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Deconstructing Textual Reality: rhizomatic writing as a disposition of postmodern literary reflection

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Abstract. The article draws on a Deleuzoguattarian view of the rhizome to examine literary connections within postmodern novels as multiple, non-linear, and non-hierarchical structures. Two symptomatic texts – Alexandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008) and Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* (2018) – have been explored through a rhizomatic reading to illustrate how these novels embody the principles of the rhizome as a disposition of postmodern thinking. The stories demonstrate a distinctive form of rhizomatic writing characterised by fragmentation, the imitation of chaotic composition, the blending of various genre elements, and the inclusion of different types of art (intermediality). Moreover, the article focuses on the rhizomatic transformations of time that shape the literary landscape within the novels, addressing concepts of the pre-past, past, present, and future via the past. A rhizomatic way of creating fiction texts actualises the idea of interdisciplinarity as the topical project in the humanities. By employing the concept of the rhizome, the article engages with the deconstructive potential of postmodern literature and the dispositional mode of its representation.

Keywords: Deleuzoguattarian philosophy; fictional reality; literary connection; Postmodern thinking; rhizomorphic reading.

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Introduction

Textual reality gains a special dimension in postmodern literature and is absorbed into it (Kaufmann, 1994, p. 100) since postmodernism is often associated with plurality, textuality and scepticism (Nath, 2014, p. 27). In postmodernism, there are many beliefs, many kinds of beliefs and many ways of believing (Anderson, 1998). The interpretation of a postmodern text generates not only the variability of its performances but also implies a certain invariant of perception. Such a text is a non-hierarchical, dynamically developing system that is incomplete not in terms of content but in terms of meaning, interpretation, and maieutic understanding. Such a text is open to different interpretations and understanding, and it is ambiguous (Davis, 2007). However, they do not build different worlds but, in different ways, "deconstruct" the same universe, which is observed from different angles. Deconstructing textual reality shows irreconcilably contradictory meanings in postmodern texts rather than a unified, logical nature of narration. However, deconstruction is not destruction, but "rather the dismantling of cultural, philosophical, and institutional structures that starts from textual" (Hendricks, 2016, p. 2).

A new aesthetics of deconstructing textual reality in postmodern fiction emerges by exploiting rhizomatic principles. The rhizome, taken from poststructuralism, has become a fundamental category for understanding postmodern art. Its characteristics, such as fragmentariness, decentering, multiplicity, changeability, contextuality, uncertainty, irony, and simulation, which determine a postmodern piece, are directly derived from it. As articulated in Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux*, the rhizome "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills" (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004, p. 23). Deleuze and Guattari describe the book itself as the rhizome due to how it was written and produced: "The world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented" (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004, p. 7). In postmodern fiction, the concept of the rhizome captures a fundamentally non-structural and non-linear way of organising the text (Honan, 2007, p. 531). In contrast to treelike structures, the rhizome is multidirectional or even omnidirectional due to its connection among different elements: "Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other" (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004, p. 7). The rhizome has neither a centre nor a periphery, so any element of the text can become the main element of the episode. The heterogeneous space means no hierarchised distance between one element and another (van der Klei, 2002, p. 48). This very statement also applies to the characters of rhizomatic pieces, which turn from minor to main characters.

Rhizomatic writing seeks to free itself from the rigid structure, the totalitarianism of language, decentred and decoded (Juarrero, 1993, p. 39) in several dimensions; its intensities "produce" multiplicity, and it changes as the number of ties increases, it becomes more complicated, creating an open field of text. The influence of the rhizome on literature is manifested in a new type of book – an open, unstructured, inconsistent and pluralistic one. As a strategy for organising text in the postmodern realm, the rhizome actualises

the problem of interdisciplinary explications of texts since the postmodern has become a key category in disciplines across the humanities (Malpas, 2005, p. 6). The rhizomatic approach to fiction texts promotes the idea of interdisciplinarity as a general project in the humanities since the "interference" of different discourses is dictated by the characteristics of texts organised according to the laws of rhizomatic logic.

