

POSTMODERN METAFICTION REVISITED

by

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Abstract

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By its ostensible definition, metafiction is fiction that dramatizes its own construction, proffering constant reminders of its artificiality. The term “metafiction,” however, is hardly transparent. “Metafiction” is in danger of having an array of definitions, and, because it is believed to be equated with postmodern fiction, it is often associated with the literature of the eighties and therefore appears outdated. Through an examination of various novels mainly from the twentieth century and literature of the West, this dissertation unifies the multiple definitions that have been assigned to the term and provides a typology that facilitates the identification of the metafictional novel. In addition, this dissertation revisits certain assumptions that have clung to the term arbitrarily, namely that metafiction is ahistorical and apolitical because it is self-referential. Beginning with a theoretical approach that views metafiction as a postmodern phenomenon borrowing from structural and post-structural thought, this study comparatively explores metafiction’s most recent manifestations and concludes by questioning metafiction’s affinity to postmodernism.

Moreover, this study identifies and explores two new examples of metafiction, the metaautobiographical novel and the post-millennium metafictional novel. The metaautobiographical novel is a hybrid genre, where a fictional author-character reconstructs

their biographical record through the act of writing fiction. For a metaautobiographical protagonist, fiction cannot define the self nor write the past, but is bound to reinvent both, thus turning itself into a what-if version of the protagonist's reality. In the wake of conversations that explore the potential death of postmodernity, post-millennium (or post-technological) metafiction can be contrasted to postmodern metafiction. It deviates from postmodern practices by responding to technology and by combining its astute fictionality with the dramatic realization that fictionality and reality converge in the realm of fiction. Whereas postmodern metafiction projects that the world may be a fictional construction, post-millennium metafiction proclaims that even highly self-reflexive texts share a profound relation with the world, influencing and affecting what lies beyond them.

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Chapter #1

Introduction:

It must be obvious by now that I'm not writing a novel, since I am not doing what a novelist would not fail to do. The reader who takes what I write for the truth might well be less mistaken than the reader who concludes that it is a fable. (Diderot 12)

Another story about a writer writing a story! Another regressus in infinitum! Who doesn't prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own process? That doesn't continually proclaim "Don't forget I'm an artifice!"? That takes for granted its mimetic nature instead of asserting it in order (not so slyly after all) to deny it, or vice-versa? (Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* 117)

More and more novels since the 1960's are preoccupied with their own fictional creation, and many critics, who also acknowledge this period as the postmodern period, understand the trend in terms of metafiction. Metafiction refers to fiction that dramatizes its own construction, proffering a tautological affirmation of its artificiality. It is a form of anti-novel, a type that deflects generic conventions—not only those pertaining to specific periods, but the very fundamental conventions that hold any novel together. Metafiction turns the novel inside out, like a shirt that discloses its seams, thus revealing its own constructed nature.

By its most ostensible definition, metafiction is understood to “[designate] the quality of disclosing the fictionality of a narrative” (Neumann and Nünning 204). It is fiction aware of its

own fictional composition; fiction that talks about itself; fiction that is preoccupied with the epistemological and ontological concerns of its own manufacturing. Self-consciousness, self-awareness, self-reflection, self-containment, self-absorption, self-indulgence, self-disclosure, self-commenting, self-love, and self-obsession connote metafiction, and have been repetitively used in relation with the term since its inception in 1970. The prefix “meta” denotes that this fiction refers to none other than itself, imitating the composition of similar compounds, such as metalanguage—the language employed to describe (human) language(s)—and Frederic Jameson’s “metacommentary” and de Man’s “metacriticism,” both of which imply the language of interpretation about interpretation and criticism. Metaization, as explained by Werner Wolf, delivers a secondary, hierarchically superior level of self-reflection from the first cognitive or communicative level, be it thought or language, and it is thus highly meditative (“Metareference” 2).

In addition to the self-indexing connoted by “meta,” the etymological meaning of the Greek morpheme implies a transcendental force which expands and extends it from the domain of itself into the realm of *beyond*. Aristotle’s “metaphysics” refers to physics *beyond* the terrain of physics, and in a homologous way, “metafiction” entails a reworking of fiction that happens beyond its own fictional means. At the meta-level, fiction reads itself as fiction, but it also juxtaposes itself against the canvas of language and reality, the two components that inextricably make up its very fabric. The content not only analyzes itself in relation to itself, but against everything that resides outside of it, against what gives it substance and perpetuates its existence.

Nietzsche’s affirmation that God is dead, followed by Roland Barthes’s death of the author in the middle of the twentieth century, leave fiction—or better yet, art—*godless* and *fatherless* at once, urging it toward self-discovery, inward speculation, and re-evaluation. As the

narrator in Roland Sukenick's "The Death of the Novel" affirms in the opening of the story: "God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot, and since our reality lacks the sanction of creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version" (41). God and author relinquish their powers and the crafted realities, once placed under their supervision, now drift aimlessly. The novel arrives at a juncture where self-reflection is the novel's only plausible direction.

Modernism's self-consciousness paves the way for postmodernism's self-reflexiveness. High modernism, which sought for "an art that examined its own conventionality, that put the conventions of art on display, an art that put art itself in question" (P. Lewis 6), developed into an art that simulates fresh perspectives on language, figuration, and fictionalization. Ortega Y Gasset was the first to observe how art is "dehumanized" in modernism, how it is disrobed from its "human realities" in order to direct its attention to itself as a work of art (11). In his pivotal work on modern art, *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel*, Ortega explains that self-awareness in literature is simply a shift in optical perception. While in realistic novels the painted image is lucidly and vividly re-imagined, in modern novels *imagism* appears foggy and obfuscated hiding behind its frame, which is now foregrounded:

We have here a very simple optical problem. To see a thing we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. If the adjustment is inadequate the thing is seen indistinctly or not at all. Take a garden seen through a window. Looking at the garden we adjust our eyes in such a way that the ray of vision travels through the pane without delay and rests on the shrubs and flowers. Since we are focusing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. *The purer the*

glass, the less we see it. But we can also deliberately disregard the garden and, withdrawing the ray of vision, detain it at the window. We then lose sight of the garden; what we still behold of it is a confused mass of color which appears pasted to the pane. *Hence to see the garden and to see the windowpane are two incompatible operations which exclude one another because they require different adjustments.* (10 emphasis mine)

When the garden dissolves into a mass of indiscernible color, the focus is placed on the windowpane, a metaphor that stands for those elements that take the reader away from mimetic practices and let her experiment with the quintessence of art as an art form. The windowpane represents the frame rather than its content, the process of seeing rather than *what* is seen, and high modernism emblemizes this frame within which fiction is circumscribed. Postmodernism elaborates on this modernist aesthetics, constantly shifting the reader's view from the windowpane to the garden, never allowing her to forget that the scenery can only be enjoyed through a specific medium, which cannot remain inert, but must always intervene and obtrude from supplying a homogenized vision of the outside.

In postmodernism the signified becomes the prominent aim in art, demanding to be examined independent of its utilitarianism. Avant-garde plays and plastic arts are especially influential to the postmodern metafictional novel. Beckett, Pirandello, Brecht, Witckewicz, Mayakovski and many other surrealist playwrights, as well as the Dadaist movement, in which Duchamp held a leading position, openly challenge the space between spectators and art objects, and reverse the role of the signified.

What the artists of the sixties ... learned from Duchamp was that hermetic art necessarily tended towards tautology, and that art which self-consciously established itself in opposition to cultural meaning systems could ultimately end by only referring to itself. As is well known, when Duchamp placed an industrial object in an art context ... he effectively deracinated the object from its functional and referential relationship to the world and made it an art object... The result was less to say something about the external world—of urinals or bottleracks—than to force a self-reflexive awareness of the art context... (Russell 291–2)

Already with modernism, art demonstrates a strong inclination to toy with its own substance, while postmodernism penetrates further into defamiliarizing the world by employing a language that primarily draws attention to itself (Alexander 6).

Modernist and avant-garde art differ from each other in many respects, and postmodernism gains from the avant-garde at least two aspects that are not incarnated in modernist aesthetics. Firstly, the avant-garde contests art's totalizing project, whereas modernism looks for ways to reconcile the fragmentation of the world in projecting a homogenized totality, and discovers, or even imposes, *meaning*; so that in modernist texts "the most obscure passage, even if fragmented, discontinuous, or seemingly illogical, always challenges us to discover something coherent, continuous, and logical beneath or beyond" (Bien 263). Secondly, and more importantly, modernism seeks unity through the sublime as a kind of redemptive power; the sublime is deemed the only salvation over the disintegration of what the modernists detect. The avant-garde, on the other hand, who embrace the ugly and the unadorned, repudiate the sublime. Postmodernism extracts from the avant-gardists the notion that the

sublime is an impossibility residing in the realm of the fictive and it is therefore reduced to a series of simulacra (Kefala 29). For postmodernism the world's fragmented nature remains fragmented, and the sublime loses its potential to elevate art—and by default society—above this overarching disjointedness. The sublime cannot salvage the postmodern subject, for it is itself a construct that resides in the infinite regress of the fate of the simulacra. The postmodern sublime is “a mere sublime simulation” (Conner 221).¹

While modernist literature and the avant-garde incubate postmodern metafiction, the rise of literary theory further facilitates fiction in articulating itself, and in re-evaluating the status and function of its language. The critical vocabulary that infests twentieth century discourse circumscribes fiction, initially being an autonomous and independent language, until it gradually seeps into fiction's core and encroaches on it. “The apparent collapse of criticism into its object, [and] the much-discussed blurring of the ‘critical’ and ‘creative’ functions” constitute, for some critics, the most central of postmodern debates (Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* 201). Beginning with Russian Formalists, then linguists, structuralists, and post-structuralists, the general consensus is to concentrate on the text itself, brushing aside literary, historical, or authorial influences (G. White 52). And as the text becomes a dynamically independent force, it chooses to thematize the critical discourse, consorting it admirably with its own language. With metafiction, for example, semiotics is transmogrified into the semiotics of the novel, which explores its linguistic and literary sign-system as a form of meaning-making. From the 1960s onward, the arts take an introspective turn.

¹ For Lyotard, the postmodern sublime is not entirely effaced or negated. While both modernist and postmodern art “allow the unrepresentable to be put forward,” in modernism the sublime still imparts pleasure, whereas in postmodernism it underscores the impossibility of representation (81).

The study of metafiction has evolved in the last fifty years, and a corpus of scholarly material provides readers with substantial tools to approach such texts. However, despite its newness as a literary term, metafiction evokes oldness and datedness. The title “Postmodern Metafiction Revisited” invites a re-examination of metafiction under the light of its most recent manifestations and aspires to revitalize the term among narratological circles. Until now, the deftest studies on metafiction, primarily published in the eighties, have dealt with novels from the sixties to the eighties, in what could be called the first wave of metafiction; a revisiting of the term entails an examination of novels written during its second wave, from the nineties to the present.

Seminal studies such as Linda Hutcheon’s *Narcissistic Narratives*, and Patricia Waugh’s *Metafiction* were published in the early eighties, but there is no recent theoretical discourse to supplement them. Although the practice of metafiction has evolved—its popularity in contemporary culture has extended beyond the literary world into other disciplines²—its theoretical backdrop has mainly remained stationary (even dwindled) and this has numerous negative repercussions. Regrettably, the metafictional novels that belong to the second wave, and to post-millennium literature, rely upon earlier critical positions that cannot sufficiently do them justice. Their fictionality is often taken for granted as a literary device that meddles with the illusion making and unmaking processes, while newer (narratological) approaches subsume experimental metafictional practices, avoiding the use of the term. Recent interest in *unnatural*

² Metafiction’s literary devices, especially the most metafictional of all *metalepsis*, have been exported to other fields. Children’s literature, art history, and film have become familiar with metafiction’s tricks and employ them abundantly. On a discussion of metalepsis as a transgeneric phenomenon, see Werner Wolf “Metalepsis as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon.”

narratives, cognitive theory, and affect theory encompass a large portion of metafictional devices, but they refer to it discursively.

Inevitably, this theoretical stagnancy has a negative impact upon the popularity of the term. Metafiction is often assumed to be an outmoded topic, whose relevance has diminished with the end of the eighties, and it is surreptitiously used without any serious focus. It is also rather unclear whether “metafiction” is a term that belongs to narratology—critical theory—or if it is another genre-type delineating the trajectory of the novel. In both cases, it is considered to have had its hallmark in the eighties, whose ripple effects are still expanding to the present, a frivolous mechanism that has become more of an ornamental literary device. As long as metafiction continues to proliferate however, its theoretical infrastructure should develop along with it. Hence, it is imperative to re-examine the term and re-appropriate it, so that its critical vocabulary updates itself, and facilitates the reading of more contemporary metafictional examples.

Chapters two and three of this dissertation address the problem of metafiction’s meaning, and offer an elaborate definition in the form of a typology. Chapter two provides a thorough literature review on the studies of metafiction, with the intention to underscore the murkiness of the term, whose definition can be applied to such a vast array of novels that it begins to lose its significance and serves as yet another reason for the term’s unpopularity. Chapter three picks up where chapter two leaves off by offering a definition of metafiction through a cumulative and operational typology with the objective to demarcate the main parameters that identify metafictional novels. Like a guiding rubric, such a typology differentiates the metafictional novel from other types, like the postmodern novel, and also facilitates in categorizing metafictional novels based on their degree of relation: how a novel is more or less metafictional,

and how its degree of metafictionality affects its interpretation as a novel of this genre.

Examples are taken from an overwhelming repertory of metafictional texts from European and American fiction and are treated comparatively. Among the Italian, British, American, Spanish, and French novels discussed, a number of contemporary metafictional Greek novels march along in the arena of metafictional texts.

Chapter four investigates one of the greatest misconceptions, adhered to the metafictional novel, and ventures to unsettle it. It has been surmised that metafiction is ahistorical and apolitical, self-indulged in its own artificiality. Metafiction is thought to be self-oriented fiction that acknowledges the confinements of its own fictionality thereby repudiating any connection to reality and remaining engrossed with a vacant interest in matters that tantalize the real world. Concurrently and in conjunction with these stipulations, metafiction is perceived to be without benefit to readers, as they merely discover the making of fiction, and nothing more. I challenge this extremist viewpoint that metafiction can only project itself, by arguing that although fiction has, for the first time, become highly involved with its own fictionality, it has never neglected to create its own versions of reality as possible extensions of the outside world. In general, fiction is as much ingrained with language as it is ingrained with the most fundamental rules governing reality; therefore, it can never absolutely reject it. As metafiction curls up inside itself, it faces the world outside from new viewpoints.

Chapters five and six change direction from the theoretical backdrop that carries a strong force in the first three chapters. Chapter five investigates a branch of metafiction that I call “metaautobiographical fiction,” which refers to novels in which a fictional author-character writes her biography, while her real-fictional life is recounted in juxtaposition with the fiction she is crafting. Usually the fiction that these character-writers—who happen to be mainly

women—compose is a rewriting of their life in an attempt to twist it and project its what-if versions of an alternate reality. For these protagonists, fiction cannot simply define the self, as earlier understandings of autobiographical fiction entail, nor can it write the past as a fossilized present, but it is bound to reinvent both self and past. Examples of this type abound: Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (1985), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Margarita Karapanou's *Rien ne va plus* (1991), and Amanda Michalopoulou's *I'd Like* (2005) are just a few. Chapter five explores the latter two in depth.

Finally, chapter six discusses metafiction from a different vantage point, connecting it with an investigation of the death of postmodernism and inquiring whether metafiction can extend beyond it. The chapter problematizes postmodernism's demise, as it has been expressed in the theoretical circles of the last five years, and proposes to examine the differences between postmodern metafiction and post-millennium or post-technological metafiction. Are we still living in postmodernism? Is post-millennium literature engulfed in postmodernism? Can postmodernism describe our contemporary culture and literature, or do we find ourselves in a moment of transition where we are surpassing the postmodern, entering perhaps a post-postmodern era? If postmodernism has reached its end, as some have argued, how legitimate is it to discuss "postmodern metafiction" and include under its label novels that have been published from the sixties to the present? Could the phrase "postmodern metafiction" reflect the kind of self-reflexive literature that perhaps *postdates* postmodernity? Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005) and Art Spiegelman's *MetaMaus* (2011) are examined as examples of what post-technological metafiction might look like.

Since the study of metafiction is so adjacent to postmodernism however, in the next section of this introduction, I thoroughly explore how postmodern ideas have affected the

development of metafiction. Major postmodernist figures from various disciplines, such as Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and François Lyotard do not leave the development of fiction unaffected, and the conglomeration of their theories placed against the postmodern framework help create the metafictional rupture. The postmodern preoccupation with constructs, its crisis of representation, its abolishment of universal truths, and its pivotal scrutiny of language, all contribute in the formation of a fiction that questions its representation and language by inspecting its textuality. It is within this context that postmodern metafiction initially emerges.

In the final section of the introduction, I turn away from general postmodern thought, and explore the case of postmodernism in Greece, as peripheral postmodernity. Since my study incorporates Greek novels, and since Greek literature is a minority that does not frequently partake in the ubiquitous discussions on postmodernism, I deem it important to explain where Greece stands in relation to this cultural paradigm, and its affinity with metafictional practices.

Postmodernism and Metafiction: Basic Conventions and the Linguistic Problem

Metafiction partakes in the postmodern discourse and recapitulates many of the concerns that have disturbed postmodernity. What follows is a brief reminder of the most notable postmodern moments, which evidentially have declared an allegiance with the metafictional practices in literature.

Postmodern theory and criticism have been instrumental in defining the themes and ideologies that govern metafiction, such as the referential and representational aspect of language, tightly connected to fiction's referentiality and representationality. The impetus behind all

structural and post-structural thinking is to shake the foundations of the triangular relationship between language, reality, and knowledge, and this has an immediate impact on the way literature views itself. Metafiction emerges out of the struggle of referentiality to become at the very least—what one critic, in a different context, called—“an object of literary scrutiny” (Tandt 123).

Postmodernism destabilizes the classical conception of the triadic relationship between language–logos/reason—which proclaims the components to be inseverable—and its opposite, reality. (This is an extension of Kantian philosophy). Traditionally, and in simplistic terms, the outside world is processed through reason, which uses logos and language to be conveyed; that is, the interaction between the world and the self happens first through reason, and then through a filtering of language. The traditional notions of knowledge acquisition are founded upon this elementary equation; the empiricists, for example, deem that knowledge is gained through observation and inevitably with the use of linguistic tools. Conceiving of reality as prismatic, multifaceted, and ungraspable, postmodernism inquires whether language—and by extension literature—is indeed a mere conduit, and what the consequences are in reaching knowledge and truth. The steadfast belief that language is transparent, that language effaces itself in order to let the world appear visible to the imagination is subverted; in effect, every use of the linguistic system results in versions of conjectural reality. In the lyrical image of Steven Connor, “language is seen as the secret vibrating heart of all power whatsoever” (*Postmodernist Culture* 217). If language, in its attempt to describe and make the world meaningful, recreates it, knowledge is deemed unattainable and literature is reduced to being a linguistic system which, like language (re)fashions and (re)constructs its worlds, its subjects, its events. Literature

becomes the means that speaks, embodies, and incarnates language, and hence it attempts to examine its own body, its own rudimentary make-up.

The immediate repercussion in postmodern thought is the demystification of language and the unattainability of knowledge, both of which find their way into metafiction. Louis Althusser and Jean-Francois Lyotard both claim there is no knowledge to be accessed, since all knowledge, including scientific, is devised. Michel Foucault proposes that only through the detachment of representation from discourse, can the theory of knowledge be segregated from its long-lasting attachment to language (*Order of Things* 337)—an implication that as long as knowledge depends on language, it could never be captured. All putative knowledge manifests a cluster of opinions and subjective truths, no one truer than the other, all projecting their hues of realities, and different types of knowledge. For the postmodernists, absence is the world's most notorious nightmare, which is inconspicuously filled with signs, simulacra, and supplements in order to make “presence” anew, in order to “materialize the agency of death” (Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 38). It is inside the subject that things find a beginning in the form of such constructs, not outside of her in nature (*Order of Things* 331). Knowledge is produced because there are no unequivocal facts; religion exists due to the absence of a supreme being (Baudrillard 26); the linguistic sign is summoned because the real thing is not present.

