arlington, Massachusetts, whose great-uncle, Marshall Bond Sr. -- brother-in-law of the industrialist William Boeing -- met Almásy and Count Zsigmond Széchenyi in 1927 in Egypt when Bond was on an expedition there (see Bond Jr., *Gold Hunter: The Adventures of Marshall Bond* 181). Richard Bond's father was Marshall Bond Jr., son of Marshall Bond Sr., whose grandfather was Judge Hiram G. Bond. The Bonds have had a fascinating history altogether and much of their stories and achievements are written down in Marshall Bond Jr.'s books. For example, Marshall Bond Sr.'s dog "Jack" while he was prospecting in the Klondike in 1898 is "Buck" in Jack London's *The Call of the*

Wild, in which the story begins in the Santa Clara Valley near San Francisco on Judge Miller's fruit ranch: "Judge Miller" is of course Judge Hiram G. Bond. Marshall Bond Sr., an engineer and outdoorsman, was hired in 1927 by a newspaper to write a report on travelling by riverboat from Aswan to Khartoum. According to Richard Bond, based on his recollections of his father's stories he was told, Almásy seized the opportunity of the contact with the American in order to attempt to raise funds for his expeditions but neither he (Marshall Bond Sr.) nor the Boeings invested in Almásy's ventures because they considered him unreliable (although a socially most acceptable and delightful person). A further although much later connection between the Marshall Bond Jr. and the Almásys occurred in 1963, when Marshall met János Almásy (László's brother) in Czechoslovakia on a camping trip with other aristocratic companions and then visited him in 1964 in Bernstein Castle (see Bond, *Adventures with Peons, Princes, and Tycoons* 108-12) and again between Marshall Bond Jr. and Jean Howard, the British intelligence officer assigned to Almásy during the Second World War (Bond, *Adventures with Peons, Princes, and Tycoons* 110-12). Richard Bond also wrote that according to his uncle, the personal papers of Almásy, kept in Szombathely, were destroyed during the war in a fire. As to the story of Almásy's homosexuality, Richard Bond wrote that this was reported to his grandfather by Count Karl Coudenhove in a letter already in 1927 and that Almásy has always been very discreet about it (Richard Bond, e-mail correspondence July 1997, Arlington; unfortunately, Bond indicated to me that he does not have the letters). Bond also writes that "Jean Howard the analyst assigned to study him by the British Secret Service however considered him an enigma. He seems to me politically to have been a loyal Hungarian conservative serving an accommodationist government. As a scientific explorer before the war he had worked for whoever paid best. Laszlo Almasy could be described both literally and figuratively as a used car dealer" (note: Jean Howard's forthcoming work on the history of Second World War British espionage and Almásy has been announced in Schrott and Farin [18]; I am not aware of its publication). Personally, I think that Bond's assessment may be right on, despite the cultural slippage that the metaphorical figure of the used car salesman did not exist during Almásy's times: the figure and its associations are specifically US-American. On the other hand, I consider such an equation a compliment as I am conscious of the proverbial dislike of the Hungarian middle and upper classes -- that is, the gentry, the aristocracy, and much of the bureaucracy and intelligencia -- of anything "business." *Tasks a) who was Jack London? b) who was Count Karl Coudenhove-Kalergi?*

2.12 My article about the historical background of Ondaatje's novel appeared in 1994 in the journal *ECW: Essays on Canadian Writing* (see "Michael Ondaatje"). In the research leading up to the writing of the paper, in August 1993 I sent Ondaatje a copy of my then forthcoming article about Almásy's historical background and thus he was aware of Almásy's history: I met Ondaatje briefly at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 1993 where he was invited for the release of the German translation of *The English Patient* and he confirmed that he has received and read the paper. It is thus a mystery to me why Ondaatje and Minghella would not anticipate and consequently attempt to preempt the storm that erupted with the release of the film. The storm about and international media coverage of the film -- including massive activity on the world wide web -- was the allegation that Almásy was a nazi and that Minghella and Ondaatje should not have glorified such a figure, no matter how minor. Obviously, this was and is a serious and important aspect of the novel and the film and I will now discuss some of its implications as I see them. One of the most interesting aspects of the novel to me is Ondaatje's construction of a fictional individual, who is in-between and peripheral and the consequences of this locus, namely Almásy's rejection of homogeneity, national self-referentiality, and its exclusionary results. Personally, I am painfully aware of the cultural and pragmatic results of nationalism, be that German, Hungarian, US-American, Israeli, Arab, African, or wherever this appears, and ubiquitously so. While I understand and admit that the preservation of national identity may have had justification in history, in contemporary times this belief construction leads us nowhere except to the like of the Tutsi and Hutu wars or the wars of the former Yugoslavia. In my opinion,