In this research, the most significant rhizomatic text constructs are defined as intermediality, which ensures producing new meanings, affects the structure of a text, and by borrowing artefacts (e.g. terms) from one kind of art, moves them to another dimension, building a special type of intratextual relationships (Rajewsky, 2011; Hallet, 2015). Exploration of the intermediality of a literary text, including "the study of the literary as a heterogeneous material that conveys a more or less radical 'semiotic rupture' within itself" (Baetens, Sánchez-Mesa Martínez, 2015, p. 292), is relatively consistent with the conception of a rhizomatic text that acknowledges its dependence on its material construction (Parikka, 2005, p. 77) and with the concept of the rhizome as a multiple, heterogeneous and non-hierarchical construct.

Parallels in the selected novels

The rules of the rhizome affect the emergence of differently structured texts, where the earlier plotline becomes the beginning of the following one, existing meanings cannot be captured, and textual reality turns into an ordered chaos, arranged as sections. This study thoroughly analyses the following rhizomatic novels: Alexandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008) and Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* (2018). The selection of the novels complies with a modern paradigm of transitivity, first articulated by McHale (1987) in *Postmodernist Fiction*: a change from a focus on epistemological issues to ontological ones marks the move from modern to postmodern fiction.

Hemon (b. 1964), a Bosnian-American fiction writer who was born in Sarajevo in the former Yugoslavia, of Ukrainian descent on his father's side and Bosnian, of Serb background on his mother's side (Knight, 2009, p. 85), published *The Lazarus Project* on the 100th anniversary of the death of Lazarus Averbuch, a teenaged Jewish survivor of the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, who was shot in Chicago in 1908 (Canales, 2013, p. 93). The novel focuses on the life and murder of the immigrant whose biography and even the name resonate with biblical motifs (Bezrukov, Bohovyk, 2021, p. 272).

Zusak (b. 1975), an Australian writer whose *Bridge of Clay* is regarded as a magnum opus (Sebag-Montefiore, 2019), articulates the idea of a "perfect chaos" of life as the central plotline of the novel (Bohovyk, Bezrukov, 2022, p. 269). Zusak was at work on his novel for thirteen years and wrote a sprawling family saga focusing on five brothers abandoned after their mother's death and their father's disappearance.

The selected novels attract attention with significant parallel lines, which allows us to explore them in one problematic field through a rhizomorphic reading. The novels have been selected because they are appropriate for this research, being "endlessly complex and nuanced; their surfaces ... textured and porous" (Marks, 2002, p. xv). This type of

reading presupposes "an active, sense-making reader who understands the significance of establishing connections, appreciating heterogeneity, affirming multiplicity, and validating and reincorporating rupture" (Burnett, Dresang, 1999, p. 421).

The first thing that catches the eye is the naming of the protagonists in the titles of the novels: Lazarus and Clay. The title of Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* is an allusion to Saint Lazarus or Lazarus of the Four Days, mentioned in the Gospel of John in the New Testament of the Christian Bible: "*Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany…*" (John 11:1). The title of Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* is metaphorically embodied in the novel – the boy's name and clay he uses to build the bridge that is proved by his girlfriend's claim: "You, … the bridge*"* (Zusak, 2019, p. 378).

The dedications mentioned at the beginning of the novels create a symbolic space in which the awareness of the text presupposes memorialising the author's name, which, in turn, leaves the name of the addressee of the dedication in readers' memory. Hemon's "*For my sister, Kristina*" (Hemon, 2008) is a dedication to his sister; it contains memories of childhood – adventures, games and experiences. Zusak's "For Scout, Kid, and Little Small, for Cate, and in loving memory of K.E.: a great lover of *language*" (Zusak, 2019) is a memory marker – a textual sign that indicates shared memories of the author and the addressee of the dedication, provoked the creation of the novel.

