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A Critico-Analytical Reading into Natalie Zemon Davis's Endeavour to Write History through Fiction in *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983)

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Dedication

I sincerely dedicate this dissertation to the soul of my beloved grandmother Meriem, who had always been an incredible inspiration in my life, and my eternal source of love and wisdom. I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my supportive parents and my lovely sister Hadjer. They have been my strength and joy at every stage of my life.

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Abstract

The Return of Martin Guerre (1983) by the pioneering American historian Natalie Zemon Davis, has been widely considered as one of the most controversial novels not only because it presents a fictional account of an actual event, but also because it is a novel that is composed by a historian. The latter claims that she invents a new approach to history writing, an approach that blends a historical event with subjective invention. This fact raises the question of how successfully the female author verbalises a possible way of addressing the interplay of the discourses of historicity and fictionality, especially that her being a historian compels her to establish veracity through avoiding any suggestion of subjective intervention. The current dissertation then, seeks to investigate the extent to which Davis, the historian and the novelist, manages to make such interplay possible. In order to achieve this aim, a critical-analytical approach is adopted so as to assess whether Davis succeeds at reconciling the supposedly historicity of her book with its constitutive literariness; or, fictionality. This dissertation ultimately concludes that *The Return of Martin Guerre* does neither embrace the objectivity underlying historical books nor does it meet the appealing quality of fictional narratives.

Keywords: history, fiction, scientific history, Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Hayden White, objectivity, subjectivity.

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General Introduction

The word history is derived from the Greek word 'historia' which means the kind of knowledge that is acquired by investigation. In more practical terms, history is a continuous and ever-changing effort to understand and study the human past. It is one of the most complicated fields since it studies different people, their actions and reactions, and presents interpretations of what, how and why things happened. For that reason, history should not be built on made-up stories, but rather it should be built on evidence and sources from the past. Accordingly, historians have always pondered the question of objectivity in their works, and have markedly differed over the possibility of achieving it and how to accurately practice history. The root of this dispute goes back to the Antiquity, where the first kind of unique and systematic historical writings started in ancient Greece 5th century B.C. These writings are different because they are about the deeds of humans rather than myths and gods. Introducing and endorsing such a change in writing are two major Greek historians, Herodotus and Thucydides. Herodotus, regarded as the father of history, is the historian of the wars between Persia and Greece, whereas his successor Thucydides is the historian of the Peloponnesian War. Together they establish the basis and the earliest version of western historical writing, at the same time they represent the first dispute over the nature of historical truth.

Herodotus writes entertaining histories that are similar, both in form and content, to literary narratives, and even included social, cultural, and political aspects of societies. He is even accused of imagining things that had not happened in reality. Thucydides, on the other hand, writes analytical and objective records with an emphasis on political and military aspects. This dispute over the accurate style and method of practising history remains quite dormant until it reaches its peak in the nineteenth century when history finally become institutionalised as a discipline and as a profession in Western universities.

As a result of this professionalization, history is seen as a science that firmly rejects any association with literary structure or fictitious interpretations. A representative touchstone for this shift is the German historian Leopold von Ranke's analytical and scientific approach to history which is highly inspired by Thucydides' practice of history. However, it should be noted that Ranke is not the first historian to ascribe a scientific quality to history. Centuries before him, the Arabic philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) regarded history as a science and developed a method that combines criticism, observation, and examination in order to obtain an accurate and objective idea of what had actually happened. Throughout time this scientific approach has met with criticism for its focus on important events and people while ignoring other masses, and mainly for its empirical and objective pursuits.

The main challenge to this traditional mould of historical studies was held by some historians of the 1970s. Historians like Hayden White, Alan Munslow, and Keith Jenkins maintained that historical facts are not simply there to be discovered, they are rather like fiction the product of historians' rhetorical devices, ideologies, and personal values and biases. In short, history as a discipline has more in common with fiction than it does with science. This assumption brings together two different discourses. The first discourse is history which is built on factual information and documents, the second on the other hand is fiction which is the product of invention and imagination. In addition, those historians claimed that the writing of history is like writing a novel, and it is the historian who should select a certain structure and tone to reconstruct the past.

Some historians, among them the American and Canadian historian Natalie Zemon Davis, set out to implicitly integrate these critiques into their works and writes books that combine history and fiction. The product of this interplay can be found in Davis's famous and

controversial book, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983). In writing the novel, Davis's ultimate intention is to produce an accurate historical account delivered by an appealing literary construction; however, the book promises more than it offers.

Since the book was written during intellectual and academic debates over the nature of historical truth, it draws the attention of both traditional and modern historians. The book is hailed in the popular press as an accurate historical reconstruction of the past. The famous French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie published his review of the book in the *New York Review of Books* in 1983, in which he describes Davis's novel as a "major work of historical reconstruction, performed without any kind of ideological bias"(14). As a cultural historian himself, Ladurie praises Davis's integrity and professionalism while presenting a colourful and cultural analysis of peasant society. The historian Donald R. Kelly reviews the book as well in 1984 and goes on to assume Davis's creativity and faithfulness to the sources. He states that Davis, "has turned a prodigious tale into a critical study of popular culture, but the trappings of scholarship have not spoiled the charm of the original" (253). Following the same path, the American historian A. Lloyd Moote in 1985 concludes that Davis's book is the perfect subject for a late twentieth-century social historian since it reveals rarely unsealed secrets of an overlooked society with a realistic monograph (934). The same cultural analysis appears in other reviews like that of Robert C. Cumbow and Edward Benson in the *French Review* of 1984.

Apparently, these social and cultural historians are situating the book on a more cultural and social level of analysis without a clear reference to its historical orientation or the book's social and intellectual contexts. Their results seem to contradict Davis's subjective pursuits and fictitious tendencies, as well as her clear departure from the primary source of the story that is ignored and denied by them. In light of this, the book becomes controversial

enough and causes a split of opinions between historians. Those modern social and cultural historians, as stated earlier, praised Davis's flexible and smooth style and her faithfulness to sources, whereas traditional historians and loyalists to the scientific, evidence-based, and objective approach to history accuses Davis of changing the spirit of the story, and of writing a more imaginative account than a historical reconstruction. In his article "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre" (1988), the American historian Robert Finlay, who can be considered as belonging to the traditional and scientific school of history, accuse Davis of anachronism since she imposes her predetermined ideas and biases on the story of Martin Guerre without a piece of clear evidence to back up her interpretation (557). Finlay goes on to assume that Davis's sympathy blinds her historical reconstruction and opens a door of fiction and exaggeration into an accurate historical record.

Further studies have tackled this imaginative reconstruction of *The Return of Martin Guerre* including Antulio J. Echevarria (2005). In this research, Echevarria emphasizes Davis's lack of evidence and questions the correctness of her interpretation (80). Furthermore, in her article "Storytelling" (2011) Joan W. Scott focuses on one aspect of the book which is Davis's craft of storytelling, and how she manages to present a colourful record and a lively entertaining story. At the same time, she ignores Davis's clear and decorated departure from historical sources. Recently, other researchers and authors like Claire Potter have revived the importance and relevance of the debate that this book stirs in literary and historical discussions. In her 2018's web article "On my Return to Martin Guerre", Potter points out the bold step taken by Davis as a historian, and how she manages to give a different interpretation than that of the original tale, and turns it into a different method for the practice of history; where the reader can read a historical record within a structure and the spirit of novels.

This split of opinions and interpretations of *The Return of Martin Guerre* resulted in having a narrowed assessment and a focus on historical elements only. Thus, each of the aforementioned studies seems to perceive the book from a narrowed perspective and vista. As stated earlier, social and cultural historians have focused on the moral and surface level of the book without studying it in relation to its contexts or even to its author's motives and goals. They have mainly praised Davis's creativity and how she brings to life a famous tale from a community that is neither kings nor powerful or influential people and gives them a chance to achieve their agency. On the other hand, historians who have analysed the book as a historical record and have proved Davis's departure from the primary sources have proved the inventive, narrative and fictitious aspects of the book. However, no study to date has examined the book as a work of prose fiction that is nearer to a novel than a historical record. Particularly they have not associated the book, at least explicitly, in relation to Hayden White's famous theory of literary structure, and how she is highly inspired by him in her historical and literary reconstruction.

In her introduction of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Davis once stated that "what I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past". By saying that, Davis assumes the possibility of a historian to combine history with fiction; however, what she offers was far from being held tightly in check by the voices of the past, and far from meeting the expected standards of literary structures. In light of this, we will address her historical and literary endeavour, and how she tries to remedy the weaknesses of scientific history.

This study seeks to generally tackle the debate of historical truth, and more precisely the attempt of Davis to approach history in a different way in *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Another main objective of our analysis is to particularly examine the extent to which Davis's

book manages to combine history with fiction, and to show how her subjectivity and ideological bias have hampered her quest for historical truth. Equally important, this study will analyse the book as a work of prose fiction by identifying Davis's adaptation of Hayden White's literary structure ideas. Besides, the application of a literary analysis of the main elements of prose fiction used by her such as plot structure, characters, and narrative technique. Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How did the debate over history as science and history as fiction develop?
2. What is Natalie Zemon Davis's perception and critique of scientific history, and how does she try to remedy its weaknesses?
3. How does Davis manage to combine history and fiction in *The Return of Martin Guerre*? Was she successful? And why?

In order to answer these questions, this study adopts a critico-analytical approach to the novel. Since the main reason behind conducting this research has been triggered by a critical stance toward Davis's statement in the introduction of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, "What I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past" (5), and which affirms that her book is but an attempt to challenge the constraints of scientific history writing, the critical method, hence, is chosen in order to check if she succeeds in her pursuit. On the other hand, the analytical method allows for a close reading and assessment of the text according to the criteria of historical writing as well as fictional writing.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter represents the background of scientific history as outlined by the German historian Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century, and his established criteria for accurate and objective historical writing, it also focuses on some critiques offered by the opponents of Ranke's approach and which expose the deficiencies inherent in his approach to history. Besides, it will explain the

main features and elements of prose fiction work. The second chapter lays out Davis's perception of history, what she rejects in scientific history, and how she proposes to remedy its weaknesses. Chapter two will also tackle the social and intellectual contexts of *The Return of Martin Guerre*. The third chapter, on the other hand, provides a critical assessment of Davis's literary reconstruction of the historical account of Martin Guerre and an analytical assessment of the main features of prose fiction used by Davis as a means to achieve her literary endeavour.

