

**BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF THE
LITERARY CHRONOTOPE:
REFLECTIONS, APPLICATIONS, PERSPECTIVES**

Nele Bemong, Pieter Borghart, Michel De Dobbeleer,
Kristoffel Demoen, Koen De Temmerman & Bart Keunen (eds.)



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Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives

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Eulogizing Realism: Documentary Chronotopes in Nineteenth-Century Prose Fiction

Pieter Borghart & Michel De Dobbeleer

In this contribution we try to probe the generic chronotope of realism, which, judging from its astonishing productivity in the nineteenth century and the profound impact it has had on literary evolution and theory ever since¹, can be designated nothing less than a hallmark in the general history of narrative. Although we are primarily concerned with the description of the principles of construction underlying the realistic, “documentary”, chronotope, we would also like to touch upon some of its rather evident, but still somewhat under-discussed similarities with the genre of historiography. For, despite an abundance of what could be called “touches of realism” in a plethora of literary texts and genres (both narrative and poetic) since the very beginnings of literary history itself, the direct germs of realism as it developed into a particular narrative genre or *generic chronotope* during the nineteenth century may well be situated in “prescientific” historiographical works such as those of Gibbon or Michelet.²

Bakhtin, as is apparent from FTC and BSHR, seems not to have thought of this hypothetical connection. However, it is noteworthy that in explaining the process of development of new narrative genres, he attaches far more importance to time than to space (e.g. “[...] in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time”; FTC: 85), and what historiography and realism have in common is precisely a “historical” – i.e. an irreversible, linear, organic – conception of time. For this reason, we consider it useful to draw in passing some preliminary parallels between the narrative strategies of our main subject, the nineteenth-century realist novel, and a number of construction principles underlying prescientific historiographical works.

The Assimilation of Historical Time and the Concept of the Documentary Chronotope

In FTC Bakhtin concludes his historico-typological survey of generic chronotopes with a discussion of the idyll. At first sight this may come as a surprise, given Bakhtin’s teleological view of literary history (see Bemong and Borghart in this volume): for both in FTC and BSHR he repeatedly points to the time-space configuration of nineteenth-century realism as the criterion *par excellence* for evaluating former generic chronotopes: “Our criterion is the assimilation of real historical time and the assimilation of historical man that takes place in that time” (BSHR: 19; see also

BSHR: 21; FTC: 84, 85, 251-2). A closer look at both essays, however, promptly reveals that the apparent absence of any discussion of chronotopic features characteristic of nineteenth-century realism is severely misleading. On the level of generic chronotopes, for instance, Morson and Emerson have rightly observed that in the first chapter of FTC, “[...] Bakhtin seems to be not only describing the chronotope of the Greek romance but to be eulogizing its implicit opposite, the nineteenth-century novel” (1990: 383-4). Furthermore, dispersed throughout the central section of BSHR entitled “Time and space in Goethe’s work” (BSHR: 25-54), the Russian scholar comes up with a number of principles of construction underlying narratives in the realist tradition (see below). Finally, we must not forget that Bakhtin’s discussion of minor chronotopes in the “Concluding Remarks” of FTC also touches upon important aspects of nineteenth-century realism (247-8). In this respect, his definition of the chronotope of parlors and salons is emblematic:

Most important in all this is the weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private side of life, with the secrets of the boudoir; the interweaving of petty, private intrigues with political and financial intrigues, the interpenetration of state with boudoir secrets, of historical sequences with the everyday and biographical sequences. Here the graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical and everyday time are concentrated and condensed; at the same time they are intertwined with each other in the tightest possible fashion, fused into unitary markers of the epoch. The epoch becomes not only graphically visible [space], but narratively visible [time] (FTC: 247).