The main characters, whose names are not revealed to the readers from the beginning, are distinguished by their "otherness": "What was there to know when it came to Clayton, our brother? Questions had followed him for years now, like why did he smile but never laugh? Why did he fight but never to win? Why did he like it so much on our roof? Why did he run not for a satisfaction, but a discomfort – some gateway to pain and suffering, and always putting up with it?" (Zusak, 2019, p. 21). The author has chosen an unusual way of getting to know the protagonist: without pathos, the reader learns the main features of the character only through rhetorical questions. In Hemon's novel, the main character is perceived through the eyewitnesses of those events, especially his sister: "He was always prone to fantasies… he was a dreamer" (Hemon, 2008, p. 60).

The characters of novels are characterised by self-sacrifice ("I'd go to hell just to make them live again" (Zusak, 2019, p. 523) – "I imagine my life to be big, so big that I cannot see the end of it. Big enough for everyone to fit into it" (Hemon, 2008, p. 288)) and fatalism ("All the lives I could live, all the people I will never know, never will be, they are everywhere" (p. 2) – "He'd confess it was all his fault – because girls just didn't disappear like this, they didn't fail without someone making them. Carey Novacs didn't just die, it was boys like him who made them" (Zusak, 2019, p. 437)).

The main characters' lives appear to be a tangle of decentred lines and dead ends corresponding to the idea that history cannot be understood and written by adhering to a centralised and strict narration. Instead, the authors put forward a type of narrative as a substitute for classical narration. The rhizome produces confusion through the inability to connect the plotlines. Then, it enables the literary pleasure that arises from the realisation that all the parts of the piece occupy the intended place. Including any stylistic devices also affects the emotional perception of literary pieces since "emotions and feelings

determine the relationship between body, mind and actions; they influence our modern self-understanding and our understanding of others" (Knaller, 2017, p. 19).

The chapters of each novel depict one main event, on the background of which the other ones are presented according to the development in time and according to the significance of the event. Despite the texts being organised in sections, such a "rupture" gives a special rhythm to the texts. The closer to the conclusion, the more the events in sections intertwine in time and space more and more frequently. Ultimately, the authors make the recipients read and memorise more carefully because the sections are getting smaller and smaller, sometimes fitting into one paragraph, and the events are increasingly getting significant. The circulation of states and values, the impossibility of distinguishing the centre and the periphery, the transition from one line to another, and free semantic combinations – all reveal rhizomatic thinking and rhizomatic logic.

Among the main plot sections of the novels, which alternately bring the readers closer to and then distance them from the characters and the events, the research focuses on the following rhizomatic transformations of time: *the pre-past, past, present, and future via the past*. The rhizome, deconstructing the textual reality of the novels, at the same time, autochthonously "stitches" the texts into a single matter, helping to multiply the facets of reality since it does not have non-intersecting borders.

Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*: a collision of the worlds

The world-rhizome gives rise to unlimited possibilities for new configurations of images and meanings. Hemon's novel begins with *the past* when a young man appears in the book; his name is unknown to the readers: "Early in the morning, a scrawny young man rings the bell at 31 Lincoln Place, the residence of George Shippy…" (Hemon, 2008, p. 1). In the following section, he is killed by Chief Shippy: "Without thinking, Chief Shippy shoots at the young man…" (p. 8). Hemon mentions one specific detail in the interior of the room – "a tapestry that featured… *Saint George killing a squirming dragon*" (p. 8). The reproduction of the famous painting by Domenico Zampieri (1581–1641) adds sarcasm to the scene; science is in the painting, and the knight rescues the beautiful maiden, killing the dragon. Probably, Chief Shippy also imagines himself as such a knight, rescuing his "stout and strong, with a large head" (p. 8) wife, who hides behind the tapestry depicting a heroic deed, from "*slim, swarthy young man – clearly a Sicilian or a Jew*" (p. 158).