Chapter One:

On Scientific History and Fiction

I.1 Introduction:

This chapter attempts to articulate a theoretical framework of the status of history as a scientific discipline, and history as a literary representation. As this chapter shows the scientific representation of history was best presented by the German historian Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. Through the works of Ranke history was seen as a natural science built on empirical methods and approach. This chapter also provided several critiques of the science of history practised by Ranke and his loyalists and the kind of limitations and deficiencies brought by scientific or conventional history. One of the major challenges to scientific history is the revival and acknowledgement of fiction, imagination, and narrative structures while writing history, and how history is more than a literary presentation rather than a scientific one. This challenge was brought by modern scholars notably by the theories of the American historiographer Hayden White. Finally, this chapter presents a detailed section on prose fiction and the main elements and features that are found in prose fictional works.

I.2The Rise of Scientific History:

The practice of history has undergone a series of shifts and developments throughout different periods. History is described as a dynamic process in that it keeps changing evolving and even restructuring (Brundage 12). However, it is widely accepted that the emergence of the scientific history of early nineteenth-century Europe is the most prominent, lasting and controversial change in the practice and writing of history. This change was a result of the Enlightenment thinking of eighteenth-century Europe, also known as the Age of Reason which was again the result of a larger movement called the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century. The latter movement took place in fifteenth-century Europe and was characterized by drastic changes and a great emphasis on science. Accordingly, advocates of

scientific history wanted to create a distinctive disciplinary approach to history in the academic field since it was practised as a part of other disciplines like classics, philosophy and humanities, to do so historians adopted a scientific method. The scientific method essentially involves careful observation, controlled experimentation and rational interpretation of results. In other words, the scientific method requires an empirical and objective treatment of materials just like the natural sciences when the results are considered facts. Accordingly, historians all around Europe started to apply this method to better understand and construct the human past, this application fostered the professionalization and institutionalization of the historical discipline. In this regard, Germany was the leading country in establishing history as science through the work of Leopold von Ranke.

1.2.1 Leopold von Ranke and Scientific History:

There is no better representative of scientific history than Leopold von Ranke, the German historian of the modern world. Leopold Ranke was born in Wiehe, Germany, in 1795 into a Lutheran family that fostered in him a Lutheran pietism. Ranke was an avid consumer of the German Enlightenment ideas including rationality, nationalism, and individualism as well as his interest in classical antiquity like the works of Thucydides (Warrington 293). Ranke's main contribution is that he liberated history from philosophy and theology and bound it to the dispassionate empirical study of documents, this is done through applying scientific methods while investigating the sources, interpreting them, and presenting the results as facts (Banner 8). This accuracy is best illustrated in Ranke's first book translated as *History of The Latin and Teutonic Nations, 1494 to 1514* published in 1824, this book set the foreground of modern history with its strong principles of source criticism and archival research. The book was known for Ranke's statement, "History has had assigned to it the office of judging the past and of instructing the account for the benefit of future ages. To

show high offices the present work does not presume; it seeks only to show what actually happened” (qtd. in Warrington 294). The interpretation of the phrase “what actually happened” is a subject of much debate; however, most scholars agree that this phrase is an indicator of colourless history which means that history should be free of any ideological or personnel biases and commitments. After the publication of his first book, Ranke was appointed a professor at the University of Berlin, where he was described as a dedicated professor who took great care of his students by helping them achieve their individual and peculiar strengths using methods of critical examination.

Ranke emphasizes individuality and development in history; for him, every epoch should be studied on its own terms and contexts free from predetermined contemporary values (Bradt 2). In other words, the contexts, ideologies, and judgments of the present should not be applied to past events, periods or people, and they should not affect the interpretation of results.

Ranke is also known for his quest to write universal history. The latter is a work that presents the history of mankind as a unit and one entity, this could be done by focusing on great events, powerful people, and kings. During his last years, Ranke wrote national histories for each of the major states of Europe, including France and England. As his reputation grew Ranke was granted entry to the hereditary nobility, adding von to his surname in 1865 (Warrington 297).

I.2.2 Objectivity and Impartiality of Historians:

According to Ranke, in order to present what actually happened historians have to extinguish every stance of their subjectivity and biases; in this sense, history is only a mirror of past facts. He states in his book translated as, *A History of England Principally in the Seventeenth Century* in 1875, “I wish I could annihilate my own self and only the objects

would speak” (qtd. in Warrington 303). This ideal of objectivity is described by Peter Novick in his famous book *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question* in 1988 as the rock on which the historical venture is constituted and prized, and the criterion by which we can differentiate professional from non-professional historians; and it is built on “the sharp distinction between the knower and known, between facts and values, and, above all, between history and fiction” (qtd. in Chen 1). This means historians should not determine right and wrong or fill the gaps in historical records with their imagination and speculations, but to tell the truth as it really happened. It should be noted that Ranke himself was a devoted Lutheran, but still manages to be impartial while writing about Catholicism and Protestantism.

I.2.3 Reliance on Primary Sources:

Primary sources in history are the original materials and documents of the witnesses or first recorders this can include archives, letters, diaries and manuscripts. In light of this, Ranke’s model of historical study is mainly built on historians’ use of primary sources written by those who lived or witnessed a particular event or period in the past. This is best illustrated by Ranke’s statement in his book translated as *History of The Reformation in Germany* published in 1845:

I see the time approaching when we shall base modern history, no longer on the reports even of contemporary historians, except insofar as they were in possession of personal and immediate knowledge of facts; and still less on work yet more remote from the source; but rather on the narratives of eyewitnesses, and on genuine and original documents. (qtd. in Warrington 295)

During his life, Ranke collected over 50,000 original documents and made copies whenever he visited archives or libraries of Vienna, Rome, France and many others. It should be noted that Ranke also uses secondary sources like books, literature and even oral sources (Boldt 5).

I.2.4 Leopold von Ranke and Literature:

The opposition between history and literature is quite recent, it was the product of early nineteenth-century Europe. History before was regarded as a branch of literature where the same thinker can write histories and fictional novels. However, from the early nineteenth-century history and literature began to move in different directions and became more specialized and enclosed within their own worlds. As noted earlier Ranke sought to separate history from other disciplines, mainly from that of literature. In the introduction of his book *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations, 1494 to 1514* Ranke states, “We cannot expect from the writing of history the same free development as is, at least in theory; to be expected in works of literature; I am not certain that is right to ascribe this quality to the work of the Greek and Roman masters. A strict presentation of the facts, contingent and unattractive as that may be, is the highest law” (qtd. in Curthoys and Docker). Accordingly, Ranke assumes a new future for historical writing that is sober, plainly presented and colourless and may seem unattractive and disconnected unlike works of literature, particularly fictional ones, but that is the ideal for professional historical writing where we should not read history for the sake of entertainment but rather to know what actually happened.

An important stage in Ranke’s career is his strict objection to Sir Walter Scott’s historical novel. The Historical novel is a novel set in a different period than that of the author, the main feature of this novel is the artistic blend of actual historical facts with fiction. The characters of the novel may be real, fictional or both in a real setting with real or fictional events as well. This type of novel enables its readers to travel to a different time and place

through its vivid description of the setting and characters. The key figure in the development of this novel is the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century. Scott is known for his inventive storytelling and sensitivity to ordinary people, he genuinely portrays kings, upper classes, and lower classes in his novels. However, it seems that his historical creativity has bothered Ranke's faithfulness. In his *Autobiographical Dictation* in 1885, a year before he died, Ranke admits that his objection to Scott's novels is not easy and that he reads Scott's romantic-historical works with lively interest, but in the same time he feels offended by the fact that Scott has knowingly created historical portraits that are completely contradictory to the historical evidence, "I could not forgive him for accepting in his narrative biased tendencies which were totally unhistorical, and presenting them as if he believed them" (qtd. in Curthoys and Docker 62). In light of this, it should be noted that it is not only this misrepresentation of historical personages that offends him, Ranke does not like Scott's focus on ordinary people like peasants, knights, women, merchants, and prostitutes as well as his sceptical texts and satiric tone that contrasts Ranke's optimistic and national tone. In light of this discussion, we can assume that Ranke advocates for history as a rigorous academic discipline free of fictional elements and subjective biases. He has taught young Germany how to evaluate and use historical materials in a mould that has not been popularized before him, which is why he is highly respected and highly criticized at the same time.

I.3 Critiques of Scientific History:

Ranke's approach to history, particularly his objectivity, has met with criticism in Germany, Europe, and the United States. Ranke is criticized for writing dry as dust, colourless, and national histories only. Historians of the early twentieth-century question Ranke's so-called colourless history. An important example of these critiques would be the Idealist Historians of the 1920s. These historians reject historian's certainty and believe that

there is no such thing as facts in history, and that they only exist in the mind of the historian. Thus, we can never know what happened in the past because we live in the present and what historians are telling us is only fabrication and creation. A seminal figure in this approach is the English historian R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943). Best known for his idea of Historical Imagination in 1946, Collingwood resists the scientific approach and believes that since events did actually happen we cannot observe them or study them, and it is impossible to apply the scientific method to them. Thus, historians must use their imagination to reconstruct and understand the past. However, Collingwood asserts that this imagination should not be based on guessing or fanciful imaginings, but rather on evidence and reliable sources (Kripke 11).

The Annales School in France emerged in the late 1920s as a reaction to the dominance of political and diplomatic narratives of powerful individuals. Historians of the latter school shed light on often overlooked or dismissed populations and cultures. The Annales School is also credited with establishing the foreground of an interdisciplinary approach in historical studies, this approach is built on adopting different methods and themes from different disciplines such as Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology while interpreting and analysing results (Yorty).

Another major challenge to scientific or conventional history was the rise of Cultural History in the 1960s. Just like the Annales School, cultural historians reject the focus on politics and economy and tackle the underrepresented populations and their beliefs, attitudes, experiences and how they articulated their lives in a given culture and society. In this regard, seminal studies emerged such as the British historian E.P. Thompson's book *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963 and Natalie Zemon Davis's book *Society and Culture in*

Early Modern France in 1975. Another major scope of cultural history is its focus on women and their contributions to societies since they were completely ignored before that.

I.4 The Linguistic Turn and The revival of Fiction in History:

In their book *Is History Fiction?* Curthoys and Docker point out that in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, there was a remarkable flowering of innovative historical writing, theories, and critiques by which historians draw more attention to the literary nature of history (180). These changes are known as the linguistic turn also called the literary turn. Proponents of the linguistic turn assume that the past only exists in historians' textual representations. In other words, the use of language decides the kind of truth historians present. This turn helped revive the relationship between history and literature, particularly fiction and acknowledges the active role of narrative structures in the representation of historical reality.