What, then, are these chronotopic features identified by Bakhtin as the common denominator of nineteenth-century realism?³ Generally, in the realist world construction time, space, plot and characters constitute an organic unity, being organized in such a manner that the resulting chronotope can only be designated “dynamic”. Its most important characteristic is the assimilation of *real historical time*:

The ability to *see time*, to *read time*, in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event – that is the ability to read in everything *signs that show time in its course* [...]. (BSHR: 25; emphasis in original)

Being the organizing axis of this particular chronotope, such a conception of time⁴ has far-reaching implications for the other narrative categories as well: *space* ceases to be mere background and becomes identifiable with a particular historical era to such an extent that “present, past and future [are] linked by a process of genuine growth, which means that change does not take place in an arbitrary fashion (not just anything can happen)” (Morson and Emerson 1990: 405). It follows that with regard to *plot structure*, the fusion of historical time and space significantly confines the range of narrative possibilities: as the fictional world is mainly ruled by social and historical

factors, the character's radius of action is strongly dependent on the conditions of the epoch under consideration. Furthermore, in maintaining close interaction with the fictional world, the *protagonists* gradually undergo a genuine evolution: "Individual people genuinely develop, which is to say, their changes are not simply the revelation of qualities given from the outset [...] People do not develop the way a seed grows into a plant; their choices at every moment reshape them bit by tiny bit" (Morson 1991: 1083). However, we must not lose sight of the fact that both plot and character evolution in realism are not wholly dependent upon historical and social forces: protagonists in fact retain a certain "capacity to surprise" (Morson and Emerson 1990: 405), which ensures change and thus evolution of the fictional world at hand. In sum, "the plot [...] and the characters do not enter [the fictional world] from the outside, are not invented to fit the landscape, but are unfolded in it as though they were present from the very beginning" (BSHR: 49).

When discussing this particular world construction, it is advisable to bring the so-called "documentary chronotope" into play. Admittedly, the history of this chronotope is young and largely confined to Flemish scholarship. Although one may retrace several major chronotopes in Bakhtin's work (see Bemong and Borghart in this volume), the term "documentary chronotope" never occurs in it. To the best of our knowledge, the notion appears for the first time in 1997 at a conference of documentary film makers in Chicago, where Michael Chanan introduced it to give a new, Bakhtinian underpinning to some observations about the differences (and similarities) between documentary and fictional screen space.⁵ A clear definition, however, is not supplied in Chanan's paper. (Indeed, the term itself appears only in its title.)

In a more narrow literary context, the term was coined autonomously by Bart Keunen in a monograph dealing with the representation of time and space in big-city novels (2000; see also 2001: 424-5), where it indicates the world construction typical of nineteenth-century realism (2000: 88-95). The documentary aspect lies in the fact that, within the paradigm of realism, the fictional world is meant to be perceived as a construction which is immediately recognizable for the reader because of its close, "documentary" resemblance to the extra-literary world.⁶ Hence, the narrative structure allows extensive descriptions of everyday scenes. This descriptive tenet relies on all sorts of cultural (e.g. political, economical, scientific, religious) "documents", functioning as symbolic references to collective historical processes.

A few years later, Keunen's term was adopted in Borghart's study of nineteenth-century naturalism (2006).⁷ Since Borghart's corpus is not confined, as is Keunen's, to (big-)city novels but also takes into consideration naturalist countryside fiction, the scope of the term is widened from industrializing and urbanizing contexts to rural ones (2006: 43). In these contexts, the adjective "documentary" should be understood in both passive and active senses: on the one hand, documentary chronotopes are primarily based on cultural documents and coherent references to social reality ("documented"), while on the other they also provide the reader with a certain

amount of specialized knowledge about contemporary society (“documenting”) (Hamon 1975). The world view expressed by documentary chronotopes in essence derives from a positivist conception of human beings and society. Nineteenth-century realism typically emphasizes the determination – at least to some degree – of human agency by natural, social, and historical forces, while simultaneously also propagating a rational belief in scientific progress and social improvement.⁸

Nele Bemong, for her part, adopts the term throughout her investigations of the Belgian historical novel. Interestingly, she observes “that the *documentary chronotope* [...] interconnects the [nineteenth-century] historical novel to the adjacent system of historiography” (under review; emphasis in original). Different from Keunen’s and Borghart’s approaches, this last statement seems to widen the range of the notion from fiction to non-fiction, a scope that Michael Chanan must have had in mind when opposing documentary time-space to fictional time-space (in films, see above). Hence, the documentary chronotope might indeed be “at work” in fictional as well as in non-fictional, for example historiographical, texts. Not accidentally, realism, in fiction, and historiography, in non-fiction, turn out to be genres *par excellence* that provide us with “documentary” passages (or “documentary motifs”, see below, note 17).