In a homologous fashion, Derrida demonstrates that the metaphysics of presence beguile mankind in believing that somewhere beyond itself there is absolute universality, where unified meaning and a completed puzzle could replace the ostensible fragmentation and disintegration of the world; however, man should be emancipated from such deep-rooted illusions (Derrida; Jameson, *Prison-House* 173). Aspiring to eliminate a hierarchy between absence and presence, Derrida conceives of the supplement either as a substitute or an addition, which is nonetheless

something remote and extraneous to what it wishes to substitute: “[Whether] it adds or it substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it” (*Grammatology* 145). The supplement is an accretion, its own *thing*, masquerading as an authentic substitution, and language and literature are supplements.

In *Of Grammatology* and in *Plato’s Pharmacy*, Derrida develops what has been known as *logocentrism*, the tendency to consider speech (associated with presence) purer than writing, resting on the specious assumption that speech is closer to thought than writing. Writing is construed to be the supplement of the supplement of thought, the copy of a copy, and therefore it is withdrawn from logos (that is, language as speech, language as presence), which is affiliated with the Father, truth, and knowledge. By equating speech with writing, Derrida does not elevate writing to the status of speech, but instead he considers speech as much of a supplement as writing. For Derrida, all language, spoken or written, is logos; all language is a supplement allegedly substituting something that is not *it*.

In the spirit of disbelieving knowledge, metafictional literature abstains from didacticism—as do the literatures that precede it, beginning with the Enlightenment—and assertively flirts with the idea of making fictional worlds; for language in postmodernism is understood first and foremost in terms of creation. Since the world now recognizes that language is prone to create rather than adequately represent, fiction understands itself as twice fictional and constantly reminds its audience, as well as itself, of its fictionality as a type of an untrue knowledge. The more postmodernism unravels how language functions, how coercively it operates undetected and unbeknownst to most subjects, the more mandatory it becomes for literature to discover its relation to both language and the world that it allegedly represents.

Hence, metafiction thematizes its medium, and epitomizes language's controversial relation to both literature and reality. It instigates a friction that polarizes the two main components of its make-up—linguistic signs and reality—and finds itself in a constant battle to retain both in harmony, by primarily exposing its artificiality. *It is by openly declaring itself as fiction that metafiction manages to withhold an inner equilibrium of its substance, at once articulating the world and remaining silent about the world.*

Supplementing the notion that knowledge is unattainable, Lacanian psychology bestows on the postmodern mind the unprecedented idea that the human subject is locked inside her language, her signs and her symbols which dominate both her inner self, that is, her unconscious, and her outer self, that is, her intersubjective relationships in society. “It is the world of words that make the world of things” is the most extreme version of the postmodern deliberation on constructedness (Lacan, *Ecrits* 65). Trapped in a network of symbols, whose interconnectedness was established far beyond her birth, the subject is a prisoner of her creations. Lacan coins the “Symbolic Order” to refer to the level of *signification*—best construed in terms of language—that continuously “symbolizes” reality. In opposition to the “Symbolic order” lies the Real, the unadulterated reality, which *cannot* be symbolized; as a result the real is only accessed through representation. The first rite of passage in the shaping of the subject is the initiation in language, and, because language enters the self at an embryonic stage, it consumes every pore, every thought, even her unconscious. The human being is forever bound to her linguistic system, and even the unconscious cannot escape it. The unconscious is, in effect, structured like language (139). Whereas Freud thought the unconscious to be an accumulation of suppressed desires, a place where the Law is defied and unbridled debauchery is deemed normal, Lacan's unconscious is still a place of conformity. On the one hand, it inheres in the rules of language

and therefore conforms to the linguistic system, and on the other hand, it is saturated with “the discourse of the Other,” that is, everything imposed upon the subject by the Other, the grand narratives that she has been inculcated with since her birth, the ideological conventions which she learns to abide by, the Law of the Father (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 32).

Although the Real exists, it is not the same Real that is constructed through the Symbolic.³ For the postmodernists reality is not an illusion; it is simply inconceivable, always distorted, rearranged, reified, and conjectured when passing through the filtering of language.⁴

³ An application of Lacan’s theoretical framework can be found in feminist theorists, like Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, who argue that terms such as *sex* and *gender* gain substance because they exist in language, not in reality: “... within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (J. Bulter 34).

⁴ In effect, nothing may escape the bridles of language—or can it? At least three forms of response arise. The first is utterly pessimistic and the other two, proposed by Benjamin Whorf and Derrida respectively, are inapplicable. For the majority of the postmodernists, escaping *this* language would mean substituting for it another system equally problematic, moving from one kind of signification to another (Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* 36). But the problem is being perpetuated, for man is incapable of breaking away from signification. Whorf chooses a different approach. He suggests that the linguist, (not the polyglot!) who is exposed to a wide variety of linguistic systems, is most nearly free from the tentacles of language. Being familiar with the formation, the basic make-up of a variety of languages, becoming aware of different ways of rendering the world, the linguist may raise himself as far as possible from a singly restricting system. Derrida’s proposition deviates from the other two responses and finds fulfillment in the practice of deconstruction: only with a set of contradictory meanings can one leap away from language: “Each time that polysemia is irreducible, when no unity of meaning is even promised to it, one is outside language” (“White Mythology” 248). Polysemia escapes language because it is its opposite. If language is after meaning, it can be foiled by an accumulation of conflicting and contesting meanings. (On a similar concept, see de Man’s

The prison house of language reminds fiction that language is its substance, from which it cannot escape. Never before has literature dwelled on its language, turning it into a thematic exploration. Literature used to be under the spell of projecting the real world, a complex task, since the world not language was thought to be the ultimate challenge. Language was the embellishment, the means to reactualize on paper the intricacy of reality. With the realization that language is as problematic and as convoluted as reality, literature tips the scale and penetrates into the never-before-explored contours of its linguistic essence.

The salient indicator of postmodernism which declares defiance towards eternal truth, towards the standardization of knowledge, and consequently towards metanarratives, has an immediate impact on the way narratives are perceived. As Hilary Lawson puts it, the certainties upon which man placed meaning used to derive from God and from phenomenological and empirical experiences. But today, the inquisitive impulse of our times leads to the conclusion that all certainties derive from texts, language, and signs (10). What validity do these certainties acquire when the postmodern eye detects them being grounded in constructs? Postmodernists, therefore, are absolved from finding absolute truths; their only certainty is that certainties do not exist, specifiable ends are indeterminate, totalized meaning is infeasible, and that only written artifices remain to perpetually fashion and refashion the realities we inhabit.

All arenas of knowledge are understood in terms of *ideology* and *discourse*. In Althusserian terms, ideology represents the subject's interaction within the social nexus, how the socio-cultural norms and axioms underpin her functional role in society. Norms and axioms that appear so obvious to the extent that she does not scrutinize them, but simply obeys them and

“Semiology and Rhetoric” in which he argues that the grammatical and rhetorical aspects of language may yield contradictory and mutually exclusive interpretations.)

conforms. Language and knowledge are ideologies (Althusser “Ideological Apparatus”). Knowledge as discourse emphasizes its narrative dimension—even scientific knowledge is first subdued under scientific discourse (Althusser, *Reading Capital* 74; Lyotard 29). It is situated in the grand narratives of an epoch and of a given society, reaching its subject indirectly through the composition of “reported statements” (Lyotard 35). This counter-classical knowledge is not a verifiable all-encompassing totality of the object to be known. Instead it is a product. The real object should not be conflated with the object of knowledge: the former is pre-existent, while the latter has no real antecedent (Althusser, *Reading Capital* 25). This idea is not a singularly postmodern verdict; after all, Althusser is reading Marx and elicits these conclusions from *Capital*. In addition, Nietzsche, in “Beyond Good and Evil,”⁵ accuses the philosopher of attempting to unpack nature’s conundrum, but all she discovers is a version of her own understanding of what truth might be, delivering it under the fabric of disguised knowledge. Unlike the modernists, however, who saw a universe complemented by remote truths, which may be accessed, the postmodernists avow that whoever attempts to fathom reality is sure to be entrapped in a labyrinth with no exodus—a series of simulacra that lead not to grasping reality or knowledge but to manufacturing it.

With the disintegration of knowledge and its divorce from language and representation, the fine line between fact and fiction is volatilized, and narratives of all sorts turn into domineering and coercive forces. They become the centripetal force that parasitically governs not only the sciences, but every aspect of human life, constantly creating and promoting forms of representation as true. Derrida in “White Mythologies” attacks philosophy—commonly construed as superior to literature due to its antipathy for literary tropes—by defining it as a

⁵ “On the Prejudice of Philosophers” and “The Free Spirit.”

metaphor for metaphysics. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* and Homi Bhaba in “Dissemination” and “Narrating the Nation” problematize the formation of a nation, whose *imagined* homogeneity is attainable through textual artifices, along with Edward Said who in *Orientalism* warns against the stereotypical formation of nations based on their textual representations. Hayden White in *The Content of Form* and Roland Barthes in “Writing and the Novel” challenge the making of history with the claim that historical discourse may *narrativize* as well as narrate, that is, turn itself into a “putatively ‘finished’” story (H. White 21). And deconstruction,⁶ with a number of literary theorists, unsettles the dynamics of criticism, viewing it as a narrative placed upon another narrative, with every interpretation becoming another textual recreation no closer to the truth than any other.⁷ Every aspect of cultural life is therefore perceived in terms of a written text amidst other texts all enmeshed in an intertextual maelstrom of narratives, imposing meaning, not existence,⁸ and unwittingly fabricating spurious realities, which nonetheless flood our minds and our essence. (This is also the theme that Pynchon takes

⁶ Deconstruction may be understood in the terms that Jameson analyzes Barthes’s *S/Z*. If any text is comprised of the signified (thought) and the signifier (language), deconstruction seeks “to articulate [the] organization [of the signified] before it finds its final and official version in the primary signifier itself, in the text” (*Prison-House* 152–3). See also Christopher Norris, who elaborates on each of these points, for a profoundly invaluable account on deconstruction.

⁷ See also Bryan Vescio who unpacks how literary interpretation is perceived by Derrida. Since no truths pertain to textual interpretations, and everything, given the limitations of the text, is more or less an appropriate reading, should criticism eclipse itself? Vescio’s analysis reveals that with Derridean deconstruction criticism should say “Nothing,” rather than say nothing.

⁸ From Hutcheon’s “Past events are given *meaning*, not *existence* by their representation in history” (*Politics* 84).

in the most cited postmodern novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, where textuality supersedes reality.)⁹

In literature and with metafiction, narratives are re-examined and re-speculated. If the end-product of narratives used to be the acquisition of knowledge, now that there is no end-product, the emphasis is shifted to the narrative, its own process, and its own integral formation. Metafiction reinterprets this heightened interest in narratives, not only by placing them in the forefront, but also by accentuating the fictionality of narratives, as narratives of fiction.

The Postmodern Case of Greece:

Greece is a curious case of postmodernism, and deserves some provisionally introductory remarks so that the Greek novels in this dissertation can fit more holistically in the postmodern metafictional framework of the West.

In a 1987 article entitled “Is Postmodernism Possible Outside the ‘West’? The Case of Greece,” Gregory Jusdanis imperiously argues that Greece exemplifies no postmodern case. According to Jusdanis, postmodernism can be viewed in two ways: as a reaction against the elitism of modernism, or as a continuation of the avant-garde, which promoted and fought for subverting art as an institution. He concludes that Greece, being deprived of both an avant-garde and a modernist movement, must also be deprived of postmodernism. In his book, *Belated Modernity*, Jusdanis makes the claim that modernism has arrived late.¹⁰ Is it possible that

⁹ It should be noted, however, that the postmodernists do not conceive of reality as a text, as some have argued, but as mediated through texts which inevitably reconstruct it.

¹⁰ The hallmark of Greek modern poetry is situated in the thirties, while its culmination with prose is located in the decade of the sixties (Tziouvas, “Mapping” 30). Even the Greek modernist novels, however, do not reach the level of experimentation that high modernism produced in the West.

postmodernism will too? His 1987 article poses the question of Greek postmodernism a little too early and he falls into the trap of answering it negatively.

Jusdanis's stipulations are soon subverted by critics who detect that in the post-dictatorship era of 1974, Greece and Greek literature in particular have increasingly demonstrated a postmodern tendency that fully manifests itself after the nineties. Peripheral modernities and postmodernities, as they have been explored by Eleni Kefala, need not follow the same stages and developments of the West center—what Jusdanis blatantly argues—and more importantly they should not be stigmatized as imperfect when they fail to conform to the prototypical patterns (22). “[Peripheral] postmodernities are products of the Western influences as much as of the specificities of their own modernities” (257). Both the West as well as the internal structures and struggles of the previous generations help create a postmodernity that is indigenous to the particular society and culture, often adopting some not all postmodern traits (Katsan 403). Greek postmodernism designates an inclination towards globalization and a sense of belonging to a European collectivity that is being assimilated in its society and culture (Mackridge and Yannakakis, 6–9),¹¹ while its literature seems to internalize an ostensible turning point from the practices of its recent past. In addition, as Rodrick Beaton suggests, there is a better readership in the early nineties, a “more substantial and seemingly a more sophisticated, reading public” that is more receptive to the new influences harvested outside Greece and brought within (225).

¹¹ It would be curious to see how literature might retract from this sense of belonging in Europe after the latest developments in economy and politics which ostracize the Greek world from the European Union and consequently from Europe. I speculate a redirection towards ethnicity and introversion, which will help Greek literature regain a latent interest in the political and ethnic issues that are now so pressing.

In Greek literature, a number of differences punctuate its turn towards the postmodern world of the West. The political and historical themes that incarnate novels of the previous generations are replaced by a sense of subjectivity located in the private and public life of the individual (Mackridge and Yannakakis 13), so that old forms of political allegories are transformed into “cultural allegories” (Tziovas, “Centrifugal Topographies” 33) and the old interest in public life transmogrifies into an interest in private life (Tziovas, *Palimpsest* 247). Dimitris Tziovas specifically argues that even historical novels shift the emphasis from reconstructing the historical to configuring the complexities of personal identity; the center is not history but the self as history, and politics are ruminated under the auspices of the individual (“Centrifugal Topographies” 32). At the same time, the pressing issue of Greekness, which has always haunted modern Greek literature, takes a new direction in acknowledging national identity as hybridization and heterogeneity. “National allegories” persist with a twist (Katsan 405): in contrast to the Greek modernists, who strove to portray a unified picture of national identity, postmodern writers recognize and embrace a “Greekness” that embodies multiplicity and otherness (Katsan 399; Kefala 60–1). Since the concept of the nation is an invented and imposed identity formation, the heteroclitic elements of nationalism are integrated into the concept of Greekness as plurality.

Metafictional practices surface in the polarity of discourse that encompasses these heterogeneous components and foreground national identity as polysemic, syncretist, and hybrid. Although I would argue that the Greek metafictional novel exemplifies covert metafictionality, there is an affluence of texts that implicitly point to their own construction and artificiality, and for both Katsan and Kefala, these texts undermine a more general sense of multiplicity. For Kefala, metafictional discourse “*speaks of the tensions and conflicts inherent in hybrid cultures*”

(37), and Katsan sees the deployment of historiographic metafiction, in particular, as a means for the Greek novelist to “critique accepted conceptions of Greek identity and history that have been naturalized” (404). The irreconcilable components that make up nationalism, culture, and society parallel the style and themes of self-reflexivity with its antinomies of versisimilitude and factualization, chaos and order, homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Postmodernism, therefore, pairs up with metafictionality to articulate some of the most burning issues that afflict the second half of the twentieth century. Homogeneity, totalization, and universality are dismantled because they are constructed notions of signification; and truth and knowledge, whether in discovering national identity, or universal certainties about reality and the cosmos, are equally traversed.

Chapter #2

A Critical History of Metafiction

It seems quite clear to me that this book will establish me as the most interesting spokesman for the American avant-garde, and for Sur-fiction, as well as Ur-fiction, and Post-Modern fiction to boot. (Sorrentino 358)

Q: You are the author, aren't you? How about taking responsibility for what you've done and telling us for sure?

A: I wish I could. But you see I'm at a crazily excited period in composition when I'm writing reams a day, and the characters are calling their own shots, and the book is at least temporarily out of control. It's no longer a dead text I'm handling, but rather a self-sustaining ecosystem, an autonomous life form that drinks up my energy each day and leaves me exhausted. I can't take full responsibility, in the normal sense of the word, or fully explain down to the last detail why things are happening as they are. (Grudin 168-9)

During the seventies and eighties there is a proliferation of articles of a new kind of fiction that speaks about itself, a more self-conscious fiction. The novel, according to many critics, has gravitated towards analyzing its own mask of fictionality, and pointing to its own fabrication. Although the seventies give birth to the term 'metafiction,' the two decades that follow are tempestuous with critics struggling to bestow a name to the phenomenon. By the late eighties,

metafiction is established as a literary term, and the turmoil it went through, being defined and redefined, subsides. The following decade reveals less interest in theorizing about the term, since it is thought that by now there is a general consensus on what the term entails, and rather than advancing typologies of metafiction, critics yield to practical analyses. This more thematic engagement with the term continues in the new millennium, but it is also accompanied by a handful of narratological approaches that curtail metafiction's semantic usage.

In this chapter, I sketch the history of metafiction as a literary term and underline its evasiveness. "Metafiction" is not unproblematic. It is often conflated with similar terms, some of which legitimately belong to it, but others of which are coined before metafiction gains traction. As Marcel Cornis-Pope notes: "A term like 'metafiction' is essentially a misnomer, in its problematic positing of a locus outside and above all fiction from where an effective critique of narrative models can be attempted" (260). To understand the innuendos of the term and be able to absolve it from everything that does not belong to it, a tracing of its genealogy is necessary.

When in 1963 Lionel Abel introduced the term "metatheater" to refer to serious plays that are not tragedies, and to plays whose characters are aware of their own theatricality (60), it was only a matter of time for the term to cross over to the adjacent field of the novel. In 1970 William H. Gass—coincidentally a metafictionist—coins the term in a discussion about the contemporary novel. Many critics of his decade coin their own terms for the same experimental fiction and, before Gass's term prevails, these terms storm the field of criticism. "Metanarrative," "surfiction," "fabulation," "metatext," "metalepsis," should be studied in conjunction with metafiction, some equated with what metafiction has come to be and others become its extended branches.

The first parallelism one must draw is between metafiction and the postmodern novel, since metafiction emerged at a time when discussions on the postmodern novel and postmodernism were most dominant. For some critics, the postmodern novel and the metafictional novel either conflate, or their distinction is not clearly defined. The overlapping of the terms is due to postmodernism's propensity for self-referentiality incarnated in all arts, from dance and photography to painting and fiction. If this postmodern tendency so widespread in the arts is made the core of postmodernism, then, metafiction would be the mirror image of postmodern fiction. Linda Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, associates postmodernism with self-consciousness in all levels of culture, photography, and architecture included, whereas metafiction pertains to literature in particular (3); thus for her, the metafictional novel *is* the postmodern novel. In Patricia Waugh's seminal book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, the term "postmodern novel" is completely effaced—even though the majority of the novels she refers to are contemporary postmodern examples—whereas Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* discusses a variety of postmodern texts, without referencing metafiction, despite the fact that many of the issues he raises are highly appropriate for it. On the other hand, there are critics for whom metafiction is one of the many phenomena embedded in the postmodern era, but surely not the only type of postmodern writing. Not every postmodern novel is a metafiction, in the same way that not everything published after the 1960s *is* postmodern (C. Butler 126). Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, who finds the term "postmodernism" too general to cover the many sub-movements he discerns within it (what he calls "supramodernism," "anti-modernism," and "paramodernism"), places metafiction under an umbrella he terms "transfiction." For him "transfiction" and the non-fiction novel are two opposing types both found in supramodernism (3–4). His convoluted bifurcation structure treats

metafiction as a smaller category, not as an overarching term. Similarly, Hans Bertens in *The Idea of the Postmodern* discerns four major postmodernisms, two of which are quintessentially antithetical: one focuses on the *return* of representation and the other on a self-reflexive form that contests representationality (66–7). Depending on whether metafiction becomes constitutive of postmodernism or not, its definition changes; broader definitions encompass the entire gamut of postmodern fiction, whereas the narrower ones allow fewer novels within their boundaries.