One of the key figures in this debate is the American intellectual historian and theorist Hayden White. White posits that historians' narratives and interpretations are subjective with presentist prejudice, which means results are constructed upon historians' biases, ideologies and choices in the present rather than fact-oriented and objective results from the past. Thus, history is indeed an aesthetic practice rather than a scientific one. In his book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), White focuses on how historians tell stories rather than what they are telling us, he concludes that historians inevitably write a certain kind of fiction, through the use of plot structures, characters, voice and tone. White's main goal is to deconstruct a mythology, the so-called science of history that aims to present objective facts free of any kind of biases. As an epitome of a postmodern historian, White's rejection of objectivity and accurate facts in history is an offshoot of Postmodernism; a movement in the late 1970s characterized by its full rejection of ultimate and universal truth and rationality.

In his 2005's article "Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality" White states, "The reason why historical studies are in crisis today is not because a bunch of wild-eyed 'postmodernists' have captured the minds of the impressionable young; it is because historical studies has manifestly failed in their efforts to become the kind of 'science' they hoped to become in the nineteenth century" (149). For White, the failure of historical studies stems from what Jean-Paul Sartre called 'bad faith', a refusal by historians to admit to themselves and to others their full freedom, for example, they refuse to acknowledge that facts are not found rather they are constructed by the kinds of questions the historian asks, the same thing for the structure and order of narrative the historian chose to conduct (Warrington 388).

According to White, in order to re-establish the dignity of historical studies, historians must stop deceiving themselves, simply because histories are not transparent records of the way things 'really happened'. On this basis, White provides an alternative view to subjectivity in favour of Ranke's famous objectivity doctrine. For him, subjectivity is inevitable while writing history. In his groundbreaking *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, White argues that historians' recollections of the past and interpretations are subjectively narrated by their own 'rhetorical emplotment'. The latter is the construction of a historical event or story into a literary and narrative plot with certain characters and tones. In light of this, White suggests that the Western literary tradition prescribes four structures of emplotment or ways of fashioning events into a narrative (genres): romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire. The role of these narrative structures or choices is to shape the narrative of the historical facts to make them intelligible. As explained in his book *Metahistory*, the romance structure is used when good triumphs over evil. These narratives are generally positive with an emphasis on how individuals can escape their situations. The comedy plot is in which opposing forces are reconciled, the tragedy plot is

where high ideals and values fail and the humanity is reminded of its limitations and the satirical plot is in which man is a captive of the world rather than its master (White 9). These genres can be combined by different historians according to their goals, like tragicomedy or satirical comedy.

In White's view, historians not only use narrative technique to suggest relationships and bring logic to their stories; historians, he says, gain part of their explanatory effect by making stories through emplotment, the placing of 'fact' or 'data' found in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures. Readers only make sense of events within a recognisable genre, such as tragedy, comedy, romance, irony, epic, or satire.

All these ideas and bold theories that undermine the traditional and scientific practice of history are controversial and influential at the same time. Hence, it should be noted that White's goal is not to prove that the historical work is essentially the same as a work of fiction. As he explains in his interview with Jakoub Mushowski: "Postmodernists have as their subject matter historical reality, but they are not fictionalizing it, they are not turning it into a fantastical universum. Postmodernists are giving literary artistic treatment to real events" (92). This is precisely the belief that the historian should combine elements of historical reconstruction with elements of fiction to create a comprehensive story.

A lot of traditional historians reject these ideas, considering them as a threat to the discipline of history, since they question the epistemological nature of history, and distort its conventional and empirical image. However, these critiques are welcomed by other historians who follow White's assumption that "history, in general, is in reality a form of novel writing"; accordingly, historians through their works have tried to combine historical events with fiction to remedy the weaknesses of scientific history, including Simon Schama and Natalie Zemon Davis and many others (Curthoys and Docker209).

I.5 On Prose Fiction:

To start with, the word fiction is derived from the Latin word ‘fictus’ which means ‘create’. Thus, fiction is a term used to describe stories, records, and narratives that are, in part or in whole, not factual but rather imaginary and invented by the author. Fiction in general may include different forms like drama and movies whereas prose fiction is a literary genre that includes short stories, novels, and novellas. In prose fiction, the writer tells a fictitious story to his or her readers either to entertain or educate or both. It should be noted that in prose fiction the writer may exaggerate or distort facts in order to create an entertaining and comprehensive story. In his book *Prose: Literary Terms and Concepts* in 2011, Kathleen Kermode describes prose fiction as “an artistic work that has a personal narrative, a hero to identify with fictional inventions, style, and suspense; in short anything that might be handled with the rather personal ventures of creativity and freedom” (23). In other words, a prose fictional work is the product of the author’s artistic style, choice, and ideologies.

Although both prose fiction and history present to their readers’ human experiences and stories in a narrative form; however, there is a clear distinction between the two. History is regarded as an empirical social experience based on empirical and factual data presented in the form of facts, whereas in prose fiction the author mediates facts and truth to obey his or her artistic and imaginative pursuits. Through their vivid and graphic representations of characters or settings, novelists can depict social, political, and personal realities better than the factual documentation of historians.

I.5.1 Elements of Prose Fiction:

In order to create a dramatized and interesting story, there are a shared number of elements and characteristics that should be found in any work of prose fiction. The first element is the plot which refers to the sequence of events that constitutes the story including the beginning, middle, and end. In more technical terms as described by Oakley Hall in his book *How Fiction Works* in 2011, the first stage in the plot is called 'situation'. In this stage the reader gets introduced to the characters, their interpersonal relationships and characters that are usually in conflict with each other. The second stage is 'complication' where things start to take a different direction and the plot thickens through the opposition, and tensions start to rise among characters. The third and most important stage is the 'climax', also known as the turning point of events. The climax can be a revelation of truth or recognition. Next, the conflict starts to be solved in the events of 'denouement'. Finally, the last stage is the 'resolution' which is the end of the story and the stability of the characters (Hall 64). The plot requires some techniques like suspense that keep the reader excited to know what will happen next. The plot can be narrated in three different ways or perceptions known as the first person point of view, when the character speaks directly from his or her experience. Besides, the second person point of view is when the writer addresses the reader and uses the pronoun 'you'. This point of view is criticised for its lack of intimacy. The third is through an omniscient point of view when the story is told from an external source that knows everything from the character's thoughts to the actions taken by them.

Moreover, characterisation is another element of prose fiction. Characters are presented by the author to perform the story through their actions and words. Mainly, there are two major characters the first is the protagonist, who attracts the reader's attention and it appears that the story being told is his or her story, it is also called the hero or heroine if it is a

female. The second character known as the antagonist, is someone who stands against the protagonist and opposes him or her. There could be other minor or secondary characters as well. The writer should not make his or her readers feel indifferent toward the characters of the story or make them feel cold and careless toward the fate of the character or their actions but should create a sense of verisimilitude which means a realistic feeling that may evoke a feeling of sympathy or recognition towards the characters. One of the ways to ensure the involvement of the reader is through the vivid description of the character's appearance and thoughts. The author should provide expressive rapport for the characters by describing them or by letting them speak and express their feelings and desires. The latter is better achieved through dialogues between characters or their inner conversations and talks.

The third element is language since the narrative discourse of any literary work is made up of language. Literature is defined as the creative use of language. The main idea and theme of a literary work are presented through language, particularly through the communicative aspects of it. The choice of language use varies widely, some authors may use complicated or aesthetic language, whereas others may use ordinary and simple language accessible to everyone, this use is known as the style. In other words, the style is the way by which the author uses language to structure the work and create specific effects through word choice, use of literary devices, and symbols. It should be noted that language is not only important to convey the meaning of a certain idea, but also to help convey the desired emotions and the tone of the author. In light of this, the tone is the author's attitude toward characters or stories and can be identified through the author's word choice. The tone can be nostalgic, nervous, ironic, or sympathetic.

I.6 Conclusion:

Throughout the first chapter, we have introduced the meaning of scientific history, and the main figure behind this scientific application in history Leopold von Ranke. Ranke established the academic discipline of history by maintaining the objectivity of the historians, and the reliance on primary sources. This chapter has also shown Ranke's serious objection to literary and fictitious elements while writing history, for him history should present facts no matter how colourless or dry they may seem. Thirdly, we have introduced several famous critiques of scientific history by social and cultural historians who reject the focus on diplomatic or political affairs in history, and decided to shed light on dismissed cultures and populations. In addition to presenting the main challenge of scientific history brought up by Hayden White. White assumes that the historian uses a kind of rhetorical emplotment and shapes his or her story into a narrative plot using certain inventive elements, tone, and characters. In short, white claims that in order to write a recognizable and understandable story, the historian should combine history with fiction.

Chapter Two:

Contextualising Natalie Zemon

Davis's Perception of History in

The Return of Martin Guerre

II.1 Introduction:

This chapter attempts to present an intellectual biography of Natalie Zemon Davis, and her perception and understanding of the practice of history. The latter is clearly shown in her research and academic trajectory and through the type of approach and methods she adopts. In addition, this chapter provides Davis's critique of the empirical and fact-oriented approach of scientific history, and how she tries to remedy its weaknesses using her methods. This chapter also presents the synopsis of Davis's book *The Return of Martin Guerre* published in 1983 with its social and intellectual contexts. Since this book was written during a rubric of social and academic debates, Davis is highly affected by them while writing *The Return of Martin Guerre*.

II.2 Natalie Zemon Davis's Life and Works:

Natalie Zemon Davis was born in 1928, Detroit, Michigan into a middle-class Jewish family. As a child, she and her family experienced Anti-semitism in the years prior to world war two because of their Jewish identity. She attended Kingswood, a private school for girls in the suburban part of Detroit. In one of her later interviews Davis admitted that as a student she had always felt like an outsider; this Jewish sensitivity fostered in her a passion and curiosity for history in general and for European history in particular. In a 1983 interview, Davis explained how history classes that she had joined in her last years at Kingswood granted her a new spirit of her past (Kirby 3). As an undergraduate Davis, then Natalie Zemon, attended Smith College in Massachusetts where she was part of some activities such as the president of The Young Progressives and the head of the Marxist Discussion Group. During these years Davis was introduced to the writings of Karl Marx¹ and his theory of

¹ Karl Marx (1818-1883) is a German philosopher and economist, best known for his theory of Socialism which aims to create a communist and classless society.

Socialism which would serve as an inspiration for most of her works. At the end of her junior year at Smith College in 1948, Davis encountered her future husband Chandler Davis, who was at that time a mathematics graduate student at Harvard. After six weeks the couple got married and would later have three kids together.