Be that as it may, the aforementioned principles of construction characteristic of documentary chronotopes still do not provide the necessary analytical tools for identifying realist (and/or historiographical) world constructions on the basis of sheer textual analysis. As a matter of fact, however ubiquitous the concept of realism in critical discourse over the past century and a half, surprisingly little attention has been paid to its rhetorical dimension in terms of the narrative strategies used.⁹ For this reason, we propose to revisit Philippe Hamon’s well-known article “Un discours contraint” – to date still the most profound attempt at establishing the poetics of realism – according to the constructivist *representans-representamen* dichotomy discussed by Bemong and Borghart earlier in this volume. In his study Hamon endeavors to describe, apparently on an arbitrary basis, fifteen divergent thematic and narratological strategies (*representans*) that – under the express condition of their being sufficiently coexistent – he considers to be characteristic of (nineteenth-century) realism (*representamen*).¹⁰ The advantage of a reassessment from a Bakhtinian perspective resides in the fulfillment of one of the main principles of modern comparative literature, namely the demand not “[...] to compare isolated elements of literary texts” (textual strategies) “as long as we do not know of their place and function in any of the substructures of these texts” (generic chronotope) (Fokkema 1974: 55; see also Miner 1987: 137-8).

Narratological and Thematic Features of Documentary Chronotopes

Rather than dryly enumerate mere textual strategies, we think it appropriate to adopt a more lively approach. Thus, in the following paragraphs the features of realism identified by Hamon are reconfigured from a Bakhtinian point of view, occasionally being confronted with the “devices” of historiography. Serving throughout as the main example is *The Murderess* (1903) by the Greek writer Alexandros Papadiamantis.¹¹ This masterpiece tells the story of Khadoula, or Frangoyannou, an old woman from the lower classes who, on the basis of the harsh living conditions of the poor and the inferior social position of women in nineteenth-century Greece, eventually begins to murder female babies and children because they have no prospects in life.

In order to realize a time scheme that mirrors *real historical time*, a first important principle of construction – although one strikingly absent from Hamon’s study – is embodied in the persistent use of a coherent series of temporal indicators that allow the reader at any moment to determine perfectly the narrative’s temporal progress. Even though the author of the *Murderess* opts for a division into seventeen short chapters, judging from the aggregate of temporal references the novel seems to fall into three larger units, each of which takes place on the island of Skiathos during the period between January and May somewhere in the second half of the nineteenth century (Farinou-Malamatari 1987: 48-51). The first episode (I-VII), ending with the discovery of Frangoyannou’s first victim, encompasses three sleepless nights in January in which the old woman sits beside the cradle of her newborn but already ill granddaughter, while mentally re-enacting her entire miserable life.¹² The second part (VIII-X), in which Khadoula commits her second and third child-murders, comprises a day shortly before and a day shortly after Easter. Finally, the last episode (XI-XVII) recounts Frangoyannou’s escape from the local authorities and covers a period of six entire days, four before and two after her final crime. Within this overall chronology, an abundance of temporal markers in turn neatly structures smaller narrative units such as particular days or nights.

More importantly, however, than such a formal analysis of story-time, Bakhtin’s conception of the chronotope above all emphasizes the interconnectedness of time and *space*, in which the latter is supposed to become “[...] charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (FTC: 84). The assimilation of real historical time involves the ability “to *read time*, in the spatial whole of the world”, that is “to read in everything *signs that show time in its course*” (BSHR: 25; emphasis in original). In this respect, an essential characteristic of realist narratives is their being embedded in a specific cultural historical – including geographical – context (Hamon 1982: No. 3; see also Chevrel 1997: 360-2). In *The Murderess* this embeddedness is not only apparent from an abundance of references to contemporary or recent Greek history, all sorts of popular customs and traditions prevalent during the nineteenth century as well as a detailed topography of Skiathos (Erselman 1954); some passages also sug-

gest that within the boundaries of the novel's story-time the island is undergoing a remarkable transition from a traditional, closed community to a more modern, open society. Inevitably, such a process entails a number of difficulties:

At that time, with the development of commerce and communications, the morals of that little out of the way place began to relax somewhat. Strangers from other 'more civilized' parts of Greece, either Government employees or merchants, were importing new liberal ideas on all matters. According to them it was foolish to be modest and decent, and silly to be sober and sensible. Depravity and lust were 'natural things'. (1977: 100-1)

Likewise, the ideas of emancipation taught to young girls at school come into conflict with the established social hierarchy, while traditional medicine starts to encounter competition from skilled doctors from abroad (Rigatos 1996). Since such passages help to construct the impression of a contemporary fictional world *in evolution*, they should be regarded as "[...] a synecdoche for the sum total of socio-historical developments" (Keunen 2001: 425).¹³ It goes without saying that prescientific historiographical texts are equally engrafted on a particular geographical and historical context, which is usually shown in its ("plotted", see below) development too.

Detailed descriptions of the daily hustle and bustle, which firmly anchor characters in a specific socio-professional environment (Hamon 1982: No. 7, 12) and are characterized by the usage of technical, transparent vocabulary (Hamon 1982: No. 11), serve a similar function. From a narratological point of view two possibilities exist: either such passages are paradigmatically organized as traditional (static or dynamic) descriptions that momentarily suspend the narrative sequence, or they are syntagmatically inserted into the story as genuine, if insignificant, plot events (Hamon 1982: No. 15).¹⁴ Whatever the narrative form they assume, apart from their "documentary" function (Hamon 1982: No. 6) such minor chronotopes also refer to more encompassing socio-historical situations on the basis of metonymical relations. The following quote from the morning scene at the end of chapter I is a case in point:

The old woman had just awakened, and she was rubbing her eyes and mumbling. A noise was heard in the adjoining small room. It was Constantis Trakhilis, the baby's father, who slept on the other side of the thin wooden partition beside another daughter and a little boy who had just awakened. He was collecting his tools – hammers, saws, planes – and was preparing to go to the Yard to begin his daily work. [...] The noise of the tools – hammers, saws, gimlits and so forth – which Constantis behind the partition was throwing one by one into his bag awoke his wife too. 'What is it, Mother?' 'What should it be? Constantis is chucking his tools in the bag,' said the old woman with a sigh. (1977: 9)

Thus, by repeatedly foregrounding different aspects of the characters' socio-professional milieu, the historical time of nineteenth-century Greece again can be glimpsed through the spatial organization of Papadiamantis' novel.

In addition, the presence of historical time can be sensed from the way in which the *plot* is structured. Similar to historiographical texts, realist narratives typically feature a straightforward story line, without many complications and containing all necessary information, which avoids either narrative suspense or deception (Hamon 1982: No. 13). In line with the mutual interaction between realist fictional worlds and the events taking place within their boundaries, plots of nineteenth-century novels appear to be rather static and do not easily lend themselves to unexpected or spectacular turns (Hamon 1982: No. 9, 14).¹⁵ In the case of *The Murderess*, the story proper can be rendered succinctly as follows: |inner thoughts| → |first murder| → |secret confession| → |second murder| → |third murder| → |escape from authorities| → |fourth murder| → |death by drowning|. Whether the relationships holding between these events are of a causal or merely chronological nature, the primary narrative sequence evolves logically without attracting too much attention.¹⁶ Within the context of historiography, *plot*, or more specifically, *emplotment*, is the mechanism *par excellence* that can turn the "documentary motif" into a genuine documentary chronotope.¹⁷ Given that the narrativization of historiography has been taken for granted ever since Hayden White's influential *Metahistory*, historical texts turn out to be no less emplotted than works of (literary) fiction (White 1993: 7-11). Chronotopicity being one of its prerequisites (see Bemong and Borghart in this volume), this narrative dimension brings scientific "documentation" into the realm of historiographical (analogous to fictional) world constructions.