Further events interrupt the chronological order and move the readers to *the present*, where the narrator reports random facts about himself: "I waste my vote, pay taxes grudgingly, share my life with a native wife, and try hard not to wish painful death to the idiot president" (Hemon, 2008, p. 11). The celebration of Bosnian Independence Day by American Bosnians seems to him to exhibit "their tolerance and help our unintelligible customs … to be preserved forever, like a fly in resin" (p. 13). The comparative metaphor immerses the readers in the world of palaeontology, implying that for Americans, Bosnians serve as a kind of insects to explore.

The plot again runs the events to *the past* and, for the first time, a reader can come across a mention of the book that the man is going to write, the plot of which takes the readers *back in time*: "I am hoping to write about a Jewish immigrant shot by the Chicago police a hundred years ago" (Hemon, 2008, p. 15). The readers finally learn the name of the main character – Vladimir Brik, who meets his friend from *the past*: "Rora. It happens to me all the time: I run into people I used to know in my previous, Sarajevo, life" (p. 17). The rhizomorphic mode of the author's thinking is manifested through a connection between history and cinematography: "The old film of the common past disintegrates when exposed to the light of a new life" (p. 18).

The following *present* section depicts Brik's meeting with photographer Rora: "this two-bit gambler and ex-gigolo, this wannabe war veteran, this Bosnian nobody", whose "fucking soul was that camera" (Hemon, 2008, p. 177). Brik recalls the story of his proposal, aligning it with the connection between art and life: "I proposed a year later in front of Monet's breathtaking water lilies" (p. 32). Brik's longing for his homeland can be seen through the comparison of the Bosnian manner of Rora's speaking with the rumble of the vehicle: "I loved the sound of it; it always recalled for me the faint rattle of the first streetcar of a spring day" (p. 35).

Brik mentions his *future* plans to write a book depicting *the future via the past*: "I wanted my future book to be about the immigrant who escaped the pogrom in Kishinev and came to Chicago only to be shot by the Chicago chief of police" (Hemon, 2008, p. 41). He decided to go to Lazarus's homeland to experience everything that the boy went through before his tragic death: "I needed to follow Lazarus all the way back to the pogrom in Kishinev, to the time before America" (p. 46).

The following events take place in Ukraine in *the present*: "our first stop would be Lviv, Ukraine" (Hemon, 2008, p. 65), and the author depicts the adventures of Rora and Brik in the Ukrainian city. The narrative is interrupted by *the pre-past* and concerns the work of the forensic experts who are to examine Lazarus's body: "*In our opinion, said unknown man came to his death from shock and hemorrhage following bullet wounds of the body*" (p. 88). Vladimir Brik and Lazarus Averbuch had something in common: they were both immigrants to America and dreamed of becoming journalists: "He daydreamed about being a reporter for the *Hebrew Voice*" (p. 96). The protagonist loses his 'primacy' again due to the section-structured novel. As a result, supporting characters become one of the main characters if the last ones are excluded from the depicted events. The episode intertwines Brik's observations and reflections on *the pre-past* relating to Lazarus's life and *the past* witnessed by Rora.

The new section mentions Lazarus's burial: "*In the driving rainstorm, not unlike the beginning of a biblical deluge*, the body, wrapped in cloth, was rolled into the grave, half-filled with water" (Hemon, 2008, p. 115). Afterwards, Assistant Chief Schuettler and William P. Miller meet Guzik at Sam Harris's Place, who agrees to report for a small fee about the conspiracies and riots designed in the Jewish ghetto. Card players' jargon is used to realise rhizomatic thinking: "'When is the next game?' 'Monday,' Guzik says. 'Maybe you have good luck this time. Or maybe you learn gamble is bad for you'" (p. 118). In

the present, Vladimir Brik begins his investigation into the life and murder of a young Jewish man: "Lazarus had spent time in Chernivtsi … the first place he and I now shared, apart from Chicago" (p. 125).