As noted above, Davis's own experience with religion prompts her to investigate race, class systems, and religious reforms; moreover, she developed an interest in the French Renaissance.² Accordingly, she wrote her honours thesis on Pietro Pomponazi, the leading representative of the Renaissance Aristotelian thought of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century (Kirby 11). As soon as Davis began her graduate training at Radcliff College, her interest shifted toward social history, focusing on the lower and middle classes of France known as the *menu peuple*, such as labourers, merchants, and peasants. Influenced by scholars like W.K Jordan, a historian of early modern Britain and a loyal fellow of the Annales School, Davis decided to write her doctoral dissertation on the *menu peuple* of Lyon, their social structure, grain riots, and the protestant uprising of 1562. In order to complete her dissertation, Davis travelled to Lyon in 1952 looking in the archives for original sources written by the people who witnessed this reformation. After spending six months in the Lyon archives, Davis and her husband came back to Ann Arbor where the FBI seized their passports. The pair had continued their political and activist involvement during their undergraduate and early graduate years, this was provoked by the prior publication of Davis's pamphlet called "*Operation Mind*" in 1952, in which Davis attacked the unconstitutional activities of the house committee. This was during the Second Red Scare (1947-60) which was characterized by the fear of the rise of communist ideology in the United States.

² The Renaissance which means 'Rebirth' in French, is a period in European history between 1450 and 1600, characterized by an intellectual and artistic revival with an interest in humanities and classical antiquity.

Chandler was dismissed from the faculty and sentenced to six months in jail. Being pregnant with her first child and with a dissertation yet to be written with no access to archives or ability to continue her research abroad, Davis turned her attention to rare book collections in the United States, particularly the New York Public Library. In 1959 Davis submitted her dissertation titled “Protestantism and the Printing Workers of Lyon” to the committee at the University of Michigan. It is worth noting that in the 1950s Davis's works are characterized by her focus on class systems and religious reforms. She used to approach historical changes in a limited sphere which she tried to elaborate in the following years.

In the 1960s Natalie Zemon Davis experienced changes in her academic career, as a historian and an educator. After the release of her husband in 1960, the University of Toronto offered Chandler a tenure-track position in the mathematics department in 1962. The couple and their children emigrated to Canada, where Davis obtained a teaching position in the same university at the Political Economy Department. During these years, Davis starts to perceive culture as a driving force of historical change and finally become an influential contributor to cultural history. Moreover, Davis is known for her interdisciplinary approach which is clearly seen in her constant use of tools from other fields such as art history, literary history, and the study of folklore. Thus, she becomes a pioneer in the interdisciplinary approach to history. As explained earlier, this approach is primarily built on the tradition of the French Annales School; accordingly, fellow historians of the latter school have praised Davis' work and acknowledged her insistence on the historical significance of the *menu peuple* as a cohesive and structured culture (Bonan 4). Davis's articles in this period include “The Good Name of Martin Panthus” published in 1960, “Peletier and Beza Part Company” in 1964, and “Strikes and Salvation of Lyons” in 1965. It should be noted that Davis adopts the cultural approach in her works to understand the ways ordinary people created and articulated their lives. By doing this, she has been careful to distinguish the voices of her subjects from that of herself;

however, in her article on Martin Panthus, a respected priest in the early Renaissance period, Davis uses for the first time a speculative language which means the interpretation is based on guesses and invention rather than knowledge or facts while interpreting evidence, the same use that would later cause controversy in her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* in 1983 (Kirby 24, 25).

Furthermore, Davis's works on the *menu peuple* focus on male actors only, with a clear exclusion of women and notions of gender, but that would change in the 1970s. Davis, just like other traditional social historians, used to ignore the presence of women in the historical frame, unless they were queens, noblewomen, or scholars like Christine de Pizan.³ However, the 1970s witnessed the rise of women's history in the United States; accordingly, Davis shifted her interest and found out that there were plenty of sources not just about women but written by them too (Kirby 39). In light of this, the status of women practically and intellectually started to improve in the Toronto Campus in North America, especially when Davis allied herself with Jill Ker Conway (1934-2018), a pioneer of the new history of women in the United States. Together they created the first History of Women Course in Canada, and one of the first in North America (43). The success of this course granted Davis a position in The History Department at the University of California at Berkeley in 1971.

As noted above, women become the centre of Davis's interest this is clearly shown in her works, including her 1973's essay "City Women and Religious Change" which would be reprinted in her book, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* published in 1975. This book features eight essays including her previous ones and new anthropological investigations on women and their relation with religious and social reforms. Davis reflected on the success of this book in a later interview with Roger Adelson:

³ Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) is the first female professional historiographer of the Middle Ages in France, best known for her support of women in her famous book *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405.

Perhaps the book's continued usefulness arises from my careful research and writing. Being published in the early stage of the women's movement was also important because students and historians were curious about what a female historian had to say about women in sixteenth-century France. The book helped make me a model for women in history. (Adelson415)

After spending six years at Berkeley, in 1980 Davis started working at Princeton University as the Henry Charles Lea Professor of History for two years. While still at Berkeley, Davis had been searching the rare book collection of The Law School Library looking for material for her research when she came across Judge Jean de Coras' *Memorable Decree* in 1561, a book that tells the story of a peasant imposter in the small French village of Artigat, Davis' first reaction was: "This must become a Film". Three years later in 1980, she worked as a historical consultant for the movie *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*, directed by Daniel Vigne and released in 1982. Despite the success of the movie Davis was disappointed and had a number of reservations regarding the characterization, the spirit, and the psychology of the characters, especially the character of Bertrande de Rols, the wife of Martin Guerre. Accordingly, Davis decided to write her own version of the story. In 1983 she published her book *The Return of Martin Guerre*, which is both well-received and highly criticized.

In the 1980s Davis continued her publications about women and anthropology, for instance, her historiographical essay "Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers, 1400-1820" in 1980, and her 1988's essay "History's Two Bodies" which was delivered as her presidential address to The American Historical Association; Davis is only the second woman to hold this title after Nellie Neilson⁴ in the 1940s. Davis has developed an interest in the

⁴ Nellie Neilson (1873-1947) is an American historian and a professor of history best known for her studies of the Middle Ages. She is the first female president of the American Historical Association.

craft of storytelling and how people used to record their lives, she explores this phenomenon in her book *Fiction in the Archives* in 1987.

Davis's works, in each period stated above, tend to follow and adopt the useful trends of every social and cultural theory that has existed. In the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s Davis will expand and broaden her research trajectory. Following the rise of globalization and global history, Davis will finally leave sixteenth-century France and the world of peasants. Cultural history reached its peak in the 1990s; its main goal is to challenge the previous paradigms of historical research including Marxism, modernization, and the Annales School, and to re-centre historical inquiry to be more inclusive with different categories of analysis. In light of this Davis released several seminal articles, "Stories and the Hunger to Know" in 1992, "Toward Mixture and Margins" in 1992, "Iroquois Women, European Women" in 1993, "Who Owns History?" in 1996, and "The Rest of the Story" in 1999, in addition to her famous book *Women on the Margins* in 1995, that tells the story of three seventeenth-century women in Europe (Kirby 79).

In the 2000s Davis started to adopt a transnational approach that studies migratory patterns and cultural exchange using a global paradigm in her articles such as, "Global History: Many Stories" in 2000, "The Historians and Literary Uses" in 2003, and "What is Universal about History?" in 2006. She had also published two books *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* in 2000 and *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* in 2007. The latter tells the story of Al-Hasan al-Wazzan known as Leo Africanus, the Renaissance's famous Muslim geographer.

In the 2010s, Davis continued to approach historiography from a global perspective, in other words giving voice to different cultures and populations of the world, and to decentre their narratives in order to discover new interpretations beyond spatial boundaries. The 2010s

were the years of awards and acknowledgements for Davis' career. In 2010, she received the Norwegian government's Holberg International Memorial Prize for her efforts in the field of the early modern period and her continuous inspiration of scholars as well as her acclaimed interdisciplinary approach. In 2012, Davis was named the Companion of the Order of Canada, and in 2013 she received the National Humanities Medal presented to her by President Barack Obama. Currently, Davis is a Professor Emerita in the History Department at the University of Toronto where she continues to publish about her passion for history. In 2022, she published her last book titled *Listening to the Languages of the People*. Despite her new directions in the last ten years, Davis continues to shed light on dismissed or misrepresented masses outside the traditional centres of power.

II.3 Natalie Zemon Davis's Critique of Scientific History:

The research trajectory of Natalie Zemon Davis is mainly built on her non-conformist approach and her eclectic use of different tools from the existing social and cultural theories of every period. While Leopold Von Ranke and his loyalists, also known as traditional professional historians, are described as 'bureaucrats' due to their large-scale omission of the lower class and their focus on political and institutional affairs, Davis, on the other hand, focuses on the illiterate working classes of the *menu peuple* through her unconventional approach.

In a 1991's interview with Roger Adelson, Davis explained how independent she is in her academic career, "I have always been deeply concerned with and wanted to reach an audience wider than the narrow circles of scholarship. While I am eclectic in looking beyond traditional approaches to history, I am no dilettante". This emphasis on diminished voices of the past is known as 'historical empathy'. This term goes back to the late eighteenth century, but gets popularized through R.G Collingwood's theory of historical imagination in 1935.

Historical empathy is meant to facilitate a deeper understanding of history and to undermine Ranke's empiricist and rational history by offering a method to understand the social, emotional, and cultural aspects of those diminished subjects of history (Mihra).

In addition to her historical empathy which is clearly seen in her focus on peasants and marginalized women. Davis's interdisciplinary approach is another aspect of her challenge to conventional history. Ranke and his school advocate for history as a fact-oriented discipline in which every period is unique and should be understood in its own context; however, in the early 1950s professional historical studies started their gradual tendency toward an interdisciplinary approach to history which means using methods or concepts of one or more disciplines other than history, this can include Social Sciences as well as Humanistic disciplines (Horn and Ritter 435). Seemingly, Davis is well known for her constant use of different methods and ideas from other fields such as gender theory, cultural anthropology, literary criticism, and the study of folklore while studying or presenting historical analysis. This eclectic use of different tools earns her a reputation as a pioneer in the interdisciplinary approach to history. In a 2018's interview with Michael Gray Davis explained her non-conformist approach to writing by saying, "My writing style has grown and is now historical with a strong dash of anthropological and literary approaches, as I've been deeply interested for decades in the questions anthropologists pose and the attention that literary writers pay to language and style".

The third and most important turn of Davis's challenging approach is her use of narrative and fictional elements. Davis is strongly influenced by the narrative revival of the late twentieth century in the United States, where historians started to embrace and acknowledge the craft of narration that is accessible to a wider, innovative reading public than that of the analytical, fact-oriented mode of historical writing (Onal 259). In her 2011's

article “STORYTELLING” Joan W. Scott acknowledges Davis’s creative method, “Davis chose another path, ingeniously turning up sources that gave voice to *le menu peuple*. She wasn’t alone in this, of course, but she was distinctive in her insistence on letting their stories constitute the substance of her history” (206). This is better illustrated by Davis’s comment in her article “Stories and the Hunger to Know” regarding the importance of storytelling, “History is simultaneously a form of literature; a mode of inquiry and proof, about whose fruits we have an obligation to fellow historians, to dead subjects of the past, and to readers of the future; and an arena for struggles of power and collaboration” (qtd. in Scott 209).