Lastly, a historical time conception also makes itself felt on the level of narrative *characters*. As the above analysis of the plot of Papadiamantis' novel exemplifies, in realism the protagonists' radius of action is subject to the fictional world they inhabit to such an extent that they step less into the limelight than traditional novelistic heroes (Hamon 1982: No. 10). Conversely, the main plot events irrevocably leave their mark on the personal evolution of the characters, "reshap[ing] them bit by tiny bit" (Morson 1991: 1083). Textual strategies which assure such an organic conception of character evolution involve a detailed account of their personal and familial background – often realized through a series of flashbacks (Hamon 1982: No. 1) – as well as a thorough attention to both the psychological origins and consequences of their behaviour (Hamon 1982: No. 2). Regarding (historical) character evolution, prescientific historiography displays remarkably similar devices, and it is indeed here that, in historiography too, *functional* flashbacks may well appear.¹⁸ In *The Murderess* all these narrative techniques are intrinsically interwoven. In the first part of the novel, the narrator tries to account for the murderous thoughts of Frangoyannou by recounting her entire miserable life, with special emphasis on the institution of the dowry that she holds responsible for most of the misfortunes that have befallen her.¹⁹ Towards the end of her nocturnal introspection, Frangoyannou's memories, almost unnoticed, shift to a series of interior monologues that psychologically "justify" her

aversion to female babies, thus paving the way for the eventual murder of the first victim. Moreover, hunted down by the police day and night, Khadoula's dreams in the last part of the novel reflect an increasing, if unconscious, remorse for her deeds. In short, the heroine's murderous behaviour has both social and psychological origins (dowry, murderous thoughts) and results in analogous consequences (social expulsion, nightmares), so that her eventual death by drowning does not really come as a surprise.

Notwithstanding the drastic nature of Frangoyannou's decisions and the cruelty of her subsequent actions, instead of merely conforming to the unjust faithfulness traditionally reserved for Greek women, Papdiamantis' heroine in fact retains a remarkable "capacity to surprise". In this respect, she embodies the past, present and perhaps even future of contemporary Greece, metonymically emblematising an entire society that is struggling to throw off its patriarchal yoke. Or to quote Bakhtin one last time:

It is as though the very *foundations* of the world are changing, and man must change along with them. [...] The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature [...] and enters into a completely new, *spatial* sphere of historical existence. Such is at last, the realistic type of novel of emergence. (BSHR: 24; emphasis in original)²⁰

Admittedly, Papdiamantis' novel has often been read as a warning against rather than as an appeal for westernized social reform, since the narrator in the final analysis seems to "[...] advocate the idea of recurrence and a return to a purer presocial condition [...]" (Tziovas 2003: 98): see what happens if we dare to repudiate our indigenous traditions and values, the message turns out to be. Such an interpretation of *The Murderess* nevertheless does not serve as a contradiction of the results from the chronotopical analysis carried out in this contribution: the presence of a documentary chronotope and its attendant positivist world view in Papdiamantis' novel is unmistakable, albeit with an axiologically negative semantic connotation.²¹

Epilogue

Having discussed the principles of construction and textual strategies (both narratological and thematic) characteristic of documentary chronotopes, in conclusion we devote a few words to the importance of Bakhtin's conception of realism for writing literary history (and the history of narrative in general). From a *synchronic* point of view, the documentary chronotope and its narrative substructure could be used as a conceptual tool for reassessing some aspects of the history of realism. Since Bakhtin has convincingly argued that a contemporary setting in itself cannot be regarded as a sufficient criterion for classifying a text as an example of nineteenth-century realism, historians of various national literatures would undoubtedly surpass their predecessors by taking this fundamental insight into consideration when delineating the

periodization of this literary period.²² Likewise, genre theorists could take advantage of the Bakhtinian conception of literary realism to help determine the status – whether popular, highbrow or a combination of the two – of less well-known nineteenth-century narrative genres such as the mystery novel (Maxwell 1977), an issue still under debate. Within the realm of nineteenth-century realism proper, chronotopical analysis also appears to be fruitful for drawing finer generic distinctions. It has been argued, for instance, that the poetics of naturalism constitute a radicalization of realism mainly with regard to the narrative techniques used. As a form of practical sociology, naturalism especially focuses on the documentary function of realism by radically highlighting the construction of the fictional world or chronotope, often at the expense of an elaborate and intriguing plot (Borghart 2006: 47-54; 2007: 214-21).