contemporary culture demonstrates that the most interesting and valuable objects of art -- and I dare to put this type of valuation on cultural products -- are those which emanate from in-between, multi-cultured creators like an Ondaatje. If we had empirical evidence on the most important contemporary novels, for instance, I propose that a very high number of texts were by thematics of non-hegemony content and produced by culturally and individually in-between and non-mainstream, that is, peripheral, authors. Contemporary culture and cultural production suggests that national self-referentiality and prioritization towards cultural homogeneity should be a matter of the past (of course, reality proves this otherwise but that is another story). Again, to me Ondaatje's novel represents the possible world of the non-nationalistic, non-self-referential Central European Hungarian -- a paradigm, of course -- being fully aware of the rarity of such in real life. This is the more outstanding and worthy of further attention in my mind because of the aforementioned controversy that erupted with regard to the historical background of Ondaatje's fictional hero, Almásy. In brief, I very much like Ondaatje's invention of the "international bastard" Almásy and the suggestion that there are Central Europeans and Hungarians who step outside, consciously, of the nationalist and self-referential paradigm so common and stereotypical of them (for the notion of "international bastards," see Ondaatje in Wachtel, Ondaatje, and Gibson 62). *Tasks a) search and define the notion of Central Europe b) compare the concepts "nationalism" and "patriotism" c) find data about the history of the film, The English Patient, incl. its Oscars*

2.13 Elizabeth Pathy Salett published in the Wednesday 4 December 1996 issue of the *Washington Post* an opinion piece, "Casting a Pall on a Movie Hero." Salett describes her father's -- who was consul-general of Hungary in Egypt at Cairo before the Second World War -- encounters with Almásy in Cairo and concludes: "*The English Patient* calls itself a work of fiction. But in fact, what the film's director-writer does is to take a real story and a real person, minimize the meaning of his activities and recast him as a passionate, loving hero. *The English Patient*, which was constructed as a beautiful, romantically lyrical film, is amoral and ahistorical. The film's presentation of a moral equivalency between the Germans and Allies trivializes the significance of the choices men like Almásy made and the enormous consequences of their actions and alliances" (C6). Salett's opinion of the film demonstrates several factors which have bearing on my discussion here: 1) An audience response to the interrelationship of "fact and fiction"; 2) A personal opinion and perception, where fiction is rated below historical "accuracy" and "fact"; and 3) The publication of the opinion in an internationally known and read newspaper demonstrates the systemic and media-accorded importance to artistic representation of life. It remains without saying that the apparent success of the film influences the popularity and sale of the novel, as the case is in most instances of filmic adaptation of a literary text. This systemic factor with regard to the interrelationship between different media processing of the same artistic product is significant by itself. But it has further dimensions: with regard to the perception of ethical dimensions as suggested by Salett, Ondaatje responded to the criticism in a letter to *The Globe and Mail*:

From Homer to *Richard III* to the present, literature has based its imaginative stories on historical event. We read those epics and literary works to discover, not the facts of the Trojan War, but the human emotions discovered in the story. If one writes a novel and pretends it is nonfiction or makes a film and pretends it is a documentary, then the writer or filmmaker should be tested. However, *The English Patient* came out a few years ago as a novel and the film version is not a documentary. I wrote about an enigmatic desert explorer whose role when World War II broke out was to be a betrayer. In reality the facts are still murky and still uncertain -- to some historians he was a spy, some others think he was a double agent. Whatever "spying" he did was witnessed and watched by the British Secret Service. *The English Patient* is not a history lesson but an interpretation of human emotions -- love, desire, betrayals in war and betrayals in peace -- in a historical time. It holds no sympathy for Nazis, in fact the most shocking scene in the film depicts a Nazi torture. It is about forgiveness, how people come out of a war. There are four other central characters who reflect and qualify the character of Almásy. The facts of the history behind *The Crucible* or *Richard III* is the raw material often chronicled by historians with a political dogma or party line to protect. Some are true, some are false. (Compare the histories of the War of the Roses or the Second World War written at the time and those written now -- and they still continue to be revised.) It is what Shakespeare or Arthur Miller have written out of it that teaches us about the human condition. If a novelist or dramatist or filmmaker is to

be censored or factually tested every time he or she writes from historical event, then this will result in the most uninspired works, or it just might be safer for those artists to resort to cartoons and fantasy. (Ondaatje qtd. in Saunders C5)