In this light, it should be noted that the literary turn (also known as the linguistic turn) shapes most of Davis's work. Being associated with scholars like Arthur Danto, Lawrence Stone, and Hayden White, this literary turn re-emphasizes the links between history, narrative, and rhetoric. Subsequently, Davis assumes the significance of narration and literary uses while constructing histories in her article “The Historian and Literary Uses” she explains how the literary texts of the fictional or non-fictional writing of educated people such as the five books of Francois Rabelais, offers her more insights of people in sixteenth-century Lyon than that found in primary sources (Davis 22).

In addition to narration, fiction and imagination are also associated with Davis’s work. In the introduction of her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* Davis states, “What I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past” (5). She wants to legitimize the ability of the historian to fill in the gaps and silences of the historical document and not to be imprisoned by documentations or archives; for her the historian should have a room for the “perhapses” and “may-have-beens”, whenever inadequate and perplexing evidence exist it is the task of the historian to structure it into a story (Davis viii).

Davis uses the same method with her other books like *Fiction in the Archives* which features a collection of remission letters and pardon-seeking written by people in sixteenth-century France. Davis reconstructs these letters as a form of their voice. This book is crafted in a clear fictive mode of storytelling with an inclusion of the primary sources of juridical formalities. Seemingly, her book *Women on the Margins* begins with a fictional dialogue between the protagonists, this book is built on the biographical snapshots of three seventeenth-century women (Kirby 73). Through her non-conformist and creative approach that encompasses narrative structures and the use of fiction, Davis rejects Ranke's colourless history.

II.4 Synopsis of *The Return of Martin Guerre*:

Davis opens her book by praising the rarely found and perfect narrative structure of the story of Martin Guerre, and that her main goal is to give "this arresting tale its first full-scale historical treatment" (Davis ix) after the film departs from the historical record in a number of ways, particularly in the treatment of the character of Bertrande de Rols. Davis relies on two primary sources, the first is the book *Arrest Memmorable Decree* in 1561 by Jean de Coras a distinguished doctor of law and one of the judges who held the case against the imposter. The second source is the book *Historia Admiranda* in 1561 by Guillaume Le Sueur another judge in the trial.

The story begins in 1527 with the migration of Martin Guerre's family fearing the continual threat of warfare between France and Spain since their home was in Hendaye which is located right on the border between the two countries. Subsequently, Sanxi Daguerre, his wife, his young son Martin and his brother Pierre leave Hendaye and move to the small French village of Artigat. In 1538 Martin Guerre marries Bertrande de Rols, daughter of a prosperous village family. The couple is in their late teens at the time of the marriage which

remains unconsummated for eight years, and only after much humiliation and despair do they finally have a son. Soon after, Martin is accused of stealing grain from his father, fearing this shame and maybe his father's wrath, Martin leaves his village, property, and his family. Eight years later a man arrives in Artigat claiming to be Martin Guerre, surprisingly he is welcomed by the villagers, his sisters, and his wife Bertrande since his parents died without hearing a word from their son. The man, who looked a lot like Martin, resumes work on the family's property and would later have a child with Bertrande. This returnee however is an imposter named Arnaud du Tilh also known as Pansette "the belly" for his great appetite, drinking, and sexual adventures (Davis 37). The imposter heard about Martin Guerre's story through his work in the neighbouring towns where he learned as much as he can about Martin's life and family. Bertrande knows, from the beginning, that this man is not her husband; however, she helps him in this deception for her benefit and love. The imposter remains undetected for four years until he quarrels with his uncle Pierre over the selling of the family's land. Consequently, the uncle sues him and forces Bertrande to join the suit as well. The first trial in 1560 found him guilty and took him to court at Toulouse. On appeal, the accused defends himself brilliantly and Bertrande faithfully defends her supposed husband. However, when the judge and his court are prepared to reverse the conviction, the true Martin Guerre appears in court hobbling on a wooden leg he lost in the battle of Saint-Quentin where he joined the Spanish army. Shocked by this revelation Bertrande changes her position and welcomes back her real husband. Arnaud is hung in front of the Guerre's house, and he dies testifying to Bertrande's innocence and virtue.

II.5 Social and Intellectual Contexts of *The Return of Martin Guerre*:

The research trajectory of Natalie Zemon Davis is characterized by her eclectic use of ideas from different disciplines. As noted earlier a decisive transition from her earlier work occurred in the 1970s and 1980s; accordingly, in order to understand her writing we need first

to recognize the context that frames much of her content. *The Return of Martin Guerre* was written in 1983 at a time when Davis has already gone further with her cultural, anthropological, and women's studies and has accumulated enough interdisciplinary methods to use, notably her experience as a historical consultant for the movie *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*. Understandably Davis's book cannot be understood without a clear reference to the context it was written in. Thus, the social and intellectual contexts of this book are chosen since they represent the mainframes that conceptualize Davis's book.

II.5.1 The Social Context of *The Return of Martin Guerre*:

Davis is known for her political and social activism including her prior involvement with communism during the Second Red Scare period and the seizing of her passport by the FBI. Nonetheless, Davis continues her social activism throughout The Civil Rights Movement in the United States and works with the so-called Negro Self –Determination. In a later interview, Davis reflects on her desire for a better world, “I wanted to create a peaceful world, stop racism, and put an end to what we saw as the ravagers of capitalism” (American Historical Association). She had also protested against a number of decisions in the United States including the Marshal Plan in 1948 and the Taft-Hartley Act, the latter according to her “weakened the labour unions” which she famously supported during her political engagement (Adelson 409). These socialist and civil rights activities strengthen Davis's connection with what is known as the second-wave feminism of the 1970s in Canada and the United States. In addition to its focus on equality and discrimination, this movement helped to shed light on the place of women in historical scholarship and criticized American women's history for being topically narrow and generally devoid of interpretation (Curthoys and Docker 165). In other words, history was dominated by male subjects whereas women, their contributions, and perceptions have been virtually invisible to historians. In the middle of this debate, Davis

emerged as a major contributor to the development of women's history in the 1970s and 1980s, following her earlier belief to give a voice to those neglected masses and to recapture their visions of the world Davis now focuses on the voice of women particularly women of the working class.

Through her work Davis conceptualizes women's history first to fill the gaps in the historical record; second, to find out what women were writing and publishing; and third, to discover more about women's attitudes in relation to the social system they lived in. In this regard, Davis again treats women's history as a multidisciplinary subject that addressed various questions regarding the social, economic, and psychological (Kirby 42). Seemingly while writing her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* in 1983 Davis admits that women are no longer occasional actors but rather central. This feminist consciousness is evident in her treatment of Martin Guerre's wife Bertrande de Rols and the interpretation of her character and attitudes that will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

II.5.2 The Intellectual Context of *The Return of Martin Guerre*:

In the time *The Return of Martin Guerre* was written, Davis has used the cultural approach in addition to her earlier social approach, to understand the ways ordinary people create and articulate their own and their society's identities. In order to achieve this, she searches for ways to speak of peasants as individuals who made their own choices in a complicated world rather than as determined by class or religion thus allying herself with scholars like E.P Thompson. Both are described by the American historian Suzanne Desan as "seminal figures in the development of cultural approach" (qtd. in Bonar 3). This socio-cultural approach in which ordinary people and the interpretation of their attitudes and behaviours become central to the story, frames most of Davis' works from the mid 1970s to the 1980s. Meanwhile, new fields emerge under this rubric of the cultural approach including

micro-history, ethno-history, and crowd history. In this regard, it should be noted that *The Return of Martin Guerre* is a typical example of a micro-history since it tackles the very minor location of three people: Martin Guerre, Arnaud du Tilh, and the wife of Martin, Bertrande.

Another major transition of the historical studies that was going on in the 1970s and 1980s was the linguistic turn when scholars of the rhetoric school such as Hayden White revitalizes historical writings by suggesting that historical meanings are the product of a historian's subjective choice of plots and voices with hindsight of presentist prejudice rather than objective socio-political explanations, these products according to white are called 'rhetorical emplotment' (Shih 2). In short history according to the linguistic turn is regarded as an aesthetic practice, builds on invention and biases and is more in common with fiction than it does with science.

This intense debate over the relationship between literature and history revives the importance of narratives and imagination in history. A seminal work in this debate is Lawrence Stone's article "The Revival of Narrative" in 1979, whom Davis worked closely with during her years at Princeton University. In this article, Stone rejects scientific and analytical history and celebrates the descriptive narratives and how they are central to the writing of history because they grant the latter a sense of meaningfulness and sameness that is lost in the scientific history.

II.6 Conclusion:

This chapter has provided the intellectual position of Natalie Zemon Davis as a social and cultural historian, and the interdisciplinary approach she has adopted as a challenge to the fact-oriented approach. In addition to the fact that she believes history is literature, the same assumption was set earlier by Hayden White. This chapter also provides the synopsis of *The*

Return of Martin Guerre a story of an imposter taking over Martin Guerre's identity and property with the help of Martin Guerre's wife Bertrande. Additionally, this chapter presents the social context of the book particularly the rise of the feminist movement in the United States. The intellectual context is illustrated by the rise of cultural history and the emphasis on overlooked masses in history as well as the revival of the narrative and fictitious aspects of history.

Chapter Three:
A Critical Analysis of the Interplay
of History and Fiction in Davis's
The Return of Martin Guerre
(1983)

III.1. Introduction:

As discussed in the previous chapter, Davis challenges the realm of scientific history and its fact-oriented approach. Subsequently, this chapter tackles Davis's desire to remedy the weaknesses of scientific history in her acclaimed book *The Return of Martin Guerre*. This book is not just a chance for her to shed light on overlooked masses like French peasants, particularly women, but also a perfect narrative that allows Davis to practice the interdisciplinary approach and the literary construction theory of history established by Hayden White during the linguistic turn. This chapter also argues that the interstices created by the "perhapses" and "may-have-beens" are the driving impulse of Davis's subjectivity. In addition to presenting Davis's endeavour in retelling the story of Martin Guerre, and how she manages to present her historical interpretation as a professional historian, in other words, to present 'what actually happened', with a fictitious and literary construction usually used by authors and novelists in their prose fiction works.