From the perspective of *diachronic* literary evolution, whether (specific) chronotopes can be attributed to *non-fictional* (in our case: prescientific historiographic) texts requires further investigation, but we hope to have made clear and justified that several features of nineteenth-century realism, rather than having appeared out of the blue, may have had the ground prepared for them by centuries of (prescientific) historiography, a genre to which Bakhtin, throughout his multifarious critical works, regrettably did not devote a separate study. On the other side of the chronological spectrum, a first attempt has already been made to account for the way in which modernism took up and further elaborated some chronotopical features of realism (Keunen 2001: 424-7), but documentary chronotopes would certainly be useful for studying different kinds of twentieth-century “neorealism” too. To draw a comparison with earlier stages of the history of Western prose fiction, it could be argued that the world construction of nineteenth-century realism relates to contemporary prose fiction in similar ways as the Greek adventure chronotope inspired the subsequent history of the European novel: both the Roman adventure novel of everyday life as a genre (FTC: 111-29) and individual novels such as Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (see Beaton in this volume) introduced and elaborated the notion of “adventure time” in totally new contexts, while the chronotope underlying the ancient Greek romance proved productive for a genuine revival in both Byzantine twelfth century literature and Modern Greek romanticism (Borghart and De Temmerman 2010).

With regard to the concept of “generic sedimentation” (FTC: 85), finally, to the best of our knowledge, the reception of realist world constructions in popular culture, though acknowledged (Tallis 1988: 1-2, 195-6; Brooks 2005: 5), is a still largely unexplored field. One need only think of renowned television series such as *Rome* – with its emphasis on the everyday life of mostly invented characters within the constraints of first century BC historical time-space – to realize that interdisciplinary cooperation within a Bakhtinian framework promises to yield fresh and illuminating results that will enable future scholars to further trace, determine and understand the general history of narrative.

Endnotes

1. Structuralist narratology, for instance, has often been criticized for regarding literary realism almost as the prevailing standard of a variety of narrative techniques. With regard to literary evolution, apart from the impact of realism on twentieth-century developments such as modernism and neo-realism (see below), we would suggest that its importance for the gradual transition – at least in belles-lettres – from *teleological* plot structures to *dialogical* chronotopes can hardly be underestimated: as the assimilation of historical time significantly confines the protagonists' spheres of action (see below), realist stories had to come up with other strategies (such as extended psychological introspection into the main characters' inner lives) in order to retain the reader's interest.
2. The notion of prescientific historiography is adopted from Aviezer Tucker's *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography*. According to this scholar, the most important difference between prescientific and scientific historiography is the fact that the latter "should fit old historiography as well as new evidence" (2004: 120), whereas the former, we might say, entirely relies on its own world construction (or chronotope). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians such as Edward Gibbon, Thomas Macaulay and Jules Michelet, who did not yet meet the historiographical standards of a Leopold von Ranke, are considered to be the last major exponents of prescientific historiography (Tucker 2004: 45).
3. Albeit from a slightly different angle, these principles are most fully elaborated by Morson and Emerson (1990: 405-6, 410-2) and Morson (1991: 1083-6).
4. In fact, this very conception of time had already been explored (and eulogized) in Bakhtin's essay "Epic and Novel" (henceforth EN). In terms of this essay's title one could call it "novelistic", characterized by typical traits of the everyday world such as conflict, difference and contingency. Its counterpart, the "epic" conception of time, then, is typified by regularity, harmony and universality, these all being features of an ideal(ized) world in which conflict is neutralized. To be sure, in the long course of its development literary history has witnessed stages in which *both* conceptions – as is clear from Falconer (1997; see also her contribution to this volume) – appear somehow blended.
5. "Fictional screen space creates the unities of the scene and the plot. [...] Where the space of the fictional narrative produces continuity, documentary space is composed of discontinuities, both spatial and temporal, produced by dialectical (and dialogical) associations across time and space" (2000: 60). The conference was entitled "Visible Evidence" (Chicago, September 4-7, 1997), and Chanan's paper – interestingly entitled "The Documentary Chronotope" – was published three years later.
6. More specifically, the choice of the term "documentary" must be connected to Bakhtin's interest in *knowledge*, indicative of the concept of "novelistic" time, as opposed to *memory*, indicative of the concept of "epic" time (see note 4). To put it in his own words: "In ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse. That is how it was, it is impossible to change it: the tradition of the past is sacred. There is as yet no consciousness of the possible relativity of the past" (EN: 15). The documentary chronotope, indeed, makes no use of such memory (of a transcendent past). Rather, it uses knowledge, which is firmly anchored into everyday reality and joins past and present to a future that is open. In this way, documentary chronotopes create an immanent experience of duration, of real historical time. In fact, within this chronotope one can sense the French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of *durée* – which is so essential to the subjective meaning of temporality – fully realized: entirely indeterminate, open time, as opposed to the immobile scientific conception of time (see his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1888: 54).