2.14 Salett's and Ondaatje's different opinion on the question of art in social discourse, is of course a crucial matter. It is not my intention to engage in the controversy whether *The English Patient* is a distortion of history or whether it is justified as it is fiction. Suffice it to say that in my opinion both Ondaatje and Salett have a point. As Ondaatje suggests and as we know, fictional descriptions of Napoleon or Julius Caesar have had the affect of mythologization in a positive context when alternate opinion may be that they were mass murderers of the first order. Ondaatje is right in his opinion that the novel and the film are both fiction as artistic expression. Salett is right in her opinion in the context of social discourse that the glorification of an individual -- even if in fiction -- who, under whatever circumstances, supported Hitler may be ethically questionable: the history of Hitler is unique in its horrors and too immediate, too near in time, and too raw for any audience still and hopefully will remain so. On the other hand, and here Salett's point of view gains on validity significantly, Ondaatje and Minghella could or should have paid attention to the said historical background concerning Almásy, as I suggested previously. The fact that the potentially explosive implication of the protagonist's historical background was not paid attention to may be the result of either Ondaatje's opinion that fiction is fiction and this preempts any and all criticism of historical "facts" or it may have been a result of the rule that "most studies in film adaptation do concentrate on the creative processes involved, and especially the contribution of the film director, rather than that of other members of the team, e.g. the screenwriter" (Remael 390). In both cases, however, *The English Patient* case is illustrative. Despite the controversy that erupted around the main character's "historical" role and possible nazi sympathies, the film received the award of best picture at the Oscars of 1997. Personally, I question the award, based on my agreement with such critics as Salett and the problematics of mythologizing the "wrong" marginal figure. On the other hand, the Hungarian count is marginal to the point where we cannot be absolutely certain about his nazi sympathies. And thus we can observe, again, that the conventions of fiction and art and the systemic properties of artistic communication mediate the "historicity" of "facts." In other words, fiction -- whether in word or image -- claims its own space and its own system. On the other hand, this is not the last word about *The English Patient*: only time will be the true judge. Thus, ultimately, "history" will decide about both the artistic value of the novel and the film and whether social responsibility is or should be a factor in the case of *The English Patient*. *Tasks a) search and discuss the matter of "novel to film" and "adaptation of literature to film"*

2.15 In closing my discussion, I take a brief excursion to yet a further aspect of Otherness of the Almásy theme of the novel and the film, namely that of ethnicity. Winfried Siemerling, in his article, "Das andere Toronto. Mündliches Wissen in Michael Ondaatjes *In the Skin of a Lion*," deals with the question of ethnicity and its situation in English-Canadian historical discourse. His argument, namely that Ondaatje subverts the English-Canadian mainstream in his novels by drawing attention to the Other, is explained thus: "The experience of the immigrant does not yet infiltrate the public perception of the host culture with the acquisition of the foreign tongue by the individual. The interweaving of the searcher and narrator Patrick with the world of the foreign carries the fictional imprint of what was left out until now from possibilities of historicity while the success of the novel also builds bridges ... in Ondaatje's writing is that possibility of history raised in an awakened voice that was left in the dark in the dominant texts of history" (Siemerling 180-81; my translation). In *The English Patient*, Almásy's fictional position, that is, his indeterminability and elusiveness, overlaps with his "real" position of historical marginality and Otherness. This characteristic has extended to Almásy's position in the available critical readings of the novel, too. For instance, Kip has been noted as an example of Ondaatje's exploration of Otherness; yet the critical reaction to Almásy's position in the novel has been lacking. Val Ross's editorial in the *Globe and Mail*, "Minefields of the Mind," draws interesting and

well-crafted observations about the novel. Ross points to "Kip, the young Indian," and Caravaggio, "an immigrant whose name is rich with sensual allusions, whose name sounds as absurd among the Anglo-Scots of Toronto as, say, 'Ondaatje'" (Ross C1-C2), but she makes no reference to Almásy. Similarly, Alberto Manguel's article, "Le poète anonyme" in the journal *L'Actualité* or Douglas Barbour's "Michael Ondaatje's Sensuous Prose Seductive" in *The Edmonton Journal* -- to point to some selected instances -- have no reference to Almásy. Somehow I doubt that this is a result of not wanting to preempt the readers by giving away the story. Could it be that we are dealing with yet another situation of the Other, a situation that the Almásy theme represents as I discussed here, in his historical situation as well as in Ondaatje's the novel and, then, again, on the landscape of criticism?

Tasks a) discuss social responsibility and literature b) discuss "ethnicity" c) discuss "ethnicity in literature" d) write a research paper of 3000 words on a topic in consultation with your instructor

Note: The above text is a revised and updated version of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The Study of Literature and Culture Online: Theory and Application." *English 475: Literature and Hypertext*. Ed. Joseph Pivato. Athabasca: Athabasca U, 2002. 102-35.

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Appendix

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