III.2. Between Subjectivity and Scientific History: Understanding Davis's Literary Endeavour:

As a pioneer of social and cultural history, Davis is known for her objection to scientific history established by Leopold von Ranke, which has been practised by traditional historians. Scientific history requires presenting facts, in the sense that historians should not present their personal interpretation based on their imagination, and even if history seems dry as dust and colourless, it should not contain other imaginative and literary elements. However, Davis wants to challenge this perspective and write an accurate historical record that is colourful and constructs it using a literary structure so that it will be read like a novel and argued as a work of history. Her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* is the best example of this interplay of history and fiction.

Written after the movie departs from the historical record that makes it hard to explain what actually happened, Davis wants to retell the story of Martin guerre using new and fresh interpretations, by a cultural and a feminist historian, and a dramatized narrative. In light of this, it is worth noting that other authors combine history and fiction in their works. As discussed in the first chapter, this combination is known as historical fiction or historical novel. One of the best contemporary authors who mastered this art of blending history and fiction is the Algerian novelist and critic Waciny Laredj. Laredj is known for his historical novels that are fictionally impressive and historically well-argued. Through his novels, Laredj wants to show us that there is no single and absolute truth in history, but rather a rhetorical and narrative construction of the past. In a conference in 2017, in the United Arab Emirates, Laredj justified the great demand for the historical novel by saying, “الرواية التاريخية لها قُراء وهم” (“The historical novel has its readers, and they are approaching it because they do not trust history”; my trans.)

Just like Davis, Laredj wants to reconstruct history with an emphasis on dismissed cultures and masses. His novel *نوار اللوز* or *Almond Flowers* published in 1983, the same year *The Return of Martin Guerre* was published, is among his best historical novels. The protagonist in this novel is an ordinary person named Saleh Ben Amer, and his constant internal and moral struggle to achieve a decent life in a difficult period in Algeria’s economic situation. Filled with vivid and expressive descriptions of both setting and characters, Laredj is able to transcend fictional characters and a fictional story with a purely historical spirit. Accordingly, we can assume that as a novelist Waciny Laredj, like many author novelists, does not find his stories, but rather he creates them and wants to write a fictional account through the eyes of history.

However, Davis is different in the fact that she wants her book to be history first then fiction. As an opponent to scientific history, she wants to prove that holding a neutral and objective position is not the only possible way to present ‘what actually happened’. In the introduction of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Davis states: “What I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past” (5). This is precisely the belief that the historian can combine ‘what actually happened’ with fiction. Understandably, she writes her book to tell the world, particularly those traditional historians, that she can uncover the true face of the past in the story of Martin Guerre using primary and secondary sources, without holding any biases, and mainly by using a literary construction of a dramatized tale. This would give her account a colourful and captivating structure that is missing in scientific history works.

III.3. Assessing the Historical Reconstruction of the Story of Martin Guerre:

What distinguishes history from fiction is the level of objectivity and imagination. Accordingly, if historians are able to hold personal prejudice, values, and present consciousness to the facts of history, and if they can use their imagination while interpreting results, then what distinguishes history from fiction, and a historian from a novelist?

Written with the aim of a truthful historical reconstruction and giving the first full-scale historical treatment of a real story, *The Return of Martin Guerre* has proved to be completely the opposite. As a historian a researcher, Davis is known for her interdisciplinary and cultural approach to history, allowing her to adopt different methods and concepts from other disciplines like anthropology, women’s history, and micro-history. Accordingly, this influence is clearly seen in her refashioning of the story of Martin Guerre. Davis seems highly affected by social, cultural, and feminist motives in the inventive part of her story.

After the movie's departure from the historical record, Davis wants to tell us what actually happened by filling the gaps in historical records (Davis viii).

One of the earliest original sources of the story of Martin Guerre, and the most important one, is the book *Memorable Decree* in 1560 by Jean de Coras, the 'rapporteur' at the trial of Martin Guerre, and a judge of the parliament of Toulouse. In his book, Jean de Coras places the imposter Arnaud du Tilh, also known as Pansette, as the main character. De Coras seems impressed by the imposter's abilities and deception, and how he manages to deceive Bertrande and have a child together. On the other hand, Davis presents completely a different interpretation. Instead of considering Bertrande as a victim of fraud, Davis's account states that Bertrande is a partner of Arnaud du Tilh. She knew from the beginning that this man is not her husband, but she accepts him, they fall in love, and they regard themselves as having an "invented" marriage. They willfully fabricate a lie, and, when challenged in court, they concoct a strategy of deceit and manipulation: "Bertrande searched her memory for a sexual episode (involving her true husband) perhaps even embroidered it with which they could surprise the court" (57). However, when the real Martin Guerre appears in court, the wife changes her position and her "double role" collapses, she brings forth "prepared excuses". Meanwhile, Arnaud remains faithful to his lover and accomplice. He dies asserting that Bertrande was duped just like the rest of the villagers of Artigat, he "concealed from start to finish Bertrande's role in their elaborate collusion" (Davis 92).

This new interpretation of the story of Martin Guerre challenges some historians, mainly American historians like Robert Finlay. His critique of Davis in his article "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre", published in 1988 is the most famous one. According to Finlay, the traditional narrative of de Coras is a tale of "greed and deception, of perverted talents and a duped woman, of great ability in the service of fraud and theft. Davis's book tells a tale of devotion and collaboration, of love and identity, of how an invented marriage is

destroyed by a hard-hearted man with a wooden leg” (Finlay 555). For de Coras, the story is a tragicomedy of an imposture who deceives the village of Artigat and almost gets away with it, but for Davis, the tragedy lies in the unmasking of Arnaud, a kind of hero, a more real Martin Guerre than the unsympathetic husband of Bertrande.

The characterisation of Bertrande is the sharpest distinction between the two versions of the story. The other sources like *Admiranda Historia* affirm that everyone in Artigat considers Bertrande a victim, even The Criminal Chamber of the Parliament of Toulouse declares her daughter fathered by Arnaud as legitimate. Besides, Arnaud’s pardon request for cruelly deceiving her, as well as the testimony of 180 witnesses that no one ever suggests that Bertrande is Arnaud’s partner in crime. Until Davis, with her feminist impulses, characterises Bertrande as a heroic figure, independent, clear-sighted, passionate, and invariably “honorable” (Finlay 556).

In the 1980s, Davis has already engaged with women’s history and feminist studies, as well as the status of women in sixteenth-century France. Davis uses this knowledge of women, particularly peasant women, in justifying Bertrande actions and motives. She justifies Bertande’s acceptance of the imposter as an act of intelligence and taking advantage of the situation. According to her, Bertrande wants a husband to protect her in a male-dominated society after the sudden departure of her husband, just like her mother who remarried Pierre (Martin Guerre’s uncle) after the death of her husband. Thus, marriage and family were essential to peasant women’s identity. Davis describes Bertrande’s situation by saying, “Shehad tried to fashion her life as best she could, using all the leeway and imagination she had as a woman. But she was also proud of her honor and her virtue and was, as should say later in court, God-fearing. She wanted to live as a mother and family woman at the center of village society. She wanted her son to inherit” (60).

According to Davis, this role and interpretation of Bertrande's character have been overlooked and muted due to the fact that "we have no female commentary on the story until the twentieth century" (118). This feminist articulation of Bertrande's actions is applied to Martin Guerre's four sisters as well. For example, when Martin's sisters side with their alleged brother against his accusers (including their uncle Pierre) Davis writes, "They may have preferred him to their uncle as head of the family and its property" (55). Again, Davis highlights the aspects of the self-interest of peasant women and how they take advantage of the situation. Apparently, Davis is engaged in a psychoanalytical and anthropological explanation of human beings' behaviours, a skill she accumulates thanks to her interdisciplinary approach while studying the *menu peuple*.

Davis seems to impose her general, predetermined view on peasant women, who are characterised by their self-interest motives, on the character of Bertrande. At the same time, this assertion on the character of Bertrande is not built on evidence or sources, but rather on her claim that Bertrande is not the kind of woman easily deceived by man:

What of Bertrande de Rols? Did she know that the new Martin was not the man who had abandoned her eight years before? Perhaps not at the very first, when he arrived with all his "signs" and proofs. But the obstinate and honourable Bertrande does not seem a woman so easily fooled, not even by a charmer like Pansette. By the time she had received him in her bed, she must have realized the difference; as any wife of Artigat would have agreed, there is no mistaking "the touch of the man on the woman." Either by explicit or tacit agreement, she helped him become her husband. (Davis 44)

This interpretation of Bertrand's psyche is entirely built on Davis's own speculation and guesses, or as she calls them, the "perhapses" and "may-have-beens". In his "The

Refashioning of Martin Guerre”, Finlay maintains that this assertion about an inevitable sexual recognition, backed by the proverb “the touch of the man” seems irrelevant and trivial while considering the conditions of sexual intercourses in peasant households of preindustrial Europe. Finlay replies with another famous proverb of eighteenth-century France, “De nuits tous chats son gris” translated as “All cats are gray at night”. For him this assumption of Davis “is not an interpretation based on the sources; it is, rather, an opinion by a modern historian who apparently believes that unsubstantiated insight can itself be taken as evidence” (559). In other words, instead of presenting the voice of Bertrande built on accurate and primary sources, Davis presents her own voice, thus her own subjective literary interference.

Furthermore, this argument of sexual recognition is logically unfitting, taking into consideration the records that Davis herself uses in reflecting Bertrande’s sexual experience. Bertrande marries at a very young age, and she and her husband only have a child after nine years when a magic spell is lifted. Soon after, Martin abandons her for eight years. Understandably, if Bertrande has felt anything weird toward the imposter, she may reasonably explain it as a result of their long abstinence. This interpretation raises some challenging questions that Davis encounters, first how Bertrande is described as “honorable” but still an accomplice of the imposter? In other words, she can be charged with adultery. Second, if Bertrande is Arnauld’s partner, then why she joins the law suit with Pierre and accuses him in the first trial? This is explained by Davis with a set of questions that according to her are asked by Bertrande:

Would God punish them because of the lie? And if their marriage were only an invention, was she a shameful adulteress in her mother’s eyes and in those of the other village women? And Would her daughter Bernarde be stained, since it was said that a child conceived in adultery was marked with the sins of its parents? She loved the

new Martin, but he had tricked her once; might he after all not trick her again? And what if the other Martin Guerre came back? (Davis 61)

Apparently, these claims and assertions about Bertrande's double game are getting more and more complicated and implausible. Bertrande should not only deceive the villagers and her stepfather Pierre, but she must also deceive the judges and her lover, the same lover she wants to be her husband. In Jean de Coras's *Memorable Decree*, Bertrande is "nervous and uncertain, trembling in speech and with eyes fixed on the floor" when she confronts the imposter at court (qtd. in Finlay 560). According to Davis, this is a part of her plan with Arnould that they prepared months ago; thus, it is a clever act that even the judges can not reveal. This invention of a love story between Bertrande and the imposter is not based on evidence from de Coras's record. Even in his last confession before being executed, Arnould does not justify his role-playing as an act of love for Bertrande. Thus, we should refer to the notion of greed that Davis ignores; Arnould's main motive is to take over Martin's property since he is the only heir after his parents' death.