In the following chapters, the events are mixed, and only the photo indicates the beginning of a new chapter. Any rhizome line can be connected in unpredictable ways to any other at any given time. The story where Olga comes to the Central Police Station is interwoven in *the present* section as she is "*like the sister of the biblical Lazarus*" (Hemon, 2008, p. 127) and should go to any length to save her brother. The memories of Lazarus's life are like negative images of Vladimir Brik's life: "Young Averbuch… seemed fond of America" (p. 151), as well as Brik, who personifies the country in the image of his wife: "SOMEONE ONCE ASKED ME how I saw America. I wake up in the morning, I said, and I look to my left. And on my left I would see Mary" (p. 151). The depiction of the characters' adventure in Ukraine is interwoven with *the past* from Rora's life in Bosnia, which is diluted with "flickering" cultural signs: "AFTER THE JEWISH CENTER … we… decided to visit the Museum of Regional History" (p. 154) and the predictable reaction of metropolitan residents "I suppose this is no Louvre" (p. 162). For US passport holders, the bustle and hustle on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border remind them of a choir, just like a hundred years ago when Lazarus left the country. The plot unpredictably returns to *the pre-past*, where the grieving Olga hears from a crazy woman: "Lazarus shall rise. Our Lord will be with us" (p. 170). The author uses a transparent allusion to the biblical Lazarus' resurrection.

In the last chapters, *the past* and *present* were intertwined in the text, creating space and time chaos. Rora, "a whore, nobody mattered to him, not me, not his sister; he never mentioned any friends, no family; he seemed to need nobody" (Hemon, 2008, p. 212), was replaced by romantic Lazarus, who was impressed by revolutionary speeches about human equality and concluded: "I want to write a book… I am going to write it" (Ibid.). Two people are two worlds; neither of them was supposed to intersect in real life, but they met on the pages of the novel.

Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*: a perfect chaos of human existence

From the very first pages of *Bridge of Clay*, Zusak immerses the readers in *the past* eleven years and depicts the sons' meeting with their father, whom they nicknamed the Murderer: "… someone needs to go first, and on that day it could only be the Murderer" (Zusak, 2019, p. 13). The first thing their father sees in the house is a mule, and "He thought fleetingly of shoving his knuckles into his eyes, to wring the vision out, but it was futile" (p. 18). The author uses the vocabulary of cinematic discourse to create a picture of an image in motion. Such a combination of text and image highlights the confluence of verbal and visual narrative dimensions (Suwara, 2014, p. 252). Briefly mentioning the protagonist, hinting at the trials that await the boy in *the future*, the author returns the readers to *the past*, where Clay's beloved girl appears in the novel for the first time: "She had good-green eyes and auburn hair" (Zusak, 2019, p. 27). Zusak depicts Clay's

competition, which takes place before the boys' father returns home: "To him, there was no win at the end of this, or a loss, or a time, or the money" (p. 51). Clay celebrates the victory with his brothers "under a pink and grey sky. The best graffiti in town" (p. 56). The mention of contemporary graffiti art adds to the aesthetics of the novel. Supporting characters appear on the pages alternately and serve as background for the gradual elucidation of the main character's features.

In the following chapter, the readers plunge into *the past*, where the boys' mother, Penelope Lesciuszko, appears far from her native Poland: "In her former country, in the Eastern Bloc, the sun had mostly been a toy, a gizmo" (Zusak, 2019, pp. 65–66). Due to the woman's memories, *the pre-past* is shown: Penny's father teaches her music and reads the myths of Greece, which he admires greatly: "… he loved the Greek mythologies. … *The Iliad. The Odyssey*" (p. 68). To characterise Penelope in detail, the author again depicts *the pre-past*, where the girl remained on the platform at the Westbahnhof. She never played at the concert, but "she played with the buttons on her blue woollen dress" (p. 91). Clay rushed to help his father in the past as he was sure he had to try "to become all he needed to be – and the past, ever closer, upon him" (p. 101). For the first time, in Carey's letter to Clay, the readers learn about *the future via the past* event, which will become the main metaphor of the novel and is embodied in the novel's title: "*That bridge will be made of you*" (p. 126).