As the study of metafiction expands, more recent treatises divorce it from postmodernism altogether and tend to use it as a narratological term apropos to a number of novels. In a synchronic analysis, metafiction ought to be perceived as one of the many qualities of the postmodern novel. If self-reflexiveness is designated the essential trope of postmodernism, then metafiction, a representative autoreferential form, could become the paramount characteristic of postmodernity. Nonetheless, metafiction finds a fertile ground under the influence of a larger postmodern consciousness, a consciousness characterized by a “crisis of representation” (Bertens 11); by depthlessness flourishing in a post-industrial society (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 58); by incredulity towards grand narratives (Lyotard xxv); by a contemplation on ontological inquires (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 9); by disbelief in universal truths and affinity to pluralism (Harvey 45, 48); by a preoccupation with textuality as the only medium for knowledge (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16). Although the term “metafiction” is postmodernism’s offspring, diachronically metafiction is not a postmodern occurrence and it very well may be studied independently.

From a narratological perspective, metafiction has encouraged a re-examination of the novelistic tradition (Alter; Peters; Quendler; Williams). Canonical texts are revisited under the

auspices of a metafictional reading with self-reflexiveness taking the form of a trope in literary criticism. Since the birth of the novel with Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) and later with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), Fielding's *Joseph Andrew* (1742), and Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796), it is evident that metafiction is an inherent quality of the novel. Long before the novel came to be, the theater and even the epic harbored metafiction: *The Odyssey* portrays one of its earliest manifestations, when Odysseus listens to his own story being sung,¹² as well as Aristophanes's *The Clouds* when the playwright finds himself on the stage addressing his audience through the voice of the chorus pleading for a fair vote from the judges. Equally important progenitors appear to be many Elizabethan plays, which feature one of the most frequently summoned metafictional metaphors, the play-within-the-play. *The Spanish Tragedy* and various Shakespearean plays such as *Hamlet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are quintessential examples. The way in which one ventures to analyze metafiction, whether diachronically or synchronically, affects the term's rendition and provisionally impedes a clear-cut definition.

Further complications in defining metafiction arise due to the numerous neologisms surfacing prior to the term's recognition. Gass never explains what he intends metafiction to mean, relying perhaps on the proliferation of *meta* terms already existing in the academic jargon (meta-theater, meta-theory, meta-commentary, meta-language), and this is yet another reason metafiction lacks a unified definition. It appears at the very end of his essay "Philosophy and the Forms of Fiction," which is preoccupied with the novelistic task of world creation.

¹² On this Italo Calvino writes: "The story of [Odysseus'] return is already there before being acted out" (*Literature Machine* 136). The text embodies the fulfillment of the protagonist's quest, before it actually happens in the narrative and the story is both completed and being completed at the same time.

Contemporary fiction writers, Gass argues, are cognizant of the inadequacy of language as the only medium for fiction, and “[know] more often now, that [their] business is to *make*” a world, not *render* the world (24). In his concluding remarks, he assumes that Borges, Barthes, and Flannery O’Brien engage in a fiction whose “form serves as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafiction” (25). This particularly laconic context sets off the initial confusion about the term. Its juxtaposition to the antinovel necessitates, first and foremost, an investigation against the backdrop of what an antinovel is, and subsequent critics have attempted to discriminate between the two terms. Larry McCaffery aptly suggests that metafiction resembles antinovels in its experimentation and unconventionality, but that its own concern lies with the making of fiction (“Art of Metafiction” 182).

While Gass was crafting his idiosyncratic vocabulary, many others did the same. Can we assume that when Raymond Federman coins “surfiction” to refer to “a kind of fiction that explores the possibilities of fiction; a kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it,” he really means metafiction (“Surfiction” 7)? Federman’s choice of the French prefix “sur” points to fiction that rises above itself, as opposed to the prefix “meta” which indicates a re-direction of fiction toward itself (or away/beyond itself). Rüdiger Imhof treats Federman’s term as an alternative to metafiction that was never able to supersede it (“Contemporary Metafiction” 292); Brian McHale, who does not recognize metafiction as an independent term and conflates it with the postmodern novel, deems Federman’s term synonymous with postmodernism (*Postmodern Fiction* 4), whereas, for Waugh, surfiction is a subcategory of metafiction pertaining to overt narrational intrusion as its most conspicuous feature (14). Robert Scholes coins “fabulation,” David Lowenkron the “metanovel,” and Steven Kellman the “self-begetting

novel.” Much of what these other terms dispel has been absorbed in defining metafiction, and in tracing its history such studies ought not to be overlooked. Through an examination of the febrile criticism responsible for metafiction’s multifariousness, the nuances of the term begin to emerge.

Metafiction’s Story as History:

At least two major tendencies have been cultivated in serious studies on metafiction. One regards it as a rise through friction between fiction and criticism and the other—which is dominated by structural and post-structural critics—as a friction between fiction and reality. Admittedly, the latter group has spilt much ink on the representational aspect of metafiction in conjunction with its ontological status—two points that percolate throughout the entire postmodern tradition putting Aristotelian mimesis under scrutiny. Equally enlightening are reader response and possible-worlds approaches, while in the twentieth century a few post-classical narratologists have reopened metafiction’s case, further attempting to conceptualize it as a literary term. Among these recent studies, the term metafiction is contrasted to “metanarrative” and much of its obfuscation has dissipated on those grounds alone; certain novels that up to now were labeled metafiction are now deemed otherwise.

I. The Seventies: A Decade of Neologisms:

No survey on the history of metafiction should neglect to pay tribute to Wayne Booth’s article “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*.” Only a subset of metafiction, the self-conscious narrator stands for one of its earlier manifestations. For Booth, this class of narrators intrudes on the narrative in order to comment on themselves as creators

and on their book as the product of creation. The article offers a thorough exploration of intrusiveness after Cervantes and before Sterne, demonstrating a continuation of this tradition reaching its apex in Fielding and Sterne, where such narrative techniques become deliberate and intentional. According to Booth, in third person narratives, the narrator “intrudes unobtrusively” (164); in first person narratives intrusions are hammered on the reader; and “rhetorical” commentaries, planted in first or third person narratives, are either surreptitious or extended comments on characters and events. His rather limited devotion to “rhetorical” commentary originates the development of what later critics will call metanarrative commentaries: every time the reader is exposed to the act of narrative, she is confronted with a metanarrative.

In one of the earliest attempts to define metafiction, Roland Barthes’s essay “Literature and Metalanguage” examines a kind of literature whose language speaks the subject of its investigation (*Critical Essays* 97). Barthes refers to literature that reflects upon itself and regards itself as a double, being at once an object as well as scrutiny of that object. However exhilarating for literature to wallow within its own domain, Barthes fears it simultaneously courts death and, like a Racinean heroine, will perish upon discovering its identity. His surmise over the future trajectory of literature, which is also partly endorsed by John Barth, destabilizes the world of criticism urging several critics to defend fiction’s choice of self-exploration as being consistent with its literary vicissitude. In a homologous, though ambivalent fashion, John Barth proposes in “Literature of Exhaustion” that the contemporary self-referential novel has resulted from a ‘used-upness’ of its literary possibilities. Everything the novel had to say has already been articulated; what else could possibly remain but an affirmation of itself, a return to its old voice? Drawing upon the metaphor of the labyrinth where all possibilities must be exhausted before the center is located, Barth forebears literature’s fate as twofold: literature with its self-

reflexivity will encounter either its defeat and death or its victory and freedom. Unlike Barthes, therefore, Barth's prediction hides an auspiciousness that is often overlooked; the novel is not necessarily heading towards demise, but has the potential to break away from the overused novelistic conventions and reach different realms.

In *Narrative Discourse*, a book published in France only two years after the term's inception, Gerard Genette alludes to it in more ways than one. One assumption of metafiction is apparent when Genette explores the extradiegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic narrative levels, with 'metadiegetic' coming closest to defining metafiction and its obsession with onion-like structures. Each of the three levels corresponds to the various degrees of recounting a narrative. The extradiegetic level is confined within the textual universe of a narrator who materializes an intradiegetic world, within which more embedded discourses are supplanted, and if within those discourses another degree of narration is positioned, that level is a narrative of the second degree and belongs to the metadiegetic level.¹³ Although, Genette's distinction has many applications, not necessarily pertaining to the metafictional novel, it certainly touches upon metafiction's predilection with the novel-within-the-novel structure and Chinese boxes. Equally prominent is Genette's metalepsis, which is directly affiliated with metafiction being one of its primary indicators. Metalepsis refers to elements in a narrative that have the potentiality to wiggle in between the three narrative levels, disturbing their demarcated domains and eroding their

¹³ Genette in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* illustrates the three narrative levels by means of using *The Thousand and One Nights* as an example. Extradiegetic narrator is the first narrator of the book, (intra)diegetic is a narrative embedded in the first one, in this case Scheherazade's story, who, in turn, produces a metadiegetic level with her own tales (85).

borderlines. Metalepsis contaminates the world of telling and the world of the told (Pier 190), and as such it is instrumental in foregrounding the metafictionality of a narrative.

The first critic who spots Gass's term and devotes an elaborate study to it is Robert Scholes with his article "Metafiction" and later with his book *Fabulation and Metafiction*. In his article, Scholes explains metafiction based on criticism, claiming that it conglomerates four perspectives of critical viewpoint, what he calls formal, structural, behavioral, and philosophical (29). Scholes's article is opaque and fails to sketch a clear picture of what he envisions metafiction to mean, except that he associates it with criticism, while his subsequent book obfuscates matters even more by introducing another neologism, "fabulation." It is unclear whether Scholes uses fabulation to mean metafiction—at one point he states that the two terms are equated¹⁴—or whether fabulation branches off to target a smaller group of metafictional narratives. He postulates that fabulations reveal "an extraordinary delight in [their] design" and gives the example of a fable with a tale-within-a-tale as a paradigmatic example of this type (2). If metafiction and fabulation are indeed synonymous, why the need for both terms? And if they are projections of each other, Scholes does not lucidly state their point of departure. At least one critic has called Scholes's attempts to define the term unsuccessful, mainly because he uses metafiction in very generic terms and as an alternative to postmodern fiction (Imhof, "Contemporary Metafiction" 273).

Malcolm Bradbury and John Fletcher study the introverted novel as if it were the metafictional novel. They consider it a modernist phenomenon and propose to discriminate it from previous forms of self-consciousness, such as Cervantes's and Sterne's, which simply

¹⁴ "For experimental fabulation—or 'metafiction' as I have called it, following Gass's suggestion..." (3).

emancipate the reader from the tyrannical narrative voice. Modernist introversion (to retain the term ‘self-consciousness’ for preceding practitioners) speculates the nature of its own artistry at the time of its design and displays the process and the means of its formulation. Bradbury and Fletcher restrict narratological introversion to the modernists, thereby inferring that it emerged and perished in this literary period. What is missing from their study is how the introverted novel expanded itself in the rest of the century, and how it has reconciled its modernist manifestations with its postmodern practices.

Coming closer to defining metafiction as fiction about fiction, Raymond Federman coins his own term “surfiction” to refer to works that “expose the fictionality of reality” by displaying their own fictional make-up (“Surfiction” 7). His four propositions about the evolution of fiction could stand for metafiction’s manifesto: firstly, the novelist will challenge the very basic conventions of reading, which proclaim a book to be read in linear fashion from left to right and top to bottom; secondly, fiction will cease representing a reality outside itself, but only its own potentiality as fiction; thirdly, instead of pretending to tell another story, fiction will tell “the story of the telling” (12); finally, the reader will be invited to join the stage next to the novelist, and only through their interactive process would meaning be extracted. Federman’s first proposition describes the kaleidoscopic nature of metafiction, and his third proposition explains what Steven Kellman names the self-begetting novel, a novel that is being created as the narration progresses. Federman may have not labeled the new fiction he foresaw “metafiction,” but his ideas have proven instrumental in the gradual stabilization of the term.

Still without incarnating the term metafiction, Robert Alter with *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* demonstrates one of the first attempts to trace the nature of self-consciousness diachronically from Cervantes to Thomas Pynchon and Donald Barthelme.

He suggests that even though it is possible to isolate pockets of self-consciousness in any novel, a fully self-conscious novel is one that on all levels (language, plot, characters, themes, narrative viewpoint) does not cease to project the fictional world as authorial construct, placing it against the backdrop of its literary tradition; a self-conscious novel acknowledges that “literary realism is a tantalizing contradiction,” with reality lying not within it but beyond it (x). Additionally, he argues that with Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) two traditions inaugurate the future of the novel: “literary fantasies” mixed with “grubby actuality” point the way to the realists, whereas the “zestfully ostentatious manipulation of the artifice [the novelist] constructs set a precedent for all the self-conscious novelists to come” (3–4). For Alter, the realistic novel in the nineteenth century presents a break in the self-conscious tradition, which is then revived in the twentieth century with modernism. Linda Hutcheon most notoriously attacks *Partial Magic* for stipulating that self-consciousness is atrophied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and contends that self-consciousness has always been integral to the development of all fiction; during those two centuries, however, there is a greater emphasis on the product rather than on the process of fiction making.

Richard Pearce, who borrows the term “surfiction” from Federman, defines contemporary fiction from the perspective of the text. In conventional fiction, he claims, the frame of the novel is suppressed. The content (the picture projected to the reader) and the medium (the language through which the content is conveyed) are trapped within the frame, placing the narrator in an in-between state responsible for showcasing the frame’s interior. Unlike this traditional view, in which content and language are subjected to the narrator’s purview, in “surfiction” the three partake in the very same imaginative field, thereby pulverizing the frame. Inspired by this article, a few years later, James Pearce in “Beyond the Narrational Frame: Interpretation and Metafiction”

elaborates on the same argument from a reader-response theory, bringing the reader in full view, when positing that metafiction transports the reader beyond the narrational frame, thrashing her outside the confines of the text. A frameless text, for Pearce, is an incomplete text, which invites the reader to (re)create and (re)construct it.¹⁵

Remaining in the same sphere of reader-response theory, Umberto Eco in *The Role of the Reader* devotes a chapter to the metatext. Advancing his thesis on open and closed texts—alternatives to Barthes’s *writerly* and *readerly* respectively (*S/Z*)—he speculates the metatext as a third division. Closed texts compel the reader to cooperate and “think their way” (256); open texts engage the reader with literary devices making her a part of them; and metatexts “tell stories about the way stories are built up,” interacting with the reader by toying with her role as a narratee (256). In a fictional world where the text is aware of itself as a text, and at times characters are aware of their fictional status, the reader participates in the fiction, by never forgetting the act of reading. Ultimately, it is the act of reading that revives a dormant world hidden behind the pages of a fiction. Therefore, a self-aware reader constitutes metafiction’s definition as much as a self-aware text.

If the reader is not made the centripetal force by which all other strings convey “metafiction,” structure or formation is. Having read Robert Scholes’s article and finding his rendition of the term “platonic,” David Lowenkron develops a term that encompasses a particular type of metafictional writing, a subgenre of the novel (343). In his article “The Metanovel,” he looks at texts that follow the novel-within-the-novel structure where a microstructure, that is an inner fiction, is embedded in a macrostructure, an outer fiction. The implied fictionality of the

¹⁵ A much less impressive article which explores how “autoreferentiality” affects the way the text, the author, and the reader are rendered, perceived, and accounted for is provided by Pavao Pavlicic.

metanovel is foregrounded once the novel engages in a self-duplication as a form of self-examination; “the proper study of the novel is the novel,” Lowenkron avers, and the metanovel demonstrates this property (355). Although a very narrow form of metafiction, the metanovel showcases one of the most frequent attires metafiction wears and Lowenkron is among the first to help reveal the convergence of the two.

Yet another apparel of metafiction is what Steven Kellman names the self-begetting novel, a novel that partakes in its own creation. Kellman puts the origin of the self-begetting novel in the French literary tradition and Proust’s epic novel as the precursor. It is at once art creating itself, and art that begins where it ends. Kellman may be unaware of the term metafiction and he may not intend his neologism to cover the vast spectrum of self-conscious and self-referential novels that metafiction conveys. Nonetheless, his term relates to metafiction, for the fiction that creates and recreates itself to infinity accentuates its status as craftsmanship and fabrication.

II. Metafiction Prevails in the Eighties:

Of particular importance to the discussion of metafiction is Hutcheon’s influential book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, which presents the first comprehensive study bearing the name she helps standardize. It is not a coincidence that her book was published at the turn of the decade, in 1980. Ten full years after a continuous struggle to survive and rise above other terms, after a struggle to contrive a meaning of its own, metafiction, with Hutcheon’s study, finds a central place in this minefield. *Narcissistic Narrative* inaugurates the term’s conscious use, which lasts throughout the eighties—a decade exemplifying brilliance in its breadth and depth of metafictional studies. Hutcheon defines metafiction as narcissistic, self-

referential, and self-commenting and discerns a paradox at the heart of its practice: the reader is ushered into an imaginary realm whose fictiveness she is compelled to acknowledge, while at once, she becomes fiction's co-creator. Arguing against Alter, who postulated that the nineteenth century eliminated self-consciousness from the tradition of the novel, she proposes a new examination of this tradition as a continuation. Although both operate under the aegis of mimesis, the realistic or 'conventional' novel tends towards exposure of the product, the story told, whereas metafiction punctuates narrative process and storytelling. In other words, Hutcheon claims that the metafictional novel imitates how stories are recounted and as such it never deviates from the mimetic tradition of literature.

Hutcheon's definition is accompanied by an intricate typology—the first to appear in this field of criticism—dividing the metafictional novel in two major categories: diegetic, where the text is presented as a conscious narrative process building up its own fictive universe, or linguistic, where the awareness falls on the construction of the text as language. She splits these binaries further by claiming each can be either overtly or covertly metafictional, with overt metafiction incarnating both self-reflection and self-consciousness, and covert metafiction being mostly self-reflective, not necessarily self-conscious. (Self-reflection should be understood as the act of pointing to oneself, whereas self-consciousness entails an awareness of the self.) An intrinsic quality of overt diegetic metafiction is the active role of the reader who is made aware of her contribution in creating the fictive world, in such forms as in the *mise-en-abyme*, and in allegoric or metaphoric structures, while overt linguistic metafiction punctuates language's relation to fictionality, either its inadequacy to convey the world or its power to fashion it. Covert levels differ from overt ones in their implicit exposure. Examples Hutcheon provides for covert diegetic are among others the detective story and fantasy literature, whose form

discursively draws attention to the reader's act of reconstituting the fictive world, whereas covert linguistic metafiction entails riddles, jokes, and puns, forms that tacitly direct the reader's attention to language's semantic duplicity.

Although Hutcheon's study is illuminating, unquestionably setting the foundations for future attempts, her typology is rather general and open-ended, allowing any novel to be characterized as metafictional. Her broad definition stems from an aspiration to develop a typology that would apply to the postmodern novel, not necessarily the metafictional novel, since the two terms are interchangeable in her study. For example, she considers the detective novel—a genre that reached literary accreditation in postmodernism—metafictional mainly due to its hermeneutic code, a working metaphor for the act of reading (72). As I will show in chapter three, the detective novel becomes metafictional upon interpretation, predominantly because readers of the genre do not openly experience its fictionality. Unlike the detective novel, on the other hand, the fictionality of the metafictional text is openly axiomatic.

Hutcheon's inclusion of fantasy literature as another form of covert metafiction poses further problems to metafiction's meaning. She maintains that "covert narcissistic texts share with all fantasy literature the ability to force the reader (not only *ask* him) to create a fictive imaginative world separate from the empirical one in which he lives" (32). Should we assume that fairy tales, science fiction novels, or novels employing magic realism are forms of metafiction because their story-world does not comply with the norms of the reader's physical universe? In effect, Hutcheon's "covert metafiction" should not be part of metafiction's definitions due to its generic girth, and even though metafiction has imbibed from such literary forms as the detective novel, fantasy fiction, and anecdotal narratives, these forms do not define it, but inhabit it. Eliminating Hutcheon's "covert" category would allow for diegetic metafiction

to pertain to overt forms and linguistic to covert, thus narrowing down the spectrum of novels that the term can entail. Despite such flaws, however, *Narcissistic Narrative* is a step in the right direction, for it aids the term's full installment in narratology and generates a considerable amount of attention. Published at the dawn of the eighties, it is profusely succeeded by many serious studies on the subject.