7. The term has also appeared in Singapore (Anthony Guneratne used it in the context of postcolonial studies in 1997) and Russia (Svetlana Sorokina speaks of a “dokumentalniy khronotop” in her 2006 article on the genre of the *roman à clef* in Russian literature of the 1920s). However, both uses are modest, in fact mere mentions, and unfortunately do not seem to contribute to our discussion. Film narratologist Lily Alexander’s single mention of the term, finally, refers to Michael Chanan’s, which she contests (2007: 61, note 1).
8. In a study entitled *In Defence of Realism*, Raymond Tallis argues that – on a more abstract, philosophical level – the validity and attractiveness of realist fiction resides in its capacity to answer the human need to genuinely experience and imagine – rather than merely pass through – the everyday world (1988: 206-8). He concludes on the following note: “Man is the only form of matter that is astonished by its own existence and capable of conceptualizing its own mutability in the terrifying idea of death. Realist fiction, linking the small facts that engage us with the great facts that enclose us, mediating between the truths of daily life, is the most compendious expression of that astonishment and that terror. It is, potentially, the highest achievement of man, the *explicit animal*” (ibid.: 212; emphasis in original).
9. This is apparent from a representative sample of critical studies on realism up to the late 1980s (Furst 1992). A perusal of more recent work, however valuable and innovative in approach (Herman 1996; Kearns 1996; Becker 2000; Morris 2003; Brooks 2005), does not alter this observation.
10. Hamon (1982: 135-68). Moreover, from an epistemological perspective Hamon’s study is directly in line with the constructivist approach adopted in the present article: “Il ne s’agit donc plus de répondre à une question du genre: *comment la littérature copie-t-elle la réalité?*, qui est une question devenue sans intérêt, mais de considérer le réalisme comme une sorte de *speech act* [...] défini par une posture et une situation spécifique de communication, donc de répondre à une question du type: *comment la littérature nous fait-elle croire qu’elle copie la réalité?*, quels sont les moyens stylistiques qu’elle met – consciemment ou non – en oeuvre pour créer ce statut spécial de lecteur, bref, quelles sont les ‘structures obligées’ [...] du discours réaliste?” (ibid.: 132).
11. As one of us is basically trained as a neohellenist, it is not surprising that the case study stems from this national tradition. Although realism in Modern Greek literature began to develop gradually as early as the mid-nineteenth century, it came into full swing only from the 1890s onwards (see Borghart 2005: 316-8 for a brief survey of recent studies). Among specialists in the field it is generally acknowledged that Papadiamantis’ *The Murderess* epitomizes the main achievements of this period.
12. According to Farinou-Malamatari (1987: 50), the first chapters of *The Murderess* relate the events during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth or fourteenth night since the birth of Khadoula’s granddaughter. As she rightly remarks, the memories of the old woman, which begin and end during the night of the first murder, do not exhibit a perfectly chronological order but rather resemble a circular motion, thus providing the narrative with a certain temporal indeterminacy. Since the cock is heard crowing three times in this part of the novel, the inner thoughts of Frangoyannou can also be interpreted from the more universal perspective of betrayal.
13. The use of metonymy as a general principle of construction in nineteenth-century realism was first noted by Jakobson in 1921 (1971a) and later taken up by other critics including Chevrel, who accordingly refers to the fictional world in naturalist literature as “un *organisme en mouvement*” (1997: 101; emphasis in original).
14. For a more comprehensive theory of the forms and functions of descriptions in literature, we refer to two other studies by Hamon (1972, 1981). For a theoretical account of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic nature of descriptive passages in European naturalism, see Borghart