In *the pre-past* section, Penelope meets Michael Dunbar, who loses his lust for life after her death and becomes "a wasteland in a suit" (Zusak, 2019, p. 13). He turns into the Murderer of their childhood: "He left us. What we were is dead-" (p. 245). The following section contains information about Clay's farewell to his childhood place, which is metaphorically communicated to the reader: "And Clay looked back, one last time, before diving – in, and outwards – to a bridge, through a past, to a father" (p. 142). The following section concerns *the past* of Michael's life: "Like Penelope, he also came from far away, but it was a place in *this* place, where the streets were hot and wide, and the land was yellow and dry" (p. 148). Michael Dunbar's childhood resembles a reflection of Penelope's story, and the characters themselves are like reflections of each other: "As you can see, in many ways, he was almost the perfect other half of Penelope; they were identical and opposite, like designed or destined symmetry" (p. 150). The rhizomatic principle is used to construct texts, seen as improvisations of a particular event. The imitation of spontaneity, the transition from one thought to another, and the shift of centre and periphery create the impression of semantic chaos.

The depiction of Michael's childhood is shown by *the future via the past*: Clay's move to his father's house, the choice of design and the intention to build the bridge; and then again, the author depicts *the pre-past* of his father's life when he marries Abbey Hanley: "Her body was a brushstroke. Her long black hair was a trail" (Zusak, 2019, p. 162). The rhizomorphic nature of poetic thinking is manifested in the connections between the novel as a literary piece and art, which permeates the novel and adds sensuality: "He loved her with lines and colour. He loved her more than Michelangelo. He loved her more than the David, and those struggling, statued slaves" (p. 170). And then the divorce of two people

in whose lives the last chords of being together are played: "… it was more a compilation: a *greatest hits* of two people who'd traveled as far as they could together, to fade away" (p. 187). The music and fiction, in their interaction, fully reveal the signs of the rhizomatic mode. The leitmotif is the need to have a goal and achieve it: "When we hit a piano key and it makes no sound, we hit it again, because we have to. We need to hear *something*, and we hope it isn't a mistake" (p. 217).

In the following chapters, the events change as if in a kaleidoscope of time, where *the past* mixes with *the future* and is "stitched" together by *the present*: the building of the bridge, Clay's rapprochement with his father, the wedding and family life of the Dunbar couple. The author's portrayal of Michael's preposition is sensual and sensitive: "She opened the lid and saw the words, on the keys, and they were lettered there simply, yet beautifully: P|E|N|E|L|O|P|E L|E|S|C|I|U|S|Z|K|O P|L|E|A|S|E M|A|R|R|Y M|E" (Zusak, 2019, p. 225) – "She'd played the keys of Y|E|S" (p. 226). The rhizomatic potential of the metaphor is manifested through the musical world and the world of reality frozen at the moment.

The events replace each other like film frames: "It's actually quite scary how similar our lives were to that movie" (Zusak, 2019, p. 317). The events in this slide are presented in a specific order – "continually tipping traditional thought and thinking off balance, creating an a-order and (dis)harmony that is chaotically complex" (Sellers, 2013, p. 3). However, it is important to note that each story has its final chord, and in this case, "[t]he last note, though, belonged to Carey" (Zusak, 2019, p. 479). Upon learning of Carey Novac's death, Clay's life becomes a freeze-frame: "How could he know that Carey … would make up his trifecta, or triumvirate, of love and loss?" (p. 310). The novel revisits Penelope and Carey's *past* multiple times, particularly in Clay's imagination: "'Carey,' he whispered – 'Penny'" (p. 486). Clay built the bridge, and he had no choice but to leave. It was "not because he wanted to, but he had to, and that was all" (p. 551).