Hutcheon's contribution to metafiction does not end with *Narcissistic Narrative*. Her two later books, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism* develop a theory about a new kind of historic novel that entwines metafiction with problems of historicity, what she names historiographic metafiction. By studying a particular set of postmodern novels that engage with the fictionalization of history-writing, Hutcheon conceptualizes historiographic metafiction as a genre that does not seek to re-actualize the past in its authentic representation, but as textual reality instead, thereby declaring an allegiance with metafiction. It operates under the assumption that both the reconstruction of history and the crafting of fictional worlds are human constructs accessible only through textuality. Hutcheon stipulates that, for the first time, the historical novel explores narrative(s) of the past, self-reflexively examining its own unfolding as a creation of a reality that once was. Despite the fact that in *Narcissistic Narrative* Hutcheon equates the metafictional novel with the postmodern novel, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* she considers historiographic metafiction as indicative of postmodern fiction; for Hutcheon, the historiographic novel defines and emblemizes postmodern literature.

Many scholars have contested Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism through the grounds of historiographic metafiction. Particularly, Ansgar Nünning in "Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres" views historiographic metafiction as an umbrella category of postmodern historical fiction alongside the metahistorical novel—a historical novel that demonstrates the

continuation of the past into the present—and the revisionist historical novel—another historical novel which marginalizes great events in order to highlight human experience. In this typology of the postmodern historical novel, historiographic metafiction differs from the other two types by engaging less with historical facts and more with the epistemological problems of writing history. In addition, Nünning accuses Hutcheon of using a definition of historiographic metafiction that does not apply to all the novels she discusses.

The eighties show a gleeful attraction to the term metafiction, which reaches its second climax, when, a few years after Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative*, Patricia Waugh publishes *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. For Waugh, metafiction epitomizes the dichotomy between the fictional and the factual. She defines it as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). Fiction can only represent a discourse of reality, and metafiction lures the reader in accepting “the reality [of any novelistic scene] as a sentence in a book” not as something real (95). If fiction with metafiction compromises its relation to reality, according to Waugh, readers are compelled to recognize their own fictionalized realities: “In showing us how fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly written” (18). In revisiting the Borgesian axiom,¹⁶ Waugh maintains that the empirical world of the reader encompasses fiction-making elements that craft and fashion its everyday composition. Comparable to the ways in which textuality and discourse constitute the fictional world of the

¹⁶ “Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of the Quixote, and Hamlet is a spectator of Hamlet? These inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers and spectators, can be fictitious.” (Borges, *Other Inquisitions* 64)

text, the reader's world is conjured by these same constituents, rendering a reality that, for the human subject, cannot exist outside language. The metafictional novel therefore articulates a self-referential universe that depends upon linguistic elements for its formation, only to mirror how language and textuality construct and reconstruct the reader's own world. The same argument has been made before Waugh by Federman and Bath in a cursory manner, but Waugh centers her definition of metafiction around it. Contemporaneous to Waugh, in another instrumental treatise on metafiction, Larry McCaffery elaborates on this theme by stating that metafiction draws upon the metaphor of man as a maker: the human subject becomes enveloped in her own fictional systems and therefore turns into a victim of their concoction as they parasitically seep into her life (*Metafictional Muse* 9). These hypotheses about the driving force behind the metafictional novel stem directly from applications of postmodern theory, where the postmodern subject is entangled to system(s) of signification that, instead of allowing her to examine the outside world, cripple her by refashioning it.

Although Waugh does not provide a typology of metafiction, like Hutcheon she conflates the metafictional novel with the postmodern novel, assuming that all postmodern novels are by default metafictional. Moreover, even though her study, like Hutcheon's, facilitates in the augmentation of the term's reception at a time when metafiction is gaining prominence as a literary term, it is simultaneously partly responsible for the term's recession in the twentieth century. Studies like Hutcheon's and Waugh's implant the apex of the metafictional novel in this decade, as a kind of self-reflexive fiction that characterizes the postmodern novels of a particular group of writers from the sixties to the eighties. With Hutcheon and Waugh, metafiction reaches its apogee. Despite their flaws, these studies are to this day foundational and representative of the theoretical discourse surrounding the term.

The next prominent publication after Waugh is Rüdiger Imhof's *Contemporary Metafiction: A Poetological Study of Metafiction in English since 1939* and his subsequent article "Contemporary Metafiction: The Phenomenon and the Efforts to Explain it." Imhof is the first scholar to acknowledge the consequences of following a diachronic or synchronic analysis of metafiction and therefore he is the first to address the misapprehension that the metafictional and the postmodern novel are mirror images of each other. His study involves overt metafictional texts, which raise no doubt as to their metafictionality. He examines the metafictional novel, which reached the pinnacle of popularity in contemporary literature, and, espousing definitions from his predecessors, he declares metafiction to being "a kind of fiction that represents nothing beyond itself, has no context except its own form, no subject but its own process" (132).

If Hutcheon's definition is centered around the text and the reader and Waugh's around the text and reality, Imhof commits to the view that the text, the reader, and reality are three components which most suitably conceptualize the term. In the realistic novel, the text is constructed in accordance to reality and by the reader's suspension of disbelief. In the metafictional novel, however, the dynamics of the triad reality-text-reader are skewed, since reality can no longer extend itself to the other two. Having succumbed to the realization that it is made of an inadequate medium, namely language, fiction orbits around itself, and in acknowledging that it cannot represent reality, it requests that the reader participate in its own "game" of discovering its fictitiousness. The metafictional quest of the novel stems from a crisis within literature at the moment it confronts language. Instead of reaching a point of saturation once it becomes aware of its linguistic limitations, fiction investigates its own operation and displays its process of self-exploration, leaving the reader unaided to fathom her empirical world.

While setting the foundations of a thorough study on metafiction, Imhof stretches his argument too far when he stipulates that metafiction is ahistorical and apolitical and that all it can bestow on its readers is an understanding of fiction as fictional discourse. For Imhof, metafiction is so self-absorbed with its own poeology that its reader learns the tricks behind literature's formation, leaving no bridges to reconcile the fictional world with the empirical. His non-utilitarian understanding of the term is rather reductive to the application of the metafiction novel, which, I show in chapter four, foregrounds its fictionality by problematizing its linguistic essence as much as struggling to come to terms with its portrayal of reality.

In *The Self-Conscious Novel* Brian Stonehill combines in his definition much of what previous commentators detected in metafiction but aspires to narrow the spectrum of novels that fall under its umbrella. He defines the self-conscious novel based on four basic approaches that are customarily employed to target any literary text. Author, reader, real world, and literary theory find themselves inside the metafictional novel, not outside of it, as it is often the case with the "conventional" novel. Literary theory surfaces with the novel's critical self-reflection; its relation to reality both creates and destroys the illusion of life, thereby balancing mimetic and anti-mimetic effects; and author and reader are circumscribed in the fiction when they are made directly visible. Stonehill's definition is illuminating and accounts for a large spectrum of metafictional novels without allowing every novel to be categorized as such. Even more illuminating is his discussion on "the repertoire of reflexivity," prompted by his aspiration to distinguish self-consciousness from clumsy writing (19). His scrupulous analysis of narration, style, structure, characterization, and themes demonstrates that the level of self-consciousness each of these categories employ, assists one to better detect whether a novel can be called metafiction or not.

III. The Nineties: A Decade of Silence:

The proliferation of studies on metafiction in the eighties facilitates its migration from nebulous domains towards more clarity, especially in comparison to the preceding years. In contrast, the nineties are not so vociferous in defining it. During this time, the term finds widespread application in studies that explore specific metafictional novels and its meaning seems to have been stabilized. While the anxiety to define metafiction subsides, scholars employ what has already been documented as a basis for critically examining individual novels, making little to no effort to challenge or further metafiction's literary status. Few studies are published that address metafiction as a literary phenomenon, mostly reiterating previous proclamations, adding nothing new to the term. It is during the nineties, however, that metafiction finds a legitimate place in literary dictionaries, an indication that the term has finally prevailed over its competitors and that it is taking a decisive form. Many assumptions, nonetheless, still remain murky, especially because scholars employ the term haphazardly based on whichever metafictional critic they choose to cite.

Metafiction as a dramatization of the dynamics between fiction and criticism is a definition endorsed by more than one critic in the nineties. It is pointed out that Scholes was the first to view metafiction as fiction that interlaces fiction with criticism, and this aspect of the metafictional novel is placed in the forefront once again. (In Australian theory, the term "fictocriticism" gains prominence, but it has traveled little outside that continent [Flavell]). In his introduction to the edited collection of essays, *Metafiction*, Mark Currie defines postmodern metafiction as a genre situated on the border line between fiction and criticism, that internalizes

the relationship between author and reader, art and life.¹⁷ Even though he acknowledges that metafiction is not a postmodern phenomenon, Currie attributes the rise of postmodern metafiction to the linguistic awareness brought about by the modernists and literary critics of the early twentieth century. Toying with the idea of metafiction's self-reflexiveness, he speculates that: "It is not enough that metafiction knows that it is fiction; it must also know that it is metafiction if its self-knowledge is adequate, and so on in an infinite regress" (1).

In a similar fashion, Brian Atterbery in "Metafictions: Stories of Reading" defines metafiction as fiction that blurs the line between the artist and the critic: metafiction relates the kind of story the critic would tell about the complexity of storytelling. According to Atterbery, metafiction underscores that every story unfolds three sub-stories: the actual story; the story of the telling; and the story of someone reading it. Paradoxically, while both Currie and Atterbery look back at seminal studies of the previous decade and criticize the broad manner in which metafiction is interpreted, their own contribution is itself limiting. Atterbery's comment that "[there] are at least as many kinds of metafiction as there are encounters between reader and text" (191) is ostentatiously generic and exceeds any generalizations made before him.

In "The Chaos of Metafiction," Peter Stoicheff revisits the claim that the metafictional novel displays a friction between fiction and reality and he provides resourceful new insights. Metafiction, he affirms, unmasks the structures which allow "fiction to masquerade as reality" and destabilizes conventional notions of literature's relation to both order and chaos (89). The traditional view of the text as an organism that may metamorphose the chaotic universe into a more systematic version of the empirical world is candidly subverted by metafictionists, who

¹⁷ In a later book, Currie prefers to use the term "theoretical fiction" instead of metafiction in order to underline metafiction's proximity to criticism (*Narratology* 53).

promulgate instead that chaos springs from the text's "limitless potential for interpretation and the author's relinquished power" (88). The text's meaning(s) cannot be constrained by any single interpretation, and the author, whose hovering presence used to restrict the breadth of the text's interpretations, is now overthrown, allowing metafiction to ruminate upon an infinite number of meanings without even arbitrating a hierarchy.

An intriguing conceptualization of metafiction is provided by Lubomir Doležel who approaches the metafictional novel from the perspective of possible-worlds theory. In *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, he asserts that as an aesthetic artifact, fiction instills a case of a possible world; fiction always creates *fictional* possible worlds, unlike, for example, history that conjures up *factual* possible worlds. In its turn, metafiction creates an *impossible* fictional world. A fictional world arises from the metafictional text, but it is at once thwarted and self-voided, nullifying its own authentication, that is, its power to grant fictional existence. Since the fictional components of a metafictional text are often irreconcilable, they cannot form a possible fictional world, but craft instead an impossibility of that fictional world. Umberto Eco in his discussion of the metatext has noted that "it is impossible to speak of an impossible world," but Doležel demonstrates that metafiction gravitates towards this impossibility (*Role of the Reader* 233). From within possible-worlds theory, metafiction becomes a case of non-fiction fiction, since it is steeped in a fictional domain whose fictionality is always subverted.

IV. The Turn of the Millennium: A Few Notable Proclamations:

In the new millennium, metafiction is scarcely discussed as a theoretical phenomenon, and although the term is widely used, it is either in relation to specific texts or it is discursively

mentioned as a concept that needs no clarification; more often than not, it fulfills a destiny of name-dropping erudition.¹⁸ During this period, metafiction is associated with the hallmark of its criticism in the eighties and in particular with Hutcheon and Waugh, so that it emits an aura of datedness, a term that has been in the foreground for a few decades and warrants no further notice. Three distinguished post-classical narratologists Werner Wolf, Ansgar Nünning, and Monika Fludernik continue to theorize metafiction from a strictly narratological vantage point and furnish the study of metafiction with a few more insightful observations. (Wolf, Nünning, and Fludernik are cognitive narratologists, with Fludernik having contributed most to the field of cognitive narrative theory.)

Werner Wolf publishes his typological definition of metafiction in German in 1993, but he reiterates it in more than one of his subsequent English articles published in the following decade (“Aesthetic Illusion as an effect of Fiction”; “Metareference in the Arts and Media”; “Metafiction and Metamusic”). After Hutcheon, Waugh, and Imhof, Wolf’s stupendous study, which marks the next milestone, avoids most of his predecessor’s omissions, proffers illuminating insights, and dissipates much of the term’s opacity. His first helpful observation distinguishes various types of self-reference. He recognizes that one form of self-referentiality (the fact that a sign refers to or “points to” itself or to similar elements within the same system) is manifested in semantic or motivic recurrences. Moments when a text refers to an earlier antecedent, be it a pronoun to a proper name or a scene evoking an earlier conversation, monologue, etc., continue to be self-referential (but not metafictional).¹⁹ Conversely, self-

¹⁸ See for example Heilmann and Llewellyn’s *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women’s Writing*.

¹⁹ Gerald Prince uses the term metanarrative to refer to metalinguistic aspects of the text, references that answer questions like “what is the meaning of x” (“Metanarrative Signs” 60). Addresses to the reader are not metanarrative

reference that denotes metafictionality (or metareferentiality)²⁰ activates in the recipient a “cognitive frame,” that “something is not ‘reality’ but reality thought, felt or represented by someone else, in short that this is a phenomenon or a ‘reality’ processed through a ‘medium’” (“Metareference” 5). This observation is groundbreaking in its simplicity, for it draws a fine line between metafiction and self-referentiality, an issue that was never foregrounded in the past. Moreover, Wolf treats metafiction as a frame that is triggered inside the reader’s mind, obliging her to encompass the artificiality projected by the narratives. Put at its simplest, this frame inside the reader’s mind impels her constantly to acknowledge the reality of the text as mediated reality.

Upon this foundational basis, Wolf proceeds with his typology consisting of four pairs. Metareference or, in the specific case of fiction, metafiction can be either intracompositional or extracompositional; explicit or implicit; *fictio* or *fictum*; critical or non-critical. The second and fourth pairs have been appointed to metafiction prior to Wolf, and he acknowledges their indebtedness to previous scholars. Explicit metafiction corresponds to metafictional expressions that remind the reader of their fictional status, whereas implicit metafiction engages devices that only covertly reflect upon their fictionality; more succinctly, implicitness is interpretation-based (Fludernik, “Metanarrative and Metafictional” 20). The second much-discussed pair is critical versus non-critical metafiction, which accounts for metafictional texts that either contain a critical analysis of themselves or do not.

The other two set of binaries are exclusively Wolf’s and prove remarkably essential. The fourth pairing is more straightforward with intracompositional metafiction relating to the

comments, but explaining a word in the narrative is. For Prince, certain self-referential moments translate into being metanarrative, and Wolf attempts to clarify these cases by his distinction between self-referentiality and metafiction.

²⁰ Metareferentiality is a multidisciplinary term referring to various forms of ‘metaization’ in the arts and media.

narrator's commentaries about this text, about this narrative, and with extracompositional metafiction referring to remarks that transgress the boundaries of their own fiction to pre-existing literature. This distinction proves quite enlightening since it clarifies the connective tissue bridging metafiction to intertextuality and parody—an often problematic terrain.²¹

The third pair, *fictio* versus *fictum*, facilitates the categorization of the metafictional novel by homogenizing a tendency that identifies all its uses. *Fictio* addresses metafictional texts in which the medium is foregrounded without questioning the truth value of the narrative; in other words, while the illusion of reality may be interrupted, such narratives are never displayed as inauthentic or invalid. Obvious examples are *Don Quixote* (1606/1615) or *Tristram Shandy* (1759), whose story lines are presented as valid despite the excessive use of narrational intrusions and the narrators' awareness of their projects. These texts are metafictional yet not anti-illusionist. *Fictum*, on the other hand, corresponds to anti-illusionist metafictional texts which either negatively or positively establish a relation to truth and reality; for instance, the narrator in Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) undermines the truth regarding his story by uncovering its fictitiousness: "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' mind and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 'voice' of) a convention usually accepted at the time of my story:

²¹ See for example *Parody/Meta-fiction*, where Margaret A. Rose defines parody as a form of metafiction. In her introductions she states: "[parody] is a self-reflexive form of meta-fiction which 'lays bare' the devices of fiction to refunction [literary material] for new purposes" (14). And later: "[parody] makes the object of attack part of its own structure" (35).

that the novelist stands next to God” (95). In *fictum* the reader’s suspension of disbelief is thwarted and the validity of the narrative discourse is equally subverted.²²

Wolf’s typology is duly the first to explain metafiction adequately addressing most of its manifestations and, in a variety of ways, preventing the interpretation of a large proportion of novels to fall arbitrarily under its label. His project supplies new venues of insight for twenty-first century narratologists who wish to further compress the term’s rendition. Inspired by and indebted to Wolf, Ansgar Nünning propounds a distinction between metafiction and metanarration, two terms customarily used interchangeably in English. In “On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of Metanarrative Commentary,” Nünning differentiates metafiction from metanarration, claiming that metafiction comments “on the *fictional*ity of the narrated text or of the narrator” thereby breaking the aesthetic illusion of fiction, whereas metanarration is preoccupied “with the narrator’s *reflections* on the *discourse* or the *process of narration*” (16 emphasis mine).²³ “In metanarrative expressions, a narrator can discuss questions of literary production or aesthetic problems, or she can even foreground the process of narration” (18). Because metanarrative comments can be located on the discourse level, no novel can be called metanarrative—yet one may talk about the metafictional novel, where metafictional commentaries may appear on various levels in the text, in its discourse, structure, style, etc. Metanarrative comments are of markedly different types—Nünning counts nineteen in total—and fulfill numerous functions, starting from enforcing an authentication of fiction to encouraging metafictional and anti-illusionistic results. Thus, they

²² See also Wolf’s “Metafiction and Metamusic” and Monika Fludernik’s *An Introduction to Narratology*.

²³ See also Fludernik’s “Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary” and Neumann and Nünning “Metanarration and Metafiction.”

may or may not destroy the narrative illusion of the text—the *fictio* versus *fictum* distinction is echoed here—and Nünning observes that little attention has been granted to those comments that do not.

To place Nünning's contribution to metafiction in perspective, let us look briefly at the opening chapter of Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), where the narrator discusses his choice of the novel's title:

The title of this work has not been chosen without the grave and solid deliberation which matters of importance demand from the prudent. Even its first, or general denomination, was the result of no common research or selection, although, according to the example of my predecessors, I had only to seize upon the most sounding and euphonic surname that English history or topography affords, and elect it at once as the title of my work and the name of my hero. But, alas! What could my readers have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer, or Stanley, or from the softer and more sentimental sounds of Belmour, Belville, Belfield, and Belgrave, but pages of inanity, similar to those which have been so christened for half a century past? (1)

The narrator of *Waverley* is a self-conscious narrator as Booth describes it, and there is no doubt it is a self-reflexive narrative, drawing attention to its own make-up. But is *Waverley* a metafictional novel? Most of the critics for whom metafiction is not simply a postmodern phenomenon would agree the above excerpt displays a case of metafictional narrative. If we respond negatively prompted by the realism the novel is rooted in, we challenge the assumption

whether metafiction is an intrinsic quality of the novel. For Nünning this would not be a case of metafiction, but of metanarration, since the narrator questions his literary production and discusses matters of art that pertain to his narrative choices.²⁴ Such metanarrative passages abound in the literary tradition, but are not to be confused with the metafictional novel. Metafictional comments foreground the fictionality of any given text more blatantly.

What remains relatively unclear in Nünning's article is where the converging line lies between those metanarrative comments that do break the illusion of reality and metafiction. And Monika Fludernik takes Nünning's discussion a step further by teasing out this particular interrelation: *pure metanarrative*, *pure metafiction*, and *metanarrative-metafiction*. According to Fludernik, metanarrative refers to insertions in a text that might be as short as a single word like the verb 'told' in the illustration she provides from conversational narrative in the phrase: "Have I already told you about...", or they might be as long as, and even longer than, the above example from Scott (*Introduction* 61). These metanarrative insertions do not thwart the fiction of the text. In effect they may strengthen it; by cultivating an intimate relationship between reader and (intrusive) narrator, they "put across a convincing picture of the fictional world" (61). The case of metafiction is more complicated, for often it employs metanarrative remarks as literary tools that impel the reader to confront the text's fictional make-up; many metanarrative comments have the means and the power to create metafictional novels. Nevertheless, if metafiction is materialized with the use of various other technical devices—such as metalepsis, the plot device of endless loop, the novel-within-the-novel—one would encounter an *ideally* pure

²⁴ According to Fludernik, who expands Nünning's typology on metanarration, this would feature a particular case of metanarrative comment, *metacompositionality*, where the narrator discusses which elements made it into the narrative and which ones were left out ("Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary" 26).

case of metafiction (63). Pure metafiction, however, is more of a theoretical concept, since no novel employs one or more of these other devices in absolute repudiation of metanarrative comments.