(2006: 92-104). For a “historiographical” illustration of Hamon’s No. 7, 11 and 12, we can refer, quite arbitrarily, to the lively passage at the end of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (chapter LXVIII), where the narrator tells us about the feverish preparation of an immense Ottoman cannon and its laborious transportation towards Constantinople (1952: 542).

15. This is to be compared with Dorrit Cohn’s narratological analysis of historiographical texts in her essay “Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective” (1999: 109-31), in which it is demonstrated how historiographers’ “[...] departures from chronology and isochrony tend to be functional, dictated by the nature of their source materials, their subject matter, and their interpretive arguments rather than by aesthetic concerns or formal experimentation” (1999: 116).
16. Examples of causal sequences are [inner thoughts] → [first murder] → [secret confession] or [third murder] → [escape from authorities], whereas the narrative sequence [confession] → [second murder] → [third murder], which covers the entire second part of the novel, is an outstanding example of a series of narrative events structured according to a merely chronological order.
17. For preliminary considerations of the status of “documentary” features in non-fictional texts, it is probably safer to speak of “documentary motifs” than of “documentary chronotopes”. Admittedly, in literary contexts the term “motif” no less than “chronotope” points to fictional texts (e.g. the collocation “motivic chronotope”), but the former term never implicates the encompassing time-space configuration of a (fictional) narrative which the latter sometimes indicates (e.g. “major” or “generic chronotope”). To bring Roland Barthes’ famous words on realism into play, the difference between the documentary motif in fiction and that in non-fiction is that the former produces an “illusion référentielle” (Barthes 1982: 89), whereas the latter *is* referential. In other words, the former produces an “effet de réel” (ibid.), while the latter – due to its mere presence in a historiographic text – *represents* reality.
18. However, in spite of these parallels, Hamon’s characteristic No. 10 also reveals a fundamental *disparity* between the realist and prescientific historiographical world constructions. While the former focuses on *everyday* characters who are unlikely to hold the spotlight, protagonists in older historiography, eager as they are for great deeds (just like more traditional novelistic heroes), surely *do* like to step into the limelight, a practice still validated in a nineteenth-century work such as Thomas Carlyle’s *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841). A fine example of the preference among prescientific historiographers for depicting prominent characters (even if they were not there) is given by Ann Rigney in her article on Michelet’s narrativization (in his *Histoire de la Révolution française*) of the taking of the Bastille (1988: 276-7). Despite her criticism of White, Rigney illustrates and demonstrates, interestingly enough, the chronotopic (she does not mention the term) consequences of emplotting historical facts.
19. In nineteenth-century Greece little girls were largely unwanted because of the material and financial burden that their future dowry would lay on their families. When parents married off their daughters, they were morally and socially obliged to grant the bride not only clothes and all sorts of household goods, but also a piece of land and a considerable amount of money. Needless to say, most poor families could hardly afford expenses of such magnitude.
20. In line with the general realist construction principle of metonymy, Hamon terms a similar conception of character “le héro synecdochique” (1981: 207), without, however, envisaging the possibility of such broad thematic implications.
21. In this respect, the name of the heroine “Frangoyannou” is particularly meaningful. Literally translatable as “(wife) of Yannis the Frank”, the married name of the murderess equates her with western Europe, a society that, according to Papadiamantis’ nostalgic conservatism, ought to be renounced at any cost.

22. To take the history of Modern Greek literature as an example again, running counter to a number of traditional literary critics it has recently been argued that the first novels after Greek independence in 1830 do not constitute the first-fruits of literary realism – a claim previously made on the basis of their contemporary setting. A thorough chronotopical analysis leads to the conclusion that they spring, rather, from the indigenous narrative tradition of the adventure novel (Borghart 2009; Borghart and De Temmerman 2010).

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