As discussed in the second chapter, Davis is known for her 'historical empathy' and how she sheds light on overlooked masses like peasants and wants to give them a voice to speak and defend themselves. However, Davis does indeed exaggerate in this regard. She refashions a tale of deception and fraud, to a tale of love, trust, and shrewdness. She even questions the judgement of the court, and the perspective of the author of her primary source Jean de Coras, with no clear or reliable arguments for her claims. Thus, she does not only reverse the moral of the story, but also bases her interpretation on her personal opinions, guesses, and general predetermined notions she discovered while studying peasant women in sixteenth-century France.

As noted in chapter one, imagination is something allowed for the historian to do particularly with the ideas of R.G Collingwood. Collingwood asserts that historians must, necessarily use their imagination in order to reconstruct and understand the past. However, this imagination is found in both historian's and novelist's narratives, and the difference between them is that the imagination of the historian must be related to the evidence that the historian gathers from the sources; whereas, the imagination of the novelist is derived from a fanciful imagination that has nothing to do with the historical sources. The latter is incontestably fitting in the case of Davis's reinterpretation of Martin Guerre's story, and how she retells the story using her opinions rather than the evidence of her primary source.

Davis is so affected by the cultural and interdisciplinary approaches she is part of. She refashions the story of Martin Guerre into a tale of conspiracy and identity, and constructs the character of Bertrande as a "heroine, a sort of proto-feminist of peasant culture" (Finlay 570). Using her selective use of methods from different disciplines with no hard evidence to support her view, she imagines the actions of the characters and justifies them within the social and cultural contexts of the peasant community, and mainly out of Jean de Coras's account. As Finlay states, de Coras records a fascinating true tale and tells his readers 'what really happened', he does not give the villain of the story another chance to justify or explain his actions using a presentist prejudice or biases (570). Thus, Davis's story is so far from being held tightly in check by the voices of the past.

III.4.Assessing the Fictionality of *The Return of Martin Guerre*:

Despite the fact that Davis wants to discover the factual roots of the story of Martin Guerre, she also wants to shape it into a narrative. In her article "On The Lane" (1988), Davis states, "I decided to use a literary construction for *The Return of Martin Guerre* that would allow the book to be read, if one wished, like a detective story" (Davis, On the Lane

575). Following the results of her historical interpretation, we can assume the fictitious and invented part of Davis's book that in a way or another makes her book read as a novel rather than an accurate historical record.

As discussed in the second chapter, *The Return of Martin Guerre* was written at the time of the linguistic turn in the United States, a time when scholars like Hayden White revived the necessity of narrative structures and fictitious elements in historical writing. In contrast to colourless history, White believes that history is literature since it is written in a literary style that requires the use of imagination and fictiveness just like that used by the author or novelist, and it is up to the historian to choose the structure or genre he or she wants to apply on the record. Accordingly, *The Return of Martin Guerre* is the best example of a book written based on a true tale that encompasses beneath it the structure of a story built on the perspective of its author. It should be noted that historians usually write their histories in a narrative form, even Leopold von Ranke is known for his narrative abilities; however, the difference is that historians like Ranke have limited their imagination and write fact-oriented histories that are readable. On the other hand, historians like Davis, open the door for their imagination and fiction in order to write colourful and enjoyable histories, and to ultimately give a voice to those actors of history.

To start with, any work of prose fiction is built on a number of elements and features that are necessarily found. As discussed in the first chapter, the plot is the backbone of any story since it keeps readers interested and eager to know the rest of the events. In the case of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Davis uses a simple plot with a chronological order that begins with the migration of Martin Guerre's family from Hendaye to Artigat, and ends with the death of the imposter. However, by applying the structure of the plot in Davis's book, we can see that the first stage or the 'situation' is the period after Martin had left his village. In this

stage, Davis introduces the situation of both Martin and Bertrande. Martin is described by her as “the disconnected peasant” and an impotent man who has a difficult childhood due to his movement from one village to another, and due to the fact that he is the only boy in a family full of girls (Davis 20). Martin is also frustrated with the village and peasant life; he wants to discover other lands and adventures:

But things were still not well with the new father. If we can judge Martin Guerre’s state of mind from how he chose to spend the next twelve years of his life, there was very little he liked about Artigat beyond his swordplay and acrobatics with the other young men. His precarious sexuality after years of impotence, his household of sisters who would soon be marrying, his position as heir, now underscored by the arrival of his son Sanxi, he wanted none of it. (Davis 21)

Bertrande is also described as “belle”, which means beautiful, stubborn and independent woman from a well-off family in Artigat. The Return of her husband is a raising action when the whole village thinks that the real Martin is finally back. He soon resumes work with the family and has another child with Bertrande. Next, complications start to happen when the returnee quarrels with his uncle Pierre, and the latter sues him in court. The plot starts to thicken particularly during the two trials with the testimony of witnesses and the family of Martin.

The turning point or the climax, happens at the court in Toulouse, when the real Martin Guerre shows up with a wooden leg he lost in Spain, “Once he got to Toulouse about late July, he was placed in the custody of the guard of the parlement, and hearings began. “Newcomer!” the defendant is said to have shouted when his confrontation began with the man from Spain, “evildoer, rascal! This man has been bought for cash and has been instructed by Pierre Guerre” (Davis 84). This revelation of truth and the end of Arnould’s deception soften the plot and start the falling actions that happen in court, including

Bertrand's asking for forgiveness from her real husband and the imposter's confession. Although the resolution is not what Bertrande has hoped for, but she has accepted her reality and even had two more sons with Martin.

While reading Davis's story, we can notice that the events are ordered chronologically and in a simple flow that reaches different audiences, with a clear division of chapters which deals with different main ideas. However, Davis spoils the events from the beginning. The identity of the new Martin is revealed even before the court and before the appearance of the real Martin, "Then in the summer of 1556, a man presented himself to her as the long-lost Martin Guerre. Previously he had been known as Arnaud du Tilh, alias Pansette", this is also strengths by another passage, "It was true that he did not look exactly the same as Martin Guerre who had left. But then the Guerres had no painted portraits by which to recall his features" (Davis 34, 43). This absence of surprise and suspense while presenting the new Martin has limited the imagination and expectations of readers and makes it harder for them to continue the book with the same tension and curiosity held in the beginning.

Moreover, while Jean de Coras's story is considered by him as a tragicomedy, in the sense that it tells the downfall of Arnaud du Tilh and how he manages to deceive the whole village. Inspired by the ideas of Hayden White, Davis reshapes the story of Martin Guerre in a new structure and genre and turns it into a Romantic tragedy. Romantic since it tells a love story and an invented marriage between Arnauld and Bertrande, and a tragedy with the return of the real Martin and the unmasking of Arnauld. The three main characters are Martin Guerre, his wife, and the imposter. However, the protagonist in Davis's story is Bertrande, she is the main character that the story revolves around. The heroine's motives and way of thinking are the main concern of Davis. Seemingly, Arnaud is described as a hero and a saviour of Bertrande from her situation after her husband's departure since she was neither a

wife nor a widow. Thus, Martin Guerre is the villain in this story, an unsympathetic, traitor, and selfish man who turns the couple's plans upside down.

Usually, in fiction works each character is supposed to represent an idea or a journey that is related to the time the work is written. An example of this would be the character Gatsby from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* which represents the American Dream of the 1920s. For Davis, Bertrande is a reflection of an '*avantgarde*' feminist, clear-sighted, and independent woman in a peasant society. She is a complicated character that makes it hard to understand her position or what she really wants. Arnould du Tilh stands for a heroic commitment and a man who is responsible for his actions since he kept Bertrande's accomplice a secret till his death. Accordingly, readers are supposed to sympathise and feel alienated with two tricksters, who prefer their own interests over honorability and honesty.

Furthermore, one of the main methods of characterization is the description, describing characters in terms of their appearance, actions, and beliefs to make readers feel that they are meeting characters in real life. This rapport of description is missing in Davis's book as there are only a few passages that describe characters. An example of this is Davis's description of Bertrande as a "young beautiful woman", and Arnould, "His youth was the opposite of Martin Guerre's. He grew up in a family of boys, with whom he got on well. He was rather short and stocky, and not especially adept at the village sports" (Davis 36). Martin however seems to have more physical description since revealing his real identity is the target of the whole plot. Yet, his description is not presented as a means to discover more about his character, rather it is presented at the end of the story by the witnesses in the trial as a means of law and legal ensuring, "Some witnesses maintained that Martin had been taller, thinner, and darker than the accused, had a flatter nose and more projecting lower lip and a scar on his eyebrow that was nowhere to be seen on this imposter" (Davis 67). Accordingly, this lack of

physical description mainly for the protagonist Bertrande and her accomplice causes the absence of other reliable functions that would help readers to reflect on the personality and actions of each character.

In light of this, it may be worthy of note that Davis puts more emphasis on describing the setting more than the characters. Whether that of Hendaye or Artigat, she manages to transcend the geographical and spatial vibes and atmosphere. Dialogues and conversations are another method to reveal the characters' thoughts, motives, and way of thinking. This can be done through communications among other characters or by exposing the flow of ideas and emotions within the character's mind which is also known as stream of consciousness. These communicative aspects are missing in Davis's book. Although she tries to reveal what was going on inside Bertrande's head in this passage, "Would God punish them because of the lie? And if their marriage were only an invention, was she a shameful adulteress in her mother's eyes and in those of the other village women?" (60). However, it is easy enough for readers to spot Davis's voice rather than Bertrande's voice.