V. The Dropping of the Name:

In twenty-first century literary criticism, “metafiction” is applicable to a number of novelistic cases, but it is simultaneously dismissed, ceasing to be a current and contemporary term that encourages elaborate discussions and debates. In narratological studies, cognitive theory adverts to metafiction with implicit and discursive references, as does the study of unnatural narratives, a trend in narrative theory that runs contrary to cognitive theory. Cognitive narratology, stemming out of cognitive social studies,²⁵ focuses on the “nexus between narrative and mind,” applying contemporary theories of mind to explore readers’ reception of texts (Herman, “Narrative Theory” 155), as well as how texts can “aggressively challenge the mind’s fundamental sense-making capabilities” (Alber, “Impossible Storyworlds” 80). It concentrates on how readers read and, occasionally in order to reach that end, it studies how writers write, how narratives are composed (Abbott; Sommer). One compelling argument by a leading cognitive narratologist is Lisa Zunshine’s hypothesis that the reading of fiction tests, stimulates, and exercises our Theory of Mind, that is “our ability to explain people’s behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires” (*Why We Read Fiction* 6). Although Zunshine does not study metafiction, her theory of *metarepresentation*—and what seems an adjacent topic, her discussion on “multiple levels of intentionality” (28)²⁶—can be applied to the metafictional novel.

²⁵ See Lisa Zunshine’s Introduction to *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*.

²⁶ The discussion on the levels of intentionality resonates with metarepresentationality since both involve various degrees of embeddedness. Intentionality encompasses layer after layer of characters’ intentions to accomplish

unnatural elements. Unlike cognitive narratologists who trace the interest of narratives in the ways they provoke the human brain, unnatural narratologists argue that the interest of narratives lies in their potential to “move beyond, extend, or challenge our knowledge of the world” (Alber et al. 115). Impossible scenarios of atemporal and interspatial worlds, transgressive and out-of-the-ordinary texts, or forms of anti-mimetic practices constitute unnatural narratives. Unnatural narratives are not a new type of fiction, but a new way of examining them. Some scholars prefer to analyze unnatural narratives in terms of their resistance to be interpreted, whereas others fruitfully link cognitive narratology to unnatural narratives in order to naturalize the unnatural and make sense of its uniqueness (Alber and Heinze 9–11).

Many metafictional novels are unnatural narratives, since the ostensive definition of unnaturalness echoes metafictionality. For Alber and Heinze the unnatural foregrounds and “[highlights] the inventive power of fictional techniques” (9). For Brian Richardson, it exemplifies anti-mimetic practices—which differ from mimetic and non-mimetic—in “[pointing] out [their] own constructedness, the artificiality of many of [their] techniques, and [their] inherent fictionality” (“What is Unnatural Narrative Theory?” 31). “We may conclude,” Richardson continues, “by affirming that unnatural narratives are works that flaunt their own fictionality, and typically depart from convention in a significant and often self-conscious manner that remains unexpected” (36). It should be noted that some of the examples these scholars provide are metafictional, whereas others are not; therefore, it would be erroneous to presume that unnatural narratives *are* metafictional. However, there are obvious ties between the two terms that would allow one to examine the metafictional text under the parameters sketched by unnatural narratologists. In fact, metafictional techniques have been treated as unnatural cases. Metalepsis is one aspect of the metafictional novel that arrests the attention of this group

of narratologists, while others include examples of authors meeting their characters, self-contradictory narratives in which two versions of the same story conflict with each other, circular narratives where the beginning points to the end and the narrative continues infinitely (Richardson “Beyond Story and Discourse”).

Metafiction’s definition has come a long way since the term’s inception. Initially, it was used as a ubiquitous label that contained more than it could process—it is the nature of words to accrue assorted meaning over time rather than be born with a definitive signification. However, one part of metafiction’s definition has never eroded throughout its re-workings. Metafiction discloses its own fictionality. The problem is how much or how little, and this is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter #3

Signaling Metafictionality

For my part, I wonder whether someday I will ever succeed in making it felt that the true character and the only one that interests me is the reader, to the degree in which something of what I write ought to contribute to his mutation, displacement, alienation, transportation. (Cortázar, *Hopscotch* 437)

Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?

Are we forever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track—for ever at the same pace? (Sterne 239)

Definitions of metafiction, as delineated in chapter one, explain a metafictional novel once it has been categorized as such, but do not identify it in the first place. Post-structural renderings of metafiction (that it demonstrates a polarity between fiction and criticism, or fiction and reality) produce a disjunctive relation between the metafictional and the postmodern novel, giving more prominence to the latter. Although reader response theory targets metafiction more closely, it is too narrowly restrictive, while the post-classical narratologists offer a growing yet incomplete typology on the subject. Metafictional theory, therefore, is not in need of a definition so much as a functional and cumulative typology that will display its contours and demarcate its boundaries.

What qualifies as a metafictional novel? Does the foregrounding of storytelling always bespeak the novel's self-indulgence? A quick glance at the canon, from classicism through modernism, will yield many illustrations of novels pointing to themselves in a plethora of ways.²⁸ How do they affiliate with metafictional practices beyond simply anticipating them? An efficient and operative typology would initially aid in distinguishing the metafictional novel from

²⁸ In classical literature, the epic begins with an address to the Muse, as inspirational to the poet, an act that draws attention to the process of creation, a reviving of past events through storytelling. Medieval instances such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* (1351/1353) emphasize the act of storytelling through frames, and others such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* underscore the presentation of narration through techniques of interlacing, which foreground the processes of telling. In the Renaissance, besides the obvious examples of Cervantes, moments of self-reference can be found elsewhere; in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), the narrator in canto twenty-eight admonishes the reader to skip that canto because "my story is no less clear without it" (339), and later the epistolary novels of Laclous, Richardson, and Rousseau utilize multiple points of view to index forms of storytelling and draw a parallel between the reader and the character-reader of letters, and between the author and the character-writer of letters. In the realist novels, the reader may be addressed directly: "it must be quite clear to the experienced reader..." (*Oliver Twist* 55); "I need hardly beg the reader to observe that..." (*Oliver Twist* 92); "it may interest the reader to know..." (*The Portrait of a Lady* 87); "it maybe confided to the reader..." (*The Portrait of a Lady* 118). In Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1869) the narrator exclaims: "We have no desire to justify our hero in the eyes of the reader" (561). In this novel, an implicit emphasis on storytelling is revealed in the third part where the narrator appears unable to track his story, but recounts it relying on rumors and gossips; as the omniscient narrator is questioned and tested, there are indirect clues to the act of telling as well as to the formation of the content of what is told. Finally, in modernism, the self-consciousness of fiction is apparent through the stream-of-consciousness and its emphasis on the use of language, intertextual references, the novel as formation (Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1917/1927) and Joyce's *The Portrait* [1916]), and discussions on the philosophy of art, (Stephen's aesthetic manifesto in *The Portrait*, his analysis of *Hamlet* in *Ulysses*, and the question Woolf poses in *To the Lighthouse* (1927): "If Shakespeare never existed, [...], would the world have differed much from what it is today?" (42).

all other types, including the postmodern novel, and help systematize metafictional novels based on their degree of relation. Stepping outside of the monoreferentiality of terminology, resisting either/or dichotomies, and acknowledging that “no individual work is a perfect specimen of a genre” (Chatman, *Story* 18), the question of the metafictional novel’s identity becomes one of gradation. Is Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) more or less metafictional than Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1989), and how do the two compare with Gilbert Sorrentino’s *Mulligan Stew* (1996)? Are Andre Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* (1925), Flan O’Brian’s *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), and Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (1967) metafictional? How do they relate to previous classic examples such as Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796), Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) or to later postmodern manifestations?

Metafiction indisputably finds its antecedents in the literary canon, reaching its hallmark in the postmodern period. Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759), and Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796) are metafictional novels emerging from the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, reason is valorized and art ceases to be an emotional activity but an intellectual one. Since humanity can crack the code of the universe through careful observation, acquisition of experiences, and thoughtful reasoning, these metafictional texts aim at exercising reason for the sake of raising human beings beyond ignorance. The reader, therefore, is invited to remain actively involved in the reading process, to become a careful observer and experiment with fiction’s textuality, so that her mental capabilities are stimulated and sharpened.

Flan O'Brian's *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), Andre Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1925)—which has its seeds in "Marshlands" (1894)—and Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (1967) are modernist metafictional texts. Modernist metafiction differs from postmodern metafiction in two major ways. For one, the metafiction of the modernist period adhere to the view of art as a form of the sublime. In such texts, the sublime supersedes the metafictional, responding to the constructedness and artificiality of the world. Modernist works turn to the sublime as a form of salvation, as the only means to raise themselves and society above their textual universe. Postmodern metafiction, however, repudiates the sublime, retaining its textuality as the sole medium to define itself. Secondly, modernist metafiction shows a propensity towards spirituality and a search for universal truths that is absent from equivalent postmodern texts. While modernist metafiction longs to praise its textuality and elevate itself through both the sublime and its secular association to God, postmodern metafiction abolishes these components and underscores the fictionality of fiction, as constructedness and as a series of simulacra. If both the sublime and concepts of universality, are equally inhabiting the locus of language and signification, they do not differ from the basic components of fiction; how can they transpose it? Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* is emblematic of the modernist metafictional text combining mysticism with magic realism, and textuality as the medium that navigates in-between them. On the other hand, Borges's *Ficciones* (1956), and Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963) lie in between modernism and postmodernism, polarizing these tensions and being torn between an escape from the sublime and mysticism and a compulsion to return to them. Although metafictional novels prior to postmodernism do not attempt to thwart the novel's narrative

illusion for the same reasons postmodern writers employ it, metafiction undeniably exists before its climax in postmodernism.²⁹

The distinction between metanarrative and metafictional comments, as postulated by Angsar Nünning, would help clarify why, despite their rhetorical engagement (see note 1), a number of novels cannot fall under the category of metafiction.³⁰ *Metanarrative* stands for those events where a narrator addresses the act of narration: questions of aesthetics, problems of tellability and performability, or the processes of narrating, are surfaced, but they do not aspire to obliterate the aesthetic illusion of the novel. Even though it incorporates metanarration, unless a text conditions the reader to perceive it as a form of fiction, it is not metafiction. The canon is studded with metanarrative comments. The epistolary novel and some realist novels, for example, dismiss the notion of the omniscient narrator and although they focus on narration, they do so in ways that buttress realism, whereas most metanarrative comments in postmodern fiction aim at proffering a metafictional effect that reveals their language as construct and their own process as linguistic formation.

²⁹ There have not been many serious efforts to explore some of the differences between modernist and postmodern metafictional texts, although some critics differentiate between twentieth century metafiction and prior practices. Brandbury and Flecher see the metafiction of Cervantes and Sterne as a way to release the reader from the authorial narrative voice, while Inger Christensen names three features of twentieth century metafiction that do not apply to earlier examples: “the narrators of the 20th century metafiction have much more daring conceptions about their own art... The modern metafictionists abandon any attempt to present a picture of ‘real’ life... [They] describe a world characterized by conflicts and instability, and inhabited by restless, displayed characters... [They] have a waning belief in the narrator’s role and nourish few illusions of being understood by the world at large” (155).

³⁰ See also chapter 2.

Metafiction can either be *explicit* or *implicit*. Certain novels unmask their artificiality openly and provocatively, while others utilize covert means that point to their constructedness and autoreferentiality. Different scholars, however, draw different separating lines between explicitness and implicitness. In this typology, I use the term “overt metafiction” to stand for a restricted number of novels, those that acknowledge their fictional ontology resolutely and conspicuously to the utmost effect by displaying characters who are cognizant of their fictive state. John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1963) and Christine Brooke-Rose’s *Textermination* (1991) are examples of explicit or overt metafiction, in contrast to Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). In *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Textermination*, characters are fully aware of their fictional existence and stories openly acknowledge their fiction as language. In one of the stories in Barth’s collection, “Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction,” the narrator-character is the story itself recounting its biography, fearing annihilation by the father-author, who can easily dispose it. The story is self-aware of its existence as a textual medium that repeats a context it does not incarnate: “I’m fiction without real hope” (35); “I’m not aware of myself at all, as far as I know. I don’t think ... I know what I’m talking about” (37). On the other hand, Rushdie’s novel draws attention to the act of storytelling without directly exposing itself as a constructed form, whether in the discourse level or on the level of story and structure—it *does not know it is fiction, but wishes to be conceived as fiction*. It is the story of India, reported by Saleem Sinai, who both *tells* the story and *embodies* the story, while at once raising poetological speculations of history as constructed narrative—also indirectly, for the narrator does not engage in this epistemological discourse. Pynchon’s novel points to its fabrication implicitly through its intertextual fragments and its emphasis on the sign. As Oedipa demonstrates, a world may gradually form itself based on the

selective signs that, if put together, make up the reading of a story, an ideology, a reality. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) is a paradigmatic example of implicit metafiction encountering the postmodern novel, for it problematizes the sign as a medium for meaning, and challenges the subject's capacity to reconstruct the socio-historico-cultural codes of her surrounding.

It is important to note that many novels can be *interpreted* metafictionally even though they do not show a high level of metafictional engagement. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) can be read as a case of metafiction in light of its ending, where the manuscript written by Melquiades tells the story of the characters, a hundred years before it has happened.³¹ Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine* (1988) and Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) can also be interpreted metafictionally for different reasons. The former includes footnotes, which visually and contextually supplement the main text and become implicit reminders of its artifice. The latter makes intertextual innuendos: the main character, a hidden allusion to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, writes letters to real and fictional people, inquiring about their work and/or confronting their philosophies. These are duly postmodern novels incorporating isolated metafictional insertions, which, depending upon their context and the eye of the reader/critic, may or may not undercut their fictionality.

More generic examples of interpreted metafiction are the detective novel and the graphic novel. The detective novel's hermeneutics, the metaphor of the detective as the reader gathering clues in order to unravel the yarn of the author and the yarn of the text, enunciates the reading process. Similarly, the graphic novel's printed form, which operates as an indicator of the two-dimensional, paper-like thickness of its characters, places, and objects, in conjunction with its blending of language and image as signs importing and constructing meaning, also expose its

³¹ Iddo Landau's metafictional reading of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is based upon this premise.

artificiality. Not all detective and graphic novels are intuitively metafictional, however, due to these underlying assumptions fundamental in their formation. Nonetheless, detective novels that deliberately parallelize the reader with the detective, or employ a combination of metafictional techniques in their narrative and structure, such as *New York Trilogy* (1985) by Paul Auster, *The Name of the Rose* (1980) by Umberto Eco, and “The Enigma” (1974) by John Fowles, can legitimately be called metafictional.³² Analogously, there are metafictional graphic novels that go beyond the simple language-image association, incorporating metafictional techniques in their structure, discourse, and narrative—such as *Logicomix* (2008) by Alexandros Doxiades, or *Maus* (1986/1991) by Art Spiegelman—whereas, graphic novels whose sole relation to metafiction remains their mode of presentation are questionably metafictional as is the case of Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006).

Thus far I have noted that a provisional discussion on metafiction may take into account the following: metafictional versus *metanarrative* commentary, *implicitness* versus *explicitness*, and *interpretative* renderings. To these we may add four more binaries, which pertain to narratological propositions, and facilitate the conceptualization of metafiction, by indicating the areas it targets. In a fictional text, metafiction may appear on the level of:

³² Impressively, all three examples can be analyzed in terms that McHale discussed *The Name of the Rose*: as anti-detective stories. The “anti-detective story, [proliferating] in postmodernist writing ... deliberately [cripples] the detective’s story’s epistemological structure” (*Constructing Postmodernism* 151). The “detectives” in *The Name of the Rose*, “City of Glass,” and “The Enigma” fail in their mission to solve the mysteries. Williams in *The Name of the Rose* solves it “through consistent misinterpretation of evidence” (150) and, in the other two cases, the quest of solving the mystery is abandoned and the story takes a different genre-directions from the one it embarked on, turning into a love-story, in “The Enigma,” and into a psychological novel in “City of Glass.”

- a. Text versus Paratext
- b. Discourse versus Performativity
- d. Story versus Fabula
- c. Extralinguistic versus Intralinguistic worlds

Text versus Paratext

A text discloses its fictionality by its choice of typesetting, and by the paratextual elements that surround it. The body of the text need not be printed in its traditional fashion, line by line, page by page, but in a variety of imaginative forms, which challenge the creativity of the author as much as content and presentation do.³³ Dramatic examples are Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005), where texts may appear upside down, sideways, or in columns, intercepted by pictures, black spaces or blank pages. They demonstrate a text gone crazy, abandoning its linearity, and refuting its normative construction, in which a letter is followed by the next letter in a word and a word is followed by the next word in a sentence. Texts swirl away from proper alignment shaking up the most rudimentary concepts of book structure. While absurdities on the graphic surface signal a disruption in conventions, they also become homogeneously integrated into the text, supplying another layer of meaning (G. White 20–1). In *House of Leaves* (2000), letters and phrases fall as the hero descends into a black space, and letters become increasingly narrow on the page as the main character walks through an increasingly narrower corridor. The visual effect is contingent upon

³³ For a penetrating discussion of graphic devices see Glyn White *Reading the Graphic Surface*; intentional modification and deliberate disruptions of the normative page-setting, he argues, add another layer of meaning to the text (21).

character-behavior and plot, a reminder that these characters dwell inside letters and paragraphs. The whimsical play on the graphic surface of the text reflects the flux that permeates the physical-fictional world of the characters, which is no more stationary nor predictable than the characters themselves.³⁴

Any information that resides outside the main text can be called a paratext. Title, chapter divisions, footnotes, appendixes, author's preface, basic publication information, and other added material such as author's interviews, author's notes, and author's letters, constitute paratextual commentary (Genette *Paratext*). They turn a text into a book as they are an integral part of its binding ritual. What is most intriguing about paratexts is that they dwell in an in-between zone, both inside and outside the text (2), and by extension they are on the border-walk between the fictional and the real. In metafictional novels, paratextual commentaries are customarily stripped from their "real" function, flaunting the novel's compositional structure; a table of contents, for example, heralds the reader's authority over the reading material and the openness of the text. Tables of contents are associated with subject matters whose material may be shuffled and read in a variety of orders, thus helping readers navigate through the book based on their knowledge or lack thereof. In metafictional novels, where the reader takes control of the act of reading, the

³⁴ In an article written with unconventional typography, challenging the visual effect of the two-dimensional page-space, Edison del Canto argues that this kind of aesthetic instability and fluidity imparts a sense of freedom: "typography is not a simple matter of aesthetics. This is not to say that typography is without an aesthetic and formal dimension. Asymmetry in modern design is a principle of freedom associated with social, cultural, national liberation movements, revolutionary socialism, and proletariat communism ... typographic style does not mean any particular style, but the power to move freely through the whole domain of typography, and to function at every step in a way that is graceful and vital instead of banal" (197).

table of contents asserts her authority over the material, thereby operating as an ironic reminder that different readings may yield different reading experiences and compose different versions of the same novel. “[Two reading] accounts of the same text will never be identical,” writes Todorov and the table of contents emblemizes this view putting it in practice on behalf of the reader (72).

Paratextual commentaries in metafictional novels may be *extrafictional* or *fabricated*, and they fulfill an array of functions depending on the novel and the type of paratextual message. In Rober Grudin’s *Book* (1992) there is very little one can read that represents facts outside the fictional world of the novel. Footnotes, postscripts, even the reviews printed on the back cover, are fictional references to the fictional novel written and published inside the *Book*, the very same book the reader embraces. In such experimental fiction, the paratextual commentaries take a life of their own. The footnotes in this novel remonstrate against their mundane task of mere reporting, and begin instead arbitrary digressions opposing the characters’ beliefs—a bloodless war between the rise of the footnotes and the fall of the characters. The havoc caused by footnotes’ disloyalty and the abandonment of their posts is quelled after the Editor takes control and punishes the mutineers. The story of the footnotes is irrelevant to the rest of the plot and serves no other purpose than as an innovative form of digression, which invites the participation of elements coming not from the narrative directly, but from outside markers as well. Alongside the fictional thresholds, a thread of “real” or extrafictional paratextual interruptions weaves the chapters together and tells a more general, a more impersonal story, no less relevant to the themes of the novel: segments from encyclopedia entries on the history of “book” and “bookselling” precede every chapter. If one chooses to read them consecutively, she would read the same entry found in the eleventh edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* and have a concise

description of the evolution and revolution of book-making and book publishing from antiquity to the present.