The intertwining of temporal and spatial dimensions creates perfect chaos, against which events unfold, ordering and getting lost again in the diversity of human destinies. The rhizomaticity of perfect chaos is expressed at the artistic and aesthetic level and becomes the prism through which the stories of human existence are represented.

Conclusion

A deconstructed textual reality in postmodern literary pieces reveals its irreconcilably contradictory meanings rather than being a unified, logical whole. In the postmodern continuum, this reality acquires a special dimension through the conception of rhizomaticity, which correlates with modern mindsets of blurring boundaries, irrationality and diversity. A Deleuzoguattarian concept of the rhizome contains the principles that can be considered key features of postmodern philosophy and culture: multiplicity, absence of a single centre, heterogeneity and the combination of everything with everything.

The Lazarus Project and *Bridge of Clay* employ complex, rhizomatic narrative structures to explore themes of identity, memory, and resilience across intertwined timelines. The

novels establish a specific kind of rhizomatic writing through its fragmentariness, imitation of chaotic composition, manipulation of disparate genre elements, syncretism of different types of art (intermediality), etc. The fundamental feature of the rhizome – its heterogeneity while maintaining integrity – is best reflected in the structure of the analysed books, creating a unique space that, on the one hand, promotes deeper immersion in the texts and, on the other hand, serves as a matrix for explicating the author's intentions. Thus, the holistic worldview in the selected novels is expressed through their deconstructed textual reality modelled by the rhizome.

The Lazarus Project and *Bridge of Clay* establish a specific kind of rhizomatic writing through its fragmentariness, imitation of chaotic composition, manipulation of disparate genre elements and syncretism from different types of art (intermediality), etc. The fundamental feature of the rhizome – its heterogeneity while maintaining integrity – is best reflected in the structure of the analysed books, creating a unique space that, on the one hand, promotes deeper immersion in the texts and, on the other hand, serves as a matrix for explicating the author's intentions. Thus, the holistic worldview in the selected novels is expressed through their deconstructed textual reality modelled by the rhizome.

In *Bridge of Clay*, the bridge becomes a central metaphor for healing, family connections, and personal growth, underscoring the enduring impact of love and loss. Likewise, *The Lazarus Project* interlaces the historical tragedy with modern-day reflections on identity and displacement through a fragmented cinematic narrative, using motifs like biblical allusions and historical irony to delve into themes of justice, cultural memory, and the shared human struggle for meaning. Both novels employ literary devices, such as cinematic imagery in Zusak's novel and historical symbolism in Hemon's, to illustrate the intricate interplay between personal and historical narratives. While Zusak focuses on family bonds and the redemptive power of reconciliation, Hemon delves into the chaos of immigrant identities and the impact of cultural displacement.

History as a backdrop for the unfolding events in *The Lazarus Project* and *Bridge of Clay*, as well as a prism through which facts and fiction are represented and compared, becomes a peculiar element of textuality, fully consistent with the principles of rhizomatic writing. The textual and historical realities sometimes intertwine and diverge again to create a chaotic heterogeneous picture and make the readers search for and interpret the details implicitly introduced into the texts by the writers.

The rhizome, as a trend of postmodernism, does not appeal to the concept of objective truth. As the monistic model of thinking is replaced by a pluralistic one, postmodernism emphasises no difference between truth and delusion, good and evil, and beginning and end. The principle of pluralism is understood as a readiness to simultaneously apply different types of analysis, outlining an interdisciplinary approach, as the recognition of mutually exclusive conclusions, and, most importantly, as the possibility of moving from one interpretation to another. Thus, truth is interpreted as a depiction of interacting with reality. Therefore, rhizomaticity as a disposition of postmodern literary thinking contributes to the revision of traditional ideas about the structure of the text and the deconstruction of textual reality.

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