Moving to the narrative technique in *The Return of Martin Guerre*, the story is told in the third person narrator that is an external source to the world of the story, in other words, through the perspective of Davis. Davis chooses to relate the story from her own perspective, which emphasises the sense of subjectivity she wants to infuse into the historicity of the book. This is indeed noticeable from the beginning of the book to the end. Readers will discover the story of Martin Guerre, the imposter's tricks, and mainly Bertrande's adventures and journey through the eyes of Davis. This narration has the drawback of distancing the reader from the story, particularly from the characters, which of course makes it harder to identify with them, especially when the descriptive rapport and communication between characters are missing. Davis's narration reveals her sympathetic tone with Bertrande and her double game. This is clear in some passages like, "During these weeks, the woman who was

seeking a judgment had a difficult and lonely time” (68). In addition, “Possibly Bertrande had the chance to talk to an attorney..., but in the presence of the judge, his clerk, and the king’s attorney, she was on her own. It was hard to present herself in this man’s world...” (69). Along with Bertrande, Arnould du Tilh as well has his share from Davis’s sad tone:

The condemned man on his knees in front of the church in the traditional garb of the penitent white shirt, bare head, and bare feet, with a torch in his hands. He asked pardon of God, the king, the court, Martin Guerre and Bertrande de Rols, and Pierre Guerre. Led through the village with the hangman’s rope on his neck, the golden-tongued peasant addressed the crowds. He was the Arnould du Tilh who had shamelessly and craftily taken the goods of another and the honor of his wife.... Even on the ladder up to the gibbet he was talking, preaching to the man who would take his place not to be harsh with Bertrande. She was a woman of honor, virtue, and constancy, he could attest to it. (93)

The tone of the author is supposed to create a relationship between the reader and the intended meaning that the author wants to convey. Davis wants her readers to sympathise and to feel an affinity with the couple’s love story and their sacrifice. However, this is hard to achieve due to the absence of neither a declaration of love nor a consistency of the character of Bertrande. In other words, Bertrande is portrayed as Arnould’s loyal accomplice and lover; however, she does not defend him in court when the real Martin Guerre appears, she smoothly changes her position and takes advantage of it.

Moreover, novelists usually tend to use the present tense, especially in detective and mystery stories that revolve around uncovering the truth. It has a definite effect on the way the reader responds to the narrative and makes it seem more familiar and intimate. The present tense will also provide what is known as the dramatic force that allows readers to

imagine and watch the scene in front of them. Unfortunately, this intimacy and involvement of both the characters and readers is absent in Davis's book. She constructs the whole book using the past tense, it may be justified since she is retelling a story from the past, but it does not make her book read as a detective story or at least a compelling story.

It should be noted that Davis uses a kind of artistic language, in addition to her language, in order to give the book a literary and artistic mood. This is seen in her use of metaphor in her final statement in the book "I think I have uncovered the true face of the past" (Davis 125). Davis also uses some symbols like the carnival masks that are used as an indicator of people's desires to seek another identity than their own selves, and to refashion their personalities; the same desire that is found in the imposter Arnauld du Tilh. In addition, Martin Guerre's wooden leg that he lost while fighting against his own country represents a symbol of his real identity in a time when there are no such things as photographs or birth certificates. So, the loss of Guerre's leg is the only incontrovertible evidence.

III.5. Conclusion:

The story of Martin Guerre is a prodigious tale of peasants in sixteenth-century France that is recorded by the witnesses and performers of the trial. Written with the aim of uncovering the true face of the past, *The Return of Martin Guerre* is more of an invention of a modern historian who apparently seems highly affected by her feminist impulses and intellectual context, than a historical record held tightly in check by the voices of the past. Davis has entered the primary source of Jean de Coras with her full subjectivity, predetermined ideas, and her feminist biases that eventually led to the exploitation of and exaggeration in the historical record. In addition, this chapter presents the literary assessment of Davis's book as a work of prose fiction since it is an inventive record. Davis uses what Hayden White calls a rhetorical emplotment, and shapes her story into a narrative plot and a

romantic tragedy between the heroes of her story Bertrande and Arnaud du Tilh. This assessment brought forth the weaknesses that the literary construction of Davis results in, from the lack of suspense and surprise to the very few descriptive and communicative rapports of characters that eventually led to the absence of verisimilitude, between the reader and characters; in other words, the emotional and psychological engagement of the reader.

General Conclusion

This study has tackled one of the main debates in the literary and academic fields. The debate over the objectivity and subjectivity of historical writing, and the possibility of the historian to combine history with fiction in one work. The root of this debate goes back to the nineteenth century in Germany, where the historian Leopold von Ranke contributes to the creation of history as a separate academic discipline with a purely empirical approach. Through applying the Enlightenment ideal of scientific reasoning, Ranke advocates for history as science built on complete objectivity and faithfulness to historical facts. This objectivity should be followed with an emphasis on primary sources. Understandably, this rigorous empirical version of history could only be achieved with a full exclusion of literary and fictitious elements no matter how dry as dust and colourless history may seem.

Despite the fact that Ranke made a huge contribution to the field of history, his scientific approach was highly criticized in Europe and the United States. Historians of the twentieth century believe that historical facts do not exist until the historian creates them, and it is impossible to apply the scientific method on history since historians cannot experiment on past events. Ranke and his traditional historians and loyalists were also criticised for their emphasis on political and national matters with a clear exclusion of other social and cultural contexts and populations. This critique resulted in the emergence of the Annales School in France and the rise of cultural history. The two worked on giving a voice to those overlooked and dismissed societies and masses.

Moreover, this study has presented the main challenge to scientific history which has been advocated by the American scholar Hayden White. White assumed that history is a literary representation with a narrative structure plot, characters, and tone that are chosen by the historian and known as rhetorical emplotment. In other words, writing history is like writing a novel. In light of this, this study provided a detailed description of prose fiction, and the main elements and features that should be found in every typical prose fictional work.

After presenting the main sides of the debate and how they defended their claims, the second chapter focused on Natalie Zemon Davis, a respected historian at Princeton University and the author of her acclaimed book *The Return of Martin Guerre* in 1983. As a pioneer in social and cultural history, Davis has rejected the colourlessness of scientific history and devoted her work to the representation of misrepresented or dismissed masses in history. She focused on presenting the voices of peasants and women in the sixteenth century with literary narrative mode. Her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* tells a fascinating tale of deception and love of a peasant couple in sixteenth-century France. Davis wrote her book in order to give this true story its first full-scale historical treatment with an appealing literary and narrative structure. In short, she wanted to combine history and fiction.

The third chapter brought forth the spirit of this study and its Major contribution. Through a critical analytical approach, we have investigated the historical reconstruction in Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Despite the fact that Davis relied on a primary source in her book, and wanted to uncover the true face of the past in this story; her book however, was so far from being a trustworthy historical record. By tracing Davis's feminist motives, interdisciplinary methods, and imagination with no solid evidence from reliable sources, we were able to detect the subjectivity and ideological biases of our female historian.

Another major contribution of this dissertation lies in applying a literary analytical assessment of the fiction in Davis's book. Since most of the studies done on this book had only focused on its historical dimension of it, the second section treated the book as a work of prose fiction with a detailed assessment of the main elements of prose fiction found in it. Inspired by Hayden White, Davis wanted to construct a thrill and dramatized story with a narrative structure, plot, and characters. However, Davis's romantic tragedy was not imaginative enough due to the lack of some literary standards including the elements of

thrilling and surprise, the descriptive and communicative rapports, and the emotional involvement of readers.

Subsequently, this study has concluded that Natalie Zemon Davis wanted to combine history and fiction in her book *The Return of Martin Guerre* in order to remedy the weaknesses of scientific history; however, she was not successful in that. Ultimately, her book is not real and objective enough to be history, and not imaginative enough to meet the expected standards of prose fiction. Thus, our reading of Davis's literary endeavour leads us to the main conclusion that answers the main problem raised by this dissertation, that history and fiction are completely two different discourses with different methods and objectives, and cannot be combined or substituted for one another.

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الملخص

لطالما كانت طبيعة علم التاريخ عرضة للجدل منذ قرون، بين من تقبل فكرة علمية الحقائق التاريخية و موضوعيتها و بين من دحض هاته الصفة و وصف التاريخ بأنه أدب لا تختلف كتابته عن كتابة الروايات و القصص التي يرويها الكاتب متأثرا بإنحيازاته و أفكاره المسبقة و معتقداته. بناء على ذلك تناول هذا البحث دراسة تحليلية و نقدية لواحد من أكثر الكتب أهمية و جدلا في ميدان النظري التاريخي و كذا النقدي الأدبي. كتاب عودة مارتن غير للباحثة الأمريكية و الكندية ناتالي زيمون ديفيس في 1983 يعد من الكتب التي قسمت آراء التاريخيون و النقاد بين من تقبل الكتاب كدراسة تاريخية بحتة و بين من اعتبره تضليلا لا يمت بالدراسة التاريخية و لا بالمصادر الموثوقة أي صلة. هدفت الكاتبة في تأليفها لهذا الكتاب إلى تحقيق دراسة تاريخية مبنية على حقائق و كشف بعض الخفايا في قصة مارتن غير، كما أرادت تحقيق سرد أدبي أشبه بروايات التحقيق و الإثارة. بين مؤيد و معارض قدمت هاته الدراسة منظورا جديدا و شاملا لمدى صحة الحقائق و التحليلات المقدمة من طرف الكاتبة و كذا دراسة مفصلة لمعالم الرواية المعترف بها عالميا و خصائصها. توصلت هاته دراسة إلى تأكيد أن الكاتبة ناتالي زيمون ديفيس وعدت أكثر مما حققت في ثنايا كتابها، حيث لم تقدم دراسة موضوعية و حيادية بل خالفت المصادر التاريخية و ألقت قصة مبنية على آراءها و تخميناتها كباحثة و كمؤرخة، في نفس الوقت لم يقدم كتابها نمطا محاكيا للسرد الخيالي و الأدبي للقصص حيث لم ينجح سردها في خلق حبكة روائية و جذب القراء عن طريق التشويق و الوصف الدقيق للشخصيات و إدراج القراء نفسيا و عاطفيا في القصة. و بذلك نستنتج أن التاريخ والخيال لا يمكن أن يجتمعا في عمل واحد حيث أن لكل منهما بنية و أهداف مختلفة.

Résumé

Publié en 1983, le livre de Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, a fait l'objet de vifs débats parmi les historiens et les critiques, avec des opinions très partagées entre ceux qui y voient une véritable étude historique et ceux qui remettent en cause sa crédibilité en raison de son manque allégué de confiance dans des sources fiables. L'auteur a entrepris de créer un livre historiquement précis et bien documenté qui captiverait également les lecteurs avec son style de narration passionnant. Cette étude, qui a suscité à la fois soutien et critique, a offert un regard neuf et complet sur la crédibilité des faits et des analyses avancés par l'auteur. De plus, il a approfondi un examen approfondi des éléments et des qualités internationalement reconnus du roman. Cette étude a confirmé que l'écrivain Natalie Zemon Davis a promis plus que ce qu'elle a réalisé dans les plis de son livre, car elle n'a pas fourni une étude objective et impartiale, mais a plutôt violé des sources historiques et composé une histoire basée sur ses opinions et ses spéculations en tant que chercheur. Ainsi, nous concluons que l'histoire et la fiction ne peuvent pas coexister dans une œuvre, car chacune a une structure et des objectifs différents.