Another experimental form engaging with fabricated paratextual material is Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1996), which opens without the expected page on publication information, but with a list of rejection letters—thirteen in total—from various publishing companies. The publication process as well as the daunting task of finding a publishing house are part of the novel's story, which Sorrentino is determined to provide—albeit also fictional. Nowadays the novel is a commodity, not an object that bestows knowledge to its beholders, but an object whose profitability is contingent upon the aesthetic taste of the market; novels may never see the light of publication because editors may not deem them worthy of generating profit. These issues preoccupy the content of the rejection letters in *Mulligan Stew* (1996), whose politeness and decorum, are placed in stark contrast to the sometimes cynical criticism of the editor-writer, making them, nonetheless, the perfect ironic preface to the novel. Following the rejection letters, there is a reader's report, written in the manner of a critic, summarizing and underlining salient features of the novel. Only after skimming through twelve pages of discursive beginnings does the reader encounter the real publication information and a formal title page.

If normal paratextual insertions are situated in an in-between zone of reality and fiction leaning more towards reality, these paratextual insertions shift the axis towards the side of fiction. Even though Sorrentino's paratextual commentaries take the reader by surprise, as she is unable to determine their fictional status right from the start, both Grudin's and Sorrentino's paratextual material function as frame stories, accentuating the various degrees of embeddedness that

already exist inside these works: a writer, writing a novel about a writer writing a novel, and an editor who published the writer's writing about writing a novel..., to an infinite regress.

Paratexts need not be elaborate to impact the reading process. Book titles and chapter titles can often impart a profound metafictional effect, which in some cases may not be substantiated beyond the title page and in the novel itself. Roland Barthes's *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977), Borges's *Ficciones* (1956), David Markson's *This is not a Novel* (2001), Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Ronald Sukenick's *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (1969), and Michael Fais's *The Autobiography of a Book* (1994) shake the foundations of their fiction from the title page. In such cases, metafiction is surfaced with irony, commanding the reader to rethink literary matters and the literary choices of the author. What does "autobiography" mean in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) if Stein is the author? What does a "novel" entail in order to assert that *This is not a Novel* (2001)? If Borges's *Ficciones* (1956) were not entitled "fictions," would they be read as non-fictions? These titles present themselves in opposition to literary genres and as fabricated manifestations, thereby contesting to the traditional critical discourse and declaring themselves self-conscious works, not simply cognizant of their fictionality, but also of the theoretical vocabulary that they themselves constitute.

More recently, the textual aspect of novels has gone far and beyond the mere illustration of letters on the page and their bizarre typographical representation. Textual and paratextual material are rendered in a combination of both verbal and non-verbal modes, incorporating a plethora of semiotic practices, which, although they may not be language-dependent, are meaning-dependent. This "multimodal novel," integrates photographs, paintings, graphs, sketches, comic-strips, and other non-linguistic elements, all possessing a function beyond

ornamentation. Multimodality underscores the fact that meaning can be read outside language, in the cultural codes and artifacts whose semiotic relevance is equal to that of the verbal (Hallet 131). The most recent manifestation of this type of novel can be found in Art Spiegelman's *MetaMaus* (2011) where the reader is confronted with a kaleidoscopic vision of what a text can be. The classical novelistic writing of a language-based text is overturned in this epic creation favoring a multimodality that, it may not be farfetched to say, could map out the future trajectory of the novel.

Textual and paratextual criteria are located outside the content of the novel. They are external stimuli whose pivotal place in the larger context lends them malleability for the metafictional writer. When metafictional markers appear inside the work, they surface either on the level of *performativity*, on the level of *discourse*, on the *story* level, or on the level of the *fabula*.³⁵ *Discourse* here is defined as of the particular use of language or rhetoric employed in a given text. It comprises the sentences of the text, all of which produce the *story* level. *Performativity*³⁶ is the act of narrative performance, having its roots in the Jakobsonian tradition of the communicative model and the cherished notion of Bakhtinian dialogism. It consists of the narrator (the speaker), the narratee (the listener), and the space and time they inhabit, which may be different from the space and time in the story they narrate or listen to. Embedded performative acts are not uncommon in literature, but most often “the verbal structure of narration is veiled in order to make the passage from fiction to referential illusion as easy as

³⁵ The terms are the result of theoretical propositions presented by Russian formalists and structural narratologists. Implicit in these terms are the works of classical narratologists, like Bal, Chatman, Genette, and Prince.

³⁶ For my definition of *performativity*, I rely on Ute Berns's article “The Concept of Performativity in Narratology: Mapping a Field of Investigation.”

possible” (Stierle 85), and thus to allow the *story* to speak louder. The narrative communicated to the narratee gives way to the *story* and the *fabula*. *How* the speaker decides to relay his narrative refers to the *story*, as opposed to the *what*, the content of her story, which refers to the *fabula*. *Fabula* is the raw material that a narrative consists of: it encases among others, characters, themes, time, and space (Chatman, *Reading Narrative Fiction* 18), and it represents the logical and chronological sequence of situations and events occurring in a particular world (Prince, *Narratology* 61). The *story* is a structured *fabula*; it includes the organization of the narrative process, whether the narrator begins *in media res* or events are skipped in chronology in order to be recounted as flashbacks. Based on the *story* the narrator tells and how he chooses to deliver it, the reader can extract the *fabula*.

Discourse:

When metafiction surfaces on the level of the discourse, metanarrative comments emerge (Nünning “On Metanarrative”). Intrusions, interruptions, digressions, self-criticism, denarration, and discussions of problems of art and literary theory are a few metanarrative examples customarily employed in metafictional novels. Their degree of extension, frequency, and integration make a novel more or less metafictional. From the seven metanarrative examples I mention, only *self-criticism*, *denarration*, and *discussions of literary theory* are newly developed techniques frequently summoned in postmodern metafiction.

The excessive use of metanarrative comments designates a self-conscious narrator, who frequently self-proclaims her unreliability, and employs interruptions, digressions, intrusions,

and denarration³⁷ to intentionally spoil the story she recounts. A self-conscious narrator does not imply a narrator who is aware of her fictive state, but one who reveals “awareness of the communicative act in which s/he is involved” (Lanser 176). Such examples abound in literature, regardless of period, but modernists and postmodernists valorize them. Although it is safe to assert that a great number of metafictional novels are narrated by self-conscious narrators, their presence in a text does not indicate metafictionality per se.

Metafictional novels transpose self-consciousness to self-reflection and self-reflexivity—the two differing in gradation. Self-reflection probes less into how a narrative is orchestrated, whereas a self-reflexive commentator concentrates on the *how* of novelistic conventions, tearing apart the very fabric of her own making (Imhof, *Contemporary Metafiction* 80). A classical example is Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796), featuring a self-reflexive narrator in a highly metafictional, non-postmodern text. Diderot’s narrator interrupts his narrative bluntly and overwhelmingly with impeccable witticism and unrestrained humor, aiming at crippling the popular conventions of the romance with its pernicious love-affairs, and trite clichés about storytelling. If Diderot’s contemporary writers make their characters suffer from love and unbridled desires, Diderot’s narrator admits to his characters’ freedom, disclosing his ignorance of what might happen to them next: “But for God’s sake, My storyteller, you ask, where were they going? And I answer: for God’s sake Reader, does any of us know where we’re going” (41). The narrator foregrounds matters of storytelling by attacking various narratological components. In toying with temporal distance (that is, the chronological distance between narration and

³⁷ Denarration according to Brian Richardson is the act of negative narration, when a narrator presents certain aspects of her narration as given, only to deny their veracity later (“Denarration in Fiction”).

events),³⁸ he decides to nap when his characters are asleep. The reader is given a sense of prolonged silence with an ostensible digression, an indication that the story is not merely crafted but exists in an independent discourse of its own. Such a self-reflexive narrator undermines the story he tells for the sake of a more empowered and invigorating narrative process, one which thwarts the expectations of his contemporary readers.

As some definitions of metafiction admit, certain metafictional novels polarize the relation between fiction and criticism, by self-criticizing their own content and style. Self-criticism is yet another metafictional indicator, practiced extensively in postmodern metafiction, parodying commonplace literary conventions and preempting the language of the critic. Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1996) achieves self-critiquing in various levels: through characters who critique the fiction of the character-writer; through a purported reader's report, reprinted as an introductory acquaintance with the novel: "This is a remarkable fiction ... of the Late-Post-modern movement... [Let] me touch on the theme, or themes, of *Mulligan Stew*. It is a brilliant case-history of genius succumbing to paranoia as well as to schizophrenia"; or through the character-novelist himself:

My new book! What is it? It seems to have certain absurdities and comic elements that might endear it to the few who are aware of the work done in that genre—but what else? My two characters so far are wooden, they don't strike me as being funny, they are certainly not pathetic. I really want to through the whole thing away and compose a Gothic romance... (57)

³⁸ For a definition of temporal distance, see Prince (*Narratology* 29).

Likewise, in Michalopoulou's *Wishbone Memories* (1996), the protagonist criticizes the novella she translates. "The stories ... seemed disconnected. So many characters, not clearly depicted, are coming and going that they confuse the reader" (88). In this parodic mode of self-critiquing, the reader is confronted at once with the discourse of the novel and the discourse of the other, being almost deprived of the privilege to reach her own critical evaluations, since the novel can manage it on its own. Implicitly she is made an accomplice of the texts' flaws, which are viewed as deliberate and are therefore requisite of dismissal—a mechanism of the novel's self-preservation.

Similar yet different are discussions of criticism and literary theory. With the intention to parody literature's meta-language, metafictionists habitually incorporate outlandish terminology that circulates mostly in academia and is fostered in environments where reading fiction is not read leisurely, but is made a profession. "As eye-narrator I've kept quiet," the self-conscious and self-reflexive narrator in *Textermination* (1991) opines:

I say not a narrator at all because, when came the fashion for the vanishing author, the silent author, the transparent text..., the critics ... started calling narrator both the character who narrates and the producer of the text, that is the author, not of course the real author ... who had material troubles or who is undergoing a long and painful dental treatment of implants, but the Author, Implied, Ideal, or whatever, thus losing an important distinction: the character who narrates is limited to what he can know, the producer of the text can move among many knowledges. He used to be called Omniscient.

Well, anti-God intellectuals (anti-author-ity) objected to that. Objected to the rigging, the fateful feel of divine providence. The author was out. All authority rested in the Reader, Implied, Ideal or whatever. And so they passed imperceptibly from phrases such as ‘the author’s intention here is clearly’ to ‘the text clearly says,’ and then to ‘the reader clearly infers.’ But behind this lip-service to fads, what the author intends, what the text says, what the reader infers, is in every case what the one critic interprets. He too is Reader, he too is God. (106–7)

Metafiction utilizes parody to criticize its own process, methods, and conventions, in order to examine itself. Criticism and critical vocabulary seep into the metafictional novel, and the discourse outside of itself is integrated within—the discourse of the sympathetic or trenchant critic, who is not an average reader, but an erudite person, well informed of literary theory.

Performativity:

In the majority of traditional novels, the performative act is set in the background, and the narrative appears as the summation of the dynamics between *story* and *fabula*. Who is the speaker and who is the listener of the story of Goriot in Balzac’s *Old Goriot* (1835)? Speaker and listener are situated outside the narrative and therefore the importance of the narrative act as performance is diminished. However, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) the narrative performance is embedded inside the novel. A character-speaker recounts a story to a character-listener and that character-listener faithfully reproduces the same story to the implied reader. In both *Heart of Darkness* and *Wuthering Heights* the protagonists were narratees who become narrators.

In metafictional novels, performativity is underscored and thematized, to the point that it unites with or consumes the *story*. Frame stories proliferate and are habitually emulative of the setting in *The Arabian Nights* (or Boccaccio's *The Decameron* [1351/1353]), and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in which a teller recounts various tales to an immediate listener, calling attention to the process of performance. Performativity supersedes the story and bespeaks a rejection of grand narratives, by framing everything else inside its own communicative moment.³⁹ In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), *Invisible Cities* (1972), and *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1969), Italo Calvino espouses this type of fiction, where performance is more salient than the various stories consumed under its umbrella. In the three Calvinese novels, characters either exchange, read, or listen to stories. In *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Calvino experiments with the language of communication, having the speaker *perform* her story rather than *articulate* it. Entrapped in a mythical castle and deprived of speech, the characters decide to kill time by exchanging stories using a set of tarot cards. The linguistic sign is replaced by the tarot sign, and the reading depends on how the narratee interprets the combination of signs. An active member of the Oulipo and a believer in the act of interpretation as the primary component of the communicative process, Calvino relies on the narratee to construct the story in her mind. "[The] reader 'receives' [the message of a literary work] by 'composing' it" and Calvino's characters become topological metaphors of this meaning-making process during the act of performing storytelling (Iser, "Interaction between Reader and Text" 107).

³⁹ Postmodernist writers are drawn to the short story, which is often circumscribed in the act of performativity. As Steven Connor argues, the deployment of the short story displays "a connectedness without completion" ("Postmodernism and Literature" 74). This oxymoron is often a result of the performative act, which gives the impression of a completed framework, while the individual stories remain suspended, or insufficiently elaborated.

The majority of metafictional works reject third person narration, introducing instead a writer and/or a reader whose illocutionary discourse is included in the narrative. Scenes consisting of a narrator (writer or speaker) and of a narratee (listener or reader) overflow and take up a substantial part of the metafictional text in an attempt to project an image of the reader partaking in the communicative act. Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* (1981) reads his story "Midnight's Children" to his caretaker Padma who becomes the narratee, the critic, and by extension a symbol of the audience. The embedded story of India is placed alongside the reading of the story of India, as the narrator accounts for the questions and criticism that Padma raises. The narrative, therefore, has been performed prior to the reader's reading by the characters themselves who experience the text both as characters inside of it and as readers outside it.

Rarely do metafictional narratives appear as haphazard story forms or as simple renderings of tales, but incarnate, what Peter Brooks names "the desire of narrating" (53). The metafictional text turns the desire to impart a story into "the motor of narration" (54), the wish to tell itself to a narrative audience. Narrative desire therefore becomes purposeful, a self-legitimation of fiction's existence. The principle of performativity in metafictional novels engages the writer/narrator in conversation with the reader/narratee. Imperative to this interaction seems to be the narrator's (or the text's) impulse to relate the reasons why the narrative is presented to the public—even if it is simply to assert that this is the story of imagination (*The French Lieutenant's Woman* [1969]), or because the narrative seeks to solicit readers who may assuage the narrator's distraught state of mind (*House of Leaves* [2000]), or to help with the disappearance of its author (*Book* [1992]). In Amanda Michalopoulou's *Wishbone Memories* (1996), the protagonist, Athena, explains that the end-product of *Wishbone Memories*, which consists of a novella and an autobiographical story, transpires out of marketability

purposes. The novella was too short to publish alone, and she deemed it fitting to add her personal story, which coincided with the translation of the novella from English to Greek. The ontology of *Wishbone Memories* is therefore attributed to the merging of the two narratives, which depend on each other in order to be published. The metafictional text manifests the desire of itself to be narrated for a purpose, and this narrative desire to create and substantiate itself in discourse is in tune with its self-exploratory aspirations. The novel is not haphazardly written and published, but it is in quest of a self-justification; by asserting it to its interlocutor, the reader, it also declares it to itself. Although such narratives feel impelled to express the reason of their existence, the obvious metafictional irony is that they still inhabit the walls of fiction and therefore create layers of fabrication.

Werner Wolf's binary opposition, *fictio* versus *fictum*, facilitates the comprehension of how the metafictional novel justifies its existence to its audience and to itself ("Metareference in the Arts and Media").⁴⁰ *Fictio* refers to certain metafictional novels that break the aesthetic illusion by presenting themselves as fabrications, admitting to the inventive and imaginative practices of their skilled narrators. In Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), the narrator displays his story as a novelistic creation inspired by and emulating characters from the nineteenth-century novel. Right in the forefront, the narrative explains that there is no profound reason for the novel, only its desire to formulate a fictional universe experimenting with older versions from the literary tradition. Contrariwise, in *Wishbone Memories* (1996), or *House of Leaves* (2000), the narrators profess their stories as true, justifying the reasons of their writing in the contextual framework of their own fictional lives. (These two texts are metafictional, not because their narrative illusion is traversed by an open avowal to its fabrication, but because of certain metafictional techniques which impart the same effect.) All three novels, nonetheless,

⁴⁰ See also chapter 1, and Fludernik.

toy with the concept of performativity, by perceiving themselves in conversation with their reader and by obligating themselves to articulate the reason for their creation.

Fabula:

The most denotative sign of metafiction is situated in the characters' portrayal. If characters show full awareness of their fictional existence in a constructed world, there is no doubt this is the most overt form of the metafictional novel. Even if there are no other metafictional signs, the characters' awareness as figments of somebody's imagination is the most salient criterion of metafictionality. Furthermore, if just one of the characters discovers his predicament as a fictional entity, it is still safe to assert that this is also an explicit form of metafiction, as in Fowles's short story "The Enigma" (1974), where the investigation of a missing character leads to the conclusion that he committed suicide in order to escape the tyranny of *being written*.

More demonstrative examples of characters cognizant of their fictional existence appear in *The People of Paper* (2005), *Textermination* (1991), *Mulligan Stew* (1996), and selected stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1963) to name a few. In *The People of Paper* (2005) some of the characters are origami-figurines made up of carved paper, whereas *Textermination* (1991) features a conference in which all literary and fictional characters take part. A common theme that suffuses these narratives is the element of protestation, an effort on the part of the characters to unburden themselves from the watchful eye, (*The People of Paper* [2005]), depicting them in ways which the characters themselves find disgraceful for their demeanor (*Mulligan Stew* [1956]). In *Textermination* (1991) the characters' protestation is more extremist. Characters from all literary works, even from T.V. series or films, fight each other in an attempt to prevail,

to remain popular among audiences, to continue being read or watched. Vacillating between latency and resurrection epitomizes these characters' existence and they must fight each other for their survival.

The spatiotemporal world of the characters influences the metafictionality of the novel. Certain novels showcase their metafiction by referring to the world of the characters as a world of leaves (*House of Leaves*[2000]), as an endless open space that expands without the characters knowing how (*House of Leaves* [2000], *Mulligan Stew* [1996]), or as a space slowly overtaken, one that the characters must abandon without knowing who is invading their privacy. In the short story "House Taken Over" by Julio Cortázar, an otherwise ostensible ghost-story, a brother and a sister live in a large house, certain parts of which are *taken over* day by day: "They've taken over the back part/ They've taken over our section" (*Blow Up and Other Stories* 13, 16). Ultimately the two inhabitants have to abandon their residence: "Before we left, I felt terrible; I locked the front door up tight and tossed the key down the sewer. It wouldn't do to have some poor devil decide to go in and rob the house, at that hour and with the house taken over" (16). Who are the uninvited visitors in the house, slowly invading the private space of these characters? What is the outside threat, which poses no menace to their material goods? Could the reader be the uninvited visitor? Can she permeate the walls of the page that surround the fictional house? Cortázar's metafictional awareness—portrayed particularly in his novel *Hopscotch* (1963)—as well as his obsession with the eye-of-the-other as observer—found in "Axolotl" and "Blow-Up" (*Blow Up and Other Stories* [1967])—allow for such an interpretation. The symbolism of who "they" might be in "House Taken Over" is therefore expanded through a metafictional reading.

Story:

If the components of the *fabula* are the building blocks of a narrative (characters, events, spatiotemporality), the *story* signifies how these elements make it into a narrative; their arrangement, their style, their rendering in a story form. Certain metafictional techniques have turned into conventions and almost immediately betray the genre: the novel-within-the-novel (or structures-within-structures) in conjunction with the *mise-en-abyme* structure, kaleidoscope narratives, fragmentary narratives, and the novel-in-the-making are some salient features of the metafictional novel, all of them indexing their own narrative form as convention.

Implicit in the metafictional novel is the question: what is inside a text and what remains outside? Most effectively the contrast between interiority and exteriority, vested yet within the domain of fiction (as opposed to the extralinguistic world), is encapsulated in the archetypal structure of the novel-within-the-novel, or narrative-within-narrative, play-within-play, film-within-film, and any hybrid combinations. This imbricate structure has reached convoluted manifestations in the last century. Certain novels reprint the embedded novel in its entirety, while others refer to it discursively through characters' vicarious readings, or through summaries of what the protagonist-writer is composing. Some clearly demarcate the layers of embeddedness, leaving no doubt where the secondary structures begin and end, whereas others leave it up to the reader to distinguish between the fiction of the fiction and its outside stratosphere(s). The most typical examples feature two levels of embeddedness, but there is no limitation to this number; however, the degree of elaboration on a single level may vary vastly. In *Wishbone Memories* (1996), the third layer consists of a single line, while *The Blind Assassin* (1985) is an example of three layers all narrated in depth. In *The Blind Assassin*, the primary narrative is given by a woman relating the story of their family to her granddaughter, the ultimate

audience. Inside the primary narrative, she inserts the novel she had once published under her sister's name. The embedded novel is about two clandestine lovers who together develop a quasi-mythical, quasi-fairytale love story. All the levels are given substantial attention and have elaborate narratives, slightly decreasing in length as they descend deeper into the fiction.

The orchestration of the multilayered structure resonates in the abysmal layering of mirror reflections. Two mirrors opposing each other recreate *ad infinitum* the image of the object inserted between them. When this type of structure-within-structure—the Russian doll or Chinese box—extends itself ceaselessly, the result is the *mise-en-abyme*.⁴¹ The novel-within-the-novel contests notions of interiority and exteriority, manifested in the active participation of the reader, who is in constant struggle between being inside and outside the various levels of embeddedness. There seems to be a correlation between how close the narrative level is to the outside world, and how realistically the narrative is rendered. The more removed the layer of embeddedness, the more of an impossible world is described.⁴²

Present in the fluctuation effect of the novel-within-the-novel is the possible deliverance of elements from one layer to another. The term “metalepsis,” popularized by Genette, refers to the literary device that allows characters, objects, or events to push through the walls of their

⁴¹ The *mise-en-abyme* bespeaks metafictionality, if situated within the *story* level. When it occurs at the level of the *fabula*, affecting the state of the characters, it represents a more general tendency which characterizes the postmodern novel, and not necessarily the postmodern metafictional novel. Clavino's short stories “The Chase” and “The Night Driver” in *t-zero* (1969) and Auster's “Ghosts” in *New York Trilogy* (1985) implement the concept of the *mise-en-abyme* on the level of the *fabula*, in the characters' infinite state of self-reflection, without endorsing a metafictional approach *per se*.

⁴² See Jean-Pierre Dupuy's enlightening article which reconciles the *mise-en-abyme* with mimesis.

narrative frame, in order to resurface in another narrative level. Metalepsis is acknowledged as a powerful indicator of metafiction due to its realistic impossibility (Fludernik, “Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary” 29; Wolf “Metalepsis”). How can a character in a book converse with his creator? How is it possible for a character to kill his reader as in Cortázar’s “Continuity of Parks” (*Blow Up and Other Stories* [1967])? How can the same object be worn by characters living alternate realities as in Michalopoulou’s *I’d Like* (2005)? And how can a voice permeate the domain of a photograph in order to force those posing to face their observer as in Cortázar’s “Blow-up” (*Blow Up and Other Stories* [1967])? Although in rigid structures elements remain trapped in their territorial narratives, metalepsis dismantles these fabricated borderlines drawing attention to the narrative as constructed form.

A parallel concept to the novel-within-the-novel is the familiar formation of the novel-in-the-making, or as Steven Kellman calls it, the-self-begetting-novel, a novel in gestation, being written during the time the events are being unraveled. Two major types can be identified: it either ends with the revelation that what the reader has been reading is what was read or written by one or more of the characters,⁴³ or it begins by disclosing to the reader that the events are occurring as the reader is reading them, that the act of writing happens here and now so that reader and/or writer are ignorant of what might happen next.⁴⁴ Extending from the self-begetting

⁴³ Some examples are Barth’s *Chimera* (1972), Tabucchi’s *Indian Nocturne* (1987), Markquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Auster’s *New York Trilogy* (1985), Karapanou’s *Rien ne va plus* (1991).

⁴⁴ Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* (1979), Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1989), Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Plascencia’s *The People of Paper* (2005), Dimitris Chatzis’s *The Double Book* (1999), Michael

novel are novels whose writers compose a text retrospectively, through a collection of material that helps them recreate the past. Customarily, such novels include unedited material from the fictional-writer's "research" as is the case of Nikos Davvetas's *The Jewish Bride* (2009), and Junot Díaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Interviews or reports by characters are reprinted in the text in their original raw form, having not been narrativized by the fictive-author, thereby foregrounding the novel's process of formation.

Many novels-in-the-making recall the novel-within-the-novel-structure by summoning an embedded novel, which nonetheless is indistinguishable from the novel the extralinguistic reader is consuming; they are their own embedded novel. The ending points to the title, which, as a paratextual marker, resides in limbo: as a reference to the book that belongs in the world of the reader and as the novel within. Dorris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is comprised of a section entitled "The Golden Notebook," a diary in which the fictional-author wishes to consolidate her other four diaries, all of which are also included independent of "The Golden Notebook" section, but within *The Golden Notebook* novel. What, therefore, constitutes *The Golden Notebook*? *The Golden Notebook* is and is not part of itself. It resides inside its own fiction while asserting itself as a fictional composition in the extralinguistic world of the reader.

Either explicitly, through indexing its own title, or through implicit operators, the-novel-in-the-making invites for re-readings *ad infinitum*. The cyclical pattern is first and foremost an instigator of the re-making process of the novel; a request to reconstruct it anew with the added knowledge of its ending. Resting upon the assumption that "one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential," reading is

Fays's *The Autobiography of a Book* (1994), Doxiadis's *Logicomix* (2008), Michalopoulou's *I'd Like* (2005), Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000).

turned into a metaphor of itself (Iser, *Implied Reader* 280). Secondly, this type of ending resists narrative closure. Narratives have been accused of totalizing meaning, of imposing rigid structures with beginning, middle, and end to what is otherwise formless and amorphous. Postmodern metafiction in the guise of the novel-in-the-making counters totalization affirming the oxymoron that narratives end at their onset. Because they always begin anew, these narratives can never exhaust themselves.

A relatively common theme of the novel-in-the-making is the search of the self, in an attempt not to define it but to remake it: the pursuit of the self is in alignment with the metafictional quest for the novel's inwardness and self-exploration. In Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne* (1999), the protagonist is in search of his dear friend in the depths of India, only to discover that he is searching for himself in a novel he is composing with identical plot-line as *Indian Nocturne*.

Another indicator of the metafictional novel based on the orchestration of its narrative material is the kaleidoscope text or the hypertext, whose fragmentary nature along with its non-linear representation tie wonderfully with the metafictional aspiration of abolishing the text's beginning, middle, and end.⁴⁵ The content of kaleidoscope novels can be shuffled around, it can be reworked and readjusted, so that the reader may actively decide upon its order. A paradigmatic kaleidoscope novel is Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), whose fragmentary form requires the reader to jump through several sections, flipping pages back and forth, before she

⁴⁵ See "'Kaleidoscope' Narratives and the Act of Reading" by Jukka Tyrkko, who explores the nature of kaleidoscope and hypertext narratives: the former being in the form of a printed text, as opposed to the latter which is in electronic form.

can consume the entire novel. It opens with a “Table of Instructions,” a manual to navigating through its complex structure:

In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all.

The first can be read in a normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56, at the close of which there are three garish little starts which stand for the words *The End*.

Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience.

The second should be read by beginning with Chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter. In case of confusion or forgetfulness, one need only consult the following list.

The second possible reading would include ninety-nine expandable chapters, beyond the fifty-six that complete the first reading. The list provided in the “Table of Instructions” shuffles the linear order, advising the reader to begin from chapter seventy-three, move to chapters one and two, then to chapter one-hundred-sixteen, and so on and so forth, in a rather illogical and arbitrary manner. *Hopscotch* (1963) constructs a labyrinth within the roots of its format and the reader navigates through it unguided in finding the exit: the finish line of the book, usually marked by its last page, is thwarted, leaving the reader entrapped in a text that swivels her back and forth inside itself.

What makes a novel kaleidoscopic is providing the reader with the potential to consume in ways other than turning page by page. For example, one may read Lessing’s *The Golden*

Notebook (1962) by combining all the red notebooks, all the blue notebooks, and all the yellow notebooks together so that the rigorous structure is dismantled. In kaleidoscope texts the reader is given the authority to control the reading act, bridle it, and, depending upon her reading competence, challenge it to the point that she cracks the text open, discovering a multidimensional object that may only be apprehended with various alternative reading experiences.

A high degree of fragmentation, fracture, or hiatus habitually characterizes metafictional novels. The modernist period attests to fragmentary narratives, which remain likewise endemic to postmodern metafiction, but as Frederic Jameson observes the fragmentation of the postmodern writers generates the effect of a “schizophrenic disjunction,” the impression that the fragments are a chain of signifiers with broken bonds (*Postmodernism* 29). Fragmented narratives vary in form. Certain narratives are completely dismembered, displaying no connection between their fragmented parts, while others allow for ruptures to be scattered throughout, without entirely obfuscating the meaning of the whole. David Markson’s *This is not a Novel* (2001), Donald Bartheleme’s collection of short stories in *City Life* (1968), and Thanasis Valtinos’s *Data from the Decade of the 60’s* (1989) turn fragmentation into a trope, overflowing their pages with disjointed and incomplete narratives, undoing the hypothesis that blanks “are the unseen joints of the text” (Iser, “Interaction” 112). David Markson’s *This is not a Novel* (2001) is a highly metafictional, highly fragmented (non)-novel. It is composed of single sentences rather than paragraphs, abiding to awkward syntax and providing factual information that relates to the world of letters: credos of famous authors/characters/critics, condition of their deaths or illnesses, insignificant facts of their lives. Insertions that reaffirm the title are dispersed

throughout the narrative: “This is a novel if Writer or Robert Rauschenberg says so” (18); “Also even a sequence of cantos awaiting numbering, if Writer says so” (23); “This is even a mural of sorts, if Writer says so” (36).

City Life (1968) is a surreptitious set of stories saturated with magic realism and a tantalizing force that confers them with meaning while simultaneously withdrawing it. One of the more metafictional stories in the collection, “Sentence,” consists of a fragmentary sentence extending itself in six pages and consciously examining its short-lived existence:

Or a long sentence moving at a certain pace down the page aiming for the bottom—if not the bottom of this page then some other page—where it can rest, or stop for a moment to think out the questions raised by its own (temporary) existence, which ends when the page is turned, or the sentence falls out of the mind that holds it (temporarily) in some kind of embrace, not necessarily an ardent one, but more perhaps the kind of embrace enjoyed (or endured), by a wife who has just waked up and is on her way to the bathroom in the morning to wash her hair, and is bumped into by her husband, who has been lounging at the breakfast table reading the newspaper, and ... there is another way of describing the situation too, which is to say that the sentence crawls through the mind like something someone says to you while you are listening very hard to the FM radio, some rock group there... (107–8)

It is a prolix and self-conscious sentence that resides in the poetological world of language and draws attention to the process of its writing. The narrator may be language itself, speaking about

the construction of a sentence, knowable of itself as speech, but unknown of its speech. The dismembered sentence is longer than any complete one; nonetheless, its disrupted beginning and limitless ending point to an infinite continuation of language, a stream of consciousness that simulates the functioning of thought racing through the mind. This short story is an acrobatics of language, an “exercise in style,”—to use Queneau’s witty title—an experimental piece, practicing the writing of fiction and challenging its potentials.

Valtino’s fragmented text is of a different sort. His novel *Data from the Decade of the 60’s* (1989) is comprised of shorter or longer paragraphs disconnected from each other with the only common denominator that all events occurred during the decade of the sixties in Greece. The fragmented chapters include documentation of the most quotidian aspects of life: love letters to a psychologist who hosts a radio program, letters from civilians to the immigration office, newspaper-clippings depicting local misdemeanors or heinous murders. The sixties is a time of turmoil and unsettlement in Greece, at the threshold of the imminent dictatorship in 1967. Valtinos is writing history by tracing the mundane life of the Greek citizens who are affected by the political upheaval, but are not immediately involved in the political affairs, nor do they belong in any activist groups, leftists or right wings. No authorial voice is allowed a place in the novel. Letters have no responses, migration applications are neither accepted nor rejected. The only voice that is present is the voice of the people in their unadorned language, in the language that communicates their misery implicitly. In addition to its contextual associations, Valtino’s fragmentation—like most fragmentary texts in postmodern metafiction—intends to re-educate readers regarding their expectations of narratives. The mind is prone to connecting; it is searching for a logical and coherent story whose elements partake in the same harmonic tune. Fragmentary texts are in collusion with incongruity. They strive against totalization, against

“models of wholeness,” in order to accept a disjointed universe, which if put into order ceases to be the same (Culler, “Prolegomena” 58).

Extralinguistic versus Intralinguistic:

Thus far we examined the metafictional text based on its textual and paratextual markers, as well as based on its content, that is its organization as a narrative form and the building blocks of this narrative form. Extralinguistic versus intralinguistic signs refer to moments that are caught in between zones. The literary device that allows for elements of different communicative layers to come into contact is known as metalepsis,⁴⁶ but metalepsis is most associated with narrative levels inside the novel’s structure. More particularly, extralinguistic and intralinguistic markers refer to a specific use of metalepsis, where elements from the real world penetrate the membrane of fiction thus partaking in its fictional universe. Authors posing as characters; real and renowned people permeating the fictional world as popularized in the *roman-a-clef*; readers invited as co-travelers in you-narratives; and intertextual associations polarize the dividing line between the text’s interiority and exteriority, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality by placing the reader on their edge.

⁴⁶ In his article “Unnatural Narrative and Metalepsis: Grant Morrison’s *Animal Man*,” Thoss claims that metaleptic transgressions can occur between a story world and another, between a story world and reality, or between story and discourse. Also Dorris Cohn in “Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme” differentiates between exterior and interior metalepsis, the former referring to transference between the extradiegetic and the diegetic level, whereas the latter, which belongs mainly to postmodernity, refers to transference between two levels of the same story.

In metafictional novels reality and fiction function as alternative layers of the same structure, constantly negating and installing each other's presence. You-narratives, for example, drag the reader into the domain of fiction, allowing her to dwell both inside and outside the fiction she is consuming. You-narratives customarily operate as overtures shedding the reader's identity and thus freeing her from her ideologies in order to let her assume someone else's personality. If fiction is a game of make-believe, you-narratives inaugurate this playful game by ushering the reader into the domain of a fictive universe. Michalopoulou's *Princess Lizard* (2007) makes a metaphor of this inauguration in its embedded novel, where you-narrative appears in conjunction with the character's amnesiac state, a convenient device to remind the reader of her duties to lose herself in the game of fiction. The embedded novel, narrated in the second person, features a woman who wakes up not knowing her identity: "You are lying in a double bed next to your clothes and your one shoe... You observe the room... You open the door... You need to start from somewhere. To sort things out. You can't remember who you are or why you are here" (120, 121, 126).⁴⁷ There is profound consonance between the symbolism emitted by the woman-protagonist and the reader. The immediacy of the second person addresses the reader to follow the protagonist, while simultaneously the protagonist's amnesiac state functions as a cordial invitation for the reader to "abolish within" herself "all barriers," to erase her identity in order for both reader and character to soar through the fiction together (Barthes, *Pleasure* 3). "[Because] if the reader is to play the part intended for him, then for the duration of his reading, he must be, so to speak, taken out of himself" (Iser, *Implied Reader* 43). Reader and character are therefore constructed simultaneously. Even though the protagonist is not a self-conscious character cognizant of herself as language, Michalopoulou evokes these associations implicitly through her character's loss of memory; she cannot know herself unless

⁴⁷ My translation.

her creator gradually generates her. The protagonist discovers herself in the process of creation, as “a subject of discourse” and as a sign that acquires meaning by accretion, only when more meaning is added to it (Fokkema 14). In you-narratives, the reader vacillates between two worlds, the extralinguistic she inhabits and the intralinguistic she actively visits, thus persisting through alternative state of affairs mimicking a character who maneuvers in-between narrative levels with metalepsis.

The reader may enter the intralinguistic world explicitly, as in the case of you-narratives, or indirectly by gazing at herself through representations of characters or events. In Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980), the reader traces herself in the character of Adso. His occasional naive questionings and his incomplete understanding of William’s intellectual thought-process are markers pointing to a deliberate parallelism. Moreover, the narrator, Adso, is the observer of William’s semiotic adventure, very much like the reader who is in pursuit of Eco’s semiotic game. In metafictional and postmodern fiction, the book turns into a mirror reflecting an image of the reader, who is not identical to herself. Very much like William’s reflection in the mirror’s library, which does not portray William but his double-opposite Jorge, the reader glimpses at herself through characters and events which are positioned deliberately in order to simulate her act of reading and remind her of her relation to the fictional world.

In the metafictional text, the reader is never an outsider. The case of the author, however, is more problematic; as the reader gains power over the reading material, the author relinquishes hers, thus capsizing the common premise that defines their roles. In the novel-within-the-novel, the author’s resignation is instituted by the fictive author, and thus, strictly speaking, the real author remains an outsider to her fiction, concealing her presence behind the author-character. By contrast, certain novels insert the name of the real author in the fiction, either in disguise (as

Umbertino in *The Name of the Rose* [1980]) or overtly, thus pointing to a crass juxtaposition of fictive versus real world entities. Author appearing in her fiction is far from a new literary device; it relates to examples as old as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In metafictional texts, however, the author is not assimilated in the fiction, as perhaps earlier examples demonstrate, but her presence decenters an otherwise unmitigated concept of *author*. It is almost needless to mention that the author in the text is not the real author outside the text. The proper name must be emptied of its signifier and signified in order to re-acquire an independent identity, one constructed by the text itself. The most striking aspect of the author in the text is the paradox that the proper name must be absolved of everything real, in order to be refilled with what is conveyed.

In "City of Glass," the first story of *New York Trilogy* (1985) by Paul Auster, Auster appears as a character, and as an author but not the author of *New York Trilogy*. The name Auster is reiterated throughout the first story, but acquires the status of a sign deprived of its signified: Auster is a scholar writing a book on *Don Quixote*; Auster is a detective; Auster is Quinn who pretends to be Auster; Auster is the narrator's friend; Auster is the author of *New York Trilogy*. Who is Auster? This centrifugal force which pulls us away from the sign, deconstructs the notion of the author so that readers may not look for him either in or outside the text. In his multi-fragmented existence, Auster's dispersal is unmotivated of enforcing his authority. On the one hand, every "Auster" encounter redirects the reader to the paratextual elements on the cover page, reminding her of *the book* and its fictional implications. Similarly, the scattering of the author's name signifies his absence; he is everywhere and nowhere. "Auster" is an empty sign, for Auster is absent from this fiction. According to William Lavender, the characters in "City of Glass" are authorless. Peter Stillman calls Auster to save him, to take him

out of his darkness and off the page, but instead of his author, Stillman reaches another character, Quinn. “The author sent a mere character in his place, so ‘poor Stillman’ must muck his way through his narrative on his own, unauthored” (226). Unfit to author Stillman, Quinn is unable to help, and Stillman is doomed to extinction; he walks off the page and never reappears (227). Vacillating between the author’s name on the cover page and the author’s name in the narrative, the reader recognizes them as yet another set of mirror images that do not resemble each other; they unite at the linguistic level only to be parted at the empirical, leaving the author both inside and outside his fiction. He has procreated it, perhaps he has allowed his ideologies and personal experiences to leak within it, but any interpreter must be aware that no single author presides the text. The author, thus, ramifies himself so that he symbolically abolishes any traces that would lead the reader to him.

An intriguing twist on this metafictional device of the author-inside-her-work appears in David Foster Wallace’s “Old Neon” (2004), where David Wallace’s story is narrated by his author through antimetathesis. “Old Neon” begins by evoking Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930), due to the narrator’s proclamations that he has committed suicide long ago. His retrospective monologue, a reflection of his bygone life, aims at self-criticism and self-(psycho)-analysis. He repeatedly admits to his fraudulence, as a character who, having ulterior motives, always pretends to be someone else, constantly disguising his real self in order to manipulate and contrive people and events. From a metafictional perspective, the narrator’s disembodied narrative voice represents the voice of fiction, pointing to its own “fraudulence” upon promoting itself as reality. This hypothesis is confirmed by the overt metafictional ending, in which David Wallace’s name appears abruptly in the last paragraph, and in the middle of a protracted sentence over twenty-five lines long. David Wallace has stumbled upon the narrator’s photo in their high

school yearbook, and knowing that his fellow-classmate committed suicide implicating himself in a calculated car accident, he attempts to reconstruct what is hidden behind the face, what is lurking within the mind of a picture:

... David Wallace blinks in the midst of idly scanning class photos from his 1980 Aurora West H.S. yearbook and seeing my photo and trying, through the tiny little keyhole of himself, to imagine what all must have happened to lead up to my death in the fiery single-car accident he'd read about in 1991, like what sorts of pain or problems might have driven the guy to get in his electric-blue Corvette and try to drive with all that O.T.C. medication in his bloodstream—David Wallace happening to have a huge and totally unorganizable set of inner thoughts, feelings, memories and impressions of this little photo's guy a year ahead of him in school with the seemingly almost neon aura around him ... David Wallace had back then imagined as happy and unreflective and wholly unhaunted by voices telling him that there was something deeply wrong with him that wasn't wrong with anybody else and that he had to spend all of his time and energy trying to figure out what to do and say in order to *impersonate* an even marginally normal or acceptable U.S. male ...—in other words *David Wallace trying*, if only in the second his lids are down, *to somehow reconcile what this luminous guy had seemed like from the outside with whatever on the interior* must have driven him to kill himself in such a dramatic and doubtlessly painful way—with *David Wallace also fully aware that the cliché that you can't ever truly know what's going on inside somebody else is hoary and insipid and yet at the same time trying very consciously to prohibit that awareness from*

mocking the attempt or sending the whole line of thought into the sort of inbent spiral that keeps you from ever getting anywhere... (181 all emphasis mine).

In attempting to paint the face behind a photographic image, the author-writer *impersonates* his character; he submerges himself in his character's thought, in the deepest parts of his consciousness. Wallace evinces to his audience his impersonation, as if declaring: "I stepped inside my characters' mind in order to better understand him; I became one with my character so that I may refashion his consciousness and penetrate his psychology; something I would not be fit to do, if I merely remained his author, external to his thoughts and removed from his feelings."

The final element of the extralinguistic and intralinguistic binary is intertextuality—an equally problematic term, one customarily conflated with metafiction and, for some critics, an unassailable indicator of all postmodern fiction. Some theoretical background discussion will be useful in order to determine its relationship with metafiction.

According to Julia Kristeva, intertextuality is a "permutation of texts" (*Desire* 36). "[In] the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (36). Or as Umberto Eco states about the "intertextual circulation" of fiction: "Since every proposition contains every other proposition..., a text could generate, by further semantic disclosures, every other text (*Role of the Reader* 24). Texts are engaged in an unremitting dialogic, writing each other, speaking each other's language, and swimming in the same embryonic liquid that all written texts are part of. The language of a text is not its own; it uses another's word(s) retaining traces of previous meanings as well as furnishing them with new

(“Word, Dialogue and Novel” 43). Bakhtinian theory, especially Bakhtinian dialogism, has proven influential to Kristeva’s intertextuality, for it emphasizes the communicative aspect not only between writer and reader, but also between writer and other writers; for Bakhtin “European novel prose is born and shaped in the process of a free (that is, reformulating) translation of others’ work” (378) and every novel is a summation of “the totality of all languages and consciousnesses of language” (366). With intertextuality the text’s monodimensionality is casted away and “poetic language is read as at least *double*” (Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel” 37). Under the metaphor of the text as textile, the threads of the text are not indigenous to the text they appear, but are woven in the fabric of every work that has ever been written or read. “Every text has its meaning ... in relation to other texts” (Allen 6); every narrative is contingent upon other narratives, so that no one exists singularly in a closed-up zone of itself.

Intertextuality has two main axes: the writer’s intentional referencing of other texts, and the reader’s interpretive tendency to relate a text to the discourse of others (Worton and Still 3). The writer’s intention, however, is not what substantiates intertextuality, although certain critics define the term based on this concept (Broich, “Ways of Marking Intertextuality”). At least in the broader sense that Kristeva is using it, intertextuality is inherent in every utterance as long as it is carved in the space of language and signification; it manifests their necessary interaction be it impelled by the writer or not. Whether intentional or unintentional, intertextuality entails a “compulsory reader response” compelling the reader to navigate the space covered between the text and its intertext (Riffaterre).

Parody is an affiliated term to intertextuality, and sometimes it is used to enlighten its definition, but customarily it restricts its openness. In its classical definition, parody is mimicking a particular style of writing with the intention of mockery. It is an overstatement, an

exaggerated form of copying with stylistic or rhetoric conventions, which have reached a point of saturation. Cervantes parodies the chivalric romance; Diderot the epistolary novel and romantic narratives; Charlotte Lennox in *The Female Quixote* (1752) the male chivalric romance and Cervante's *Don Quixote*. These examples demonstrate an innovative style, not by their ingenuity of creating something new, but by an overuse of the already cliché and commonplace. Unlike parody, which carries derisive associations, intertextuality relates to other texts or utterances, for a number of different reasons. If it is summoned primarily to deride, then there is a case of parody, but anything beyond mockery escapes the domain of parody and remains in the realm of intertextuality. Borges's "Pierre Menard" (*Ficciones* [1956]) is an example of classical parody meeting postmodern intertextuality.

In postmodernism, intertextuality generally emblemizes the discourse spoken among texts to manifest their silent conversation and point to their interrelation. It may have a "deconstructive function" by colliding various genre conversions, which end up dismantling each other in the context of the text (Broich, "Intertextuality" 253). Or it may have a *metafictional* function, where characters do not inhabit "a world which mimetically imitates our own world but [a textual world] which [imitates] other texts" (253). In "The Library of Babel," Borges thematizes intertextuality by creating the library as a metaphor of the universe, and man "the imperfect librarian" as a metaphor of his struggle to sort out his textual cosmos in order to discover the universe (*Ficciones* 80). Borges insinuates that the world exists within the book as much as the book exists within the world. Each rendering of the universe in books gives away a different universe, all of which comprise the world they inhabit, and are inhabited by it. Intertextuality, therefore, inheres in the relation between the book and the world and, since metafiction ruminates upon this relation, it adheres to it unavoidably.

Intertextuality is the conjunction of the extralinguistic world with the intralinguistic world, or an assumption thereof. The outside texts (the *hypotexts* according to Genette's *Palimpsests*) that are drawn inside the novel (*hypertexts*) may be real material published in the past, such as some of the excerpts in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996); they may be fictional material promoted *as if* stemming from the extralinguistic world, such as in Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (1985); or they may portray a combination of fictional and factual intertextual material, as in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980) and Valtinos' *The Data of the Decade of the 60's* (1989). Through intertextuality, the metafictional novel points to a textual universe that extends beyond the boundaries of a single book and unites the discourses and languages of an all-encompassing textuality; everything that has been written and everything that will be written. This is the textual universe of the novel beyond its pages: a world overflowing with texts and more texts.

Text (linguistic/non-linguistic)	printing style and format
Paratext (linguistic/non-linguistic)	footnotes, titles, chapter titles, table of content, interviews, appendixes, editorial material, etc.
Performativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the act of narrative performance embedded in the fiction • <i>fictio</i> versus <i>fictum</i>
Discourse (rhetoric)	metanarrative comments (self criticizing, discussing problems of art, intrusions interruptions digressions, discussing literary

	theory, etc)
Fabula (<i>what</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characters aware of their fiction(ality) • spatiotemporality
Story (<i>how</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure-within-structure • <i>mise-en-abyme</i> • metalepsis • self-begetting novel • kaleidoscope text, hypertext • degree of fragmentation
Extralinguistic/Intralinguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • author/reader inside the fiction • implicit references to the reader • you-narratives • intertextuality

Table. 1. Identifying the Metafictional Novel

The orchestration of the above typology should be a useful tool for determining a metafictional text. The degree of metafictionality may vary, and it is contingent upon the number of the above characteristics integrated into the narrative, so that metafictional novels can be placed on a hypothetical scalar spectrum. Frequency, function, and the degree of integration—that is, if certain attributes are used as mere ornaments or are woven into a spider-web whose themes, style, and language are all in a metafictional conversation with each other—play a critical role in identifying a metafictional novel.

Chapter #4

Postmodern Metafiction Misconstrued

Due to its self-exploration and penchant for self-knowledge, metafiction has been understood as the type of fiction that divorces itself from reality, life, and the world, in order to dwell in the nuances of its own creation and poetological aspiration. Its inwardness is often interpreted as a desire to shake off the yoke of carrying a representation of the outside world, and instead narcissistically deliberate on itself. A misunderstanding has arisen that all metafiction can bestow to its readers is an understanding of itself, giving them nothing beyond the mere pleasures masking its textual games. This view limits the possibilities of metafiction, whose nature is apparently more intricate: while recognizing the distance between itself and reality, while shifting the emphasis from reality to itself, literature can never only be about itself.

A series of events have gradually led to these conclusions about metafiction, all of them stemming primarily from structural and post-structural theory, whose ideologies have imbibed postmodern thought. First and foremost, postmodernism has contested the most rudimentary assumptions about the subject's relation to language, the linguistic sign. No one could have summarized the quintessence of postmodern drive more succinctly than Foucault: "The whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: What is language, how can we find a way around it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plenitude? ... the thought that has been speaking for thousands of years without knowing what speaking is or even that it is speaking" (Foucault, *Order of Things* 306). In postmodernism, language's ability to *represent* is reconfigured under both structural and post-structural parameters: language ceases to be transparent, and no longer is the "colorless network" that reflects reality unobtrusively (311).

Language is conceived as an insufficient human construct, as an artifice unaffiliated with the real. Its only relation to reality is an *attempt* to represent it, but, in fact, it reproduces it, inconspicuously crafting its subjects rather than explaining them. The renowned linguist Emile Benveniste asserts how language functions:

Language *reproduces* reality. This is to be understood in the most literal way: reality is produced anew by means of language ... The linguist on his part considers that thought could not exist without language and that as a result the knowledge of the world is being determined by the expression it receives. Language reproduces the world, but by submitting it to its own organization. (22)

Much of postmodern thought is grounded in the assumptions of Saussurean linguistics, which install the linguistic sign as an *arbitrary* link between a concept and a sound pattern, and not as a connection between a name and a thing (66, 73).⁴⁸ The Saussurean breakthrough manifests itself in the notion that language is a self-contained system, whose meaning, value, and rules can be obtained from within rather than by any collaboration with outside. Every sign acquires its meaning and value through its juxtaposition with other signs:—“what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it” (Saussure 119)—and it is concomitantly independent and self-sustained within its own systematic structure.

⁴⁸ “A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” (Saussure 66).

The open-endedness of language as it is delineated by Derrida's *différance* also heralds language's inability to portray the real. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida demonstrates that within the self-contained linguistic system, wholeness—or a complete, totalized meaning—is improbable, since it is in a constant state of deferral. For every signified relies upon a chain of signifieds *ad infinitum* in order to achieve singularity of meaning, which is never accomplished because meaning is perpetually deferred, because meaning moves from signified to signified before it allows itself to be concretized and assume organic totality. For Derrida, all language is a sign system impelled by *différance*, an endless displacement of meaning, which impedes language from reaching singularity, knowledge, truth.⁴⁹ If in search of the integrity of the sign, meaning is constantly postponed, Derrida concludes that there is no transcendental signified; there is no one signified within which all trace of all other signifieds may be situated, which would otherwise bestow to the sign its holistic identity (158, 20). If the sign is primarily understood gaining its ideal wholeness from a series of other signs, but never from a referent, never looking outside its self-contained system—an extension of Saussurean linguistics—the separation between language and reality in postmodernism is made all the more apparent.

The second and third developments that affect metafiction's interpretation derive directly from the above hypothesis: the normative views in postmodern theory promulgate the position, that, firstly, literature denounces reality, and secondly, that it may give its readers nothing but a picture of itself. Having discovered that “the exalted status [literature] claimed for its language was a myth,” and thus partaking in the crisis of language's impotence, fiction, along with

⁴⁹ In “*Différance*,” Derrida deconstructs the principle of semiology that the sign substitutes for absence, by explaining the concept of difference: the effect of the sign is not “that of presence but of *difference*” (20), because it always *defers* presence even though it masks it *as* presence (21–2).

metafiction, finds itself before a mirror scrutinizing itself, examining its own potentials for representation (de Man, *Blindness and Insight* 11). If language is devoid of reality, literature, which relies upon language for its enactment, does not contain reality either. Consequently, metafiction, which represents a kind of literature that is cognizant of its interaction with the outside world, consciously withdraws itself from reality twice more. Metafiction is fiction that has succumbed to the realization that it cannot represent nor explain the universe and thus suffices in its own practices as fiction.

Many critics come to the conclusion that literature is at no liberty to explain, organize, or reflect the world, since, according to the postmodern tendency, language has been shown to have failed in this role. “[The] truth is that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words” (Genette 164) and “novels do not imitate reality, they create it” (Todorov 67–8) become the new credo. Despite the validity suffused in such declarations, the syllogism that *follows* impoverishes fiction: due to fiction’s inwardness, metafiction in particular undertakes to disillusion readers from reading fiction in order to discover something beyond it. According to Paul de Man, because literature “operates on the level of signifier, [it] contains no responsible pronouncement on the nature of the world—despite its powerful potential to create the opposite illusion” (de Man, *Resistance to Theory* 10, 11). I acknowledge that a definition of metafiction is contingent upon its self-referentiality, a postmodern trait that did not leave literature unaffected. I want to grant full force to the claim that fiction is a construct and that metafiction is predominantly preoccupied with the play of language, foregrounding its peculiar relation to reality. With metafiction, fiction explores its linguistic essence juxtaposing it to an abstract yet more real reality than itself. But amidst this heightened self-exploration, metafiction invokes a reality that is integral to itself and to all fiction, obstructing it from leaving the outside world at a distance.

Metafiction is fiction about fiction, but it is also fiction beyond fiction; it both articulates the world and is aware that it cannot reach the world;⁵⁰ these two contradictory aspects summarize the paradox that metafiction is determined to expose.

The Postmodern Predicament: Literature as Language

Dominant postmodern literary theory operates on the premise that literature must shake off the burden of carrying the outside world, assuming clear contours, first and foremost, in the works of Derrida, Barthes, and de Man. Derrida's "there is nothing outside of the text" is one of the most influential topics that promotes the schism between literature and reality, admonishing readers not to look within their empirical reality in order to apprehend the fictional world and vice versa (*Grammatology* 158, 20). Reading, according to Derrida, "cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychological, etc.) or towards a signified outside the text whose content could take place ... outside of language, that is to say ... outside of writing in general" (158). Here Derrida does not deny the existence of a reality beyond the text (Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* 45)—and neither does postmodernism as it has been accused of⁵¹—but because language and meaning are independent of reality, their interpretation must be too. The imaginary line that connects the text to the world beyond is erased, and therefore literature finds itself anchored only to its own language. Despite the enlightenment brought about by the statement "there is nothing outside of

⁵⁰ Modified from Thiher: "language articulates the world and ... language cannot reach the world" (93).

⁵¹ When Raymond Federman and Patricia Waugh discuss metafiction in terms of a fiction that foregrounds reality's fictionality, they do not imply that reality is fictional, but that the way the subject confronts his environment results in his creating of a reality that is less real and more fictional.

the text”— texts need not rely on reality to be fulfilled, readers need not rely on the author’s life experiences to apprehend a work of fiction⁵²—it nonetheless breeds the hypothesis that a separation between fiction and reality is imperative.

In a poetic metaphor that aims at demystifying the relationship between literature and the world, Roland Barthes compares their convoluted relation to that of Orpheus and Eurydice:

One could say that literature is Orpheus returning from the underworld; as long as literature walks ahead, aware that it is leading someone, the reality behind it which it is gradually leading out of the unnamed—that reality breathes, walks, lives, heads toward the light of a meaning; but once literature turns around to look at what it loves all that is left is a named meaning, which is a *dead meaning*. (“Literature and Signification” 268, emphasis mine)

Barthes’s elaborate analogy can better be illuminated if one has the realist novel and the metafictional novel in mind. In the realist novel, literature leads the way to reality, as if literature is assured of reality’s possession; it is as if reality belongs to literature indisputably. However, the very moment literature turns to gaze at its obedient follower—which is what metafiction attempts by turning back at itself, at what it is made of—reality dissipates. It is at this crucial moment that fiction, according to Barthes, realizes it cannot and does not contain reality. Only by being oblivious to itself can literature hold the belief that reality follows it at all times.

⁵² See Roland Barthes “The Death of the Author” in *Image Music Text* and Foucault’s “What’s an Author?”

To underscore more forcefully the point that literature is not subdued by reality, postmodern theorists employ the example of the proper name. It has been argued that in fiction, proper names, which have no real referent outside the text, produce a fictive referent not by the help of the empirical world but by textual inferences. The proper name acquires its essence through a summation of characteristics associated with it. It is comprised of a constellation of linguistic traits which confer to the name its identity and fictional existence (Bal, Barthes, Bennington, Fokkema, Hutcheon, Waugh). By extension, everything in fiction takes up meaning in a similar fashion, since objects in texts do not have one-to-one reference in the world. Without disputing this claim, which is after all the way by which fiction conjures its fictive world, it is nonetheless important to remember that fiction does not reinvent the wheel with regards to every object it names. “The reader applies codes from the world of reference that are not necessarily ‘inscribed’ in the text” and thus when the sign is constructed readers “draw on both literary conventions and conventions from knowledge about the world” (Fokkema 47).

Barthes in *S/Z* writes that “discourse has no responsibility vis-a-vis the real: in the most realistic novel the referent has no reality” (Barthes 80). In a peculiar way, to reject the existence of a real referent in fiction involves the rejection of the existence of a real referent in language. Ultimately both fictional and everyday language operate with the help of *prototypes* as well as referents. Let us consider the difference in the referent “lighthouse” in the next three sentences, assuming a reader has heard sentences one and two, and has read sentence three in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*:

There used to be an old lighthouse off the coast of my town.

Nowadays a lighthouse operates electronically.

“There will be no landing at the lighthouse tomorrow,” said Charles Tansley (Woolf 7).

The referent of the “lighthouse” in the first sentence is a lighthouse that has no existence *now*; in essence, there is no real, tangible referent to which it may be connected. We must agree therefore that “real” and “tangible” are not necessary qualities of the referent. In the second sentence the lighthouse is non-specific, that is, there is no one lighthouse to which it refers. Nor can we assume that it refers to all the lighthouses worldwide; rather, the referent here corresponds to what stands for *prototype* in semantics—an image in the mind which connects to the “idea” of a lighthouse: it has a flickering light, its structure is tall and lean, it lights up at night, etc. The prototype is similar to the signified, but while the signified cannot stand alone—it comprises the sign with the help of the signifier—the prototype stands for the referent of *a non-specific* sign. In the third sentence, in the fictional context of Woolf’s text, the lighthouse has a fictive referent, which both refers to a fictional lighthouse crafted for the purpose of the text, and also to the same prototype as per the example of the second sentence. The reader conceives of this lighthouse by accessing the prototype, the idea of what a lighthouse is and what it looks like, and it is upon this reality that “possible” worlds are crafted; this determines the shape the fictive world will take in the reader’s mind.

Proper names function in a similar fashion, that is a proper name becomes an assemblage of descriptions forming the picture of a person. While in all three examples the referent is non-existent and intangible, sentences two and three share the commonality of their referent being located in the prototype, inside the reader’s mind.⁵³ In literature, the literary referent may be a construct, because it inhabits a textual reality that cannot be equated with the extralinguistic

⁵³ A collection of helpful essays on referring can be found in *Readings in the Philosophy of Language*.

world. Nonetheless, it relies both upon “an affirmative, recognizably plausible or ‘real’ entity *and* modifies our awareness of it” (Whiteside 198, emphasis mine); that is, while it is based upon something other than itself, the literary referent is capable of refiguring our prototype in order to generate the appropriate, desirable, and undoubtedly premeditated effect dictated by the text.⁵⁴ The metamorphosis the prototype undergoes results in birth of the fictive referent. As Philip Tew notes: “all texts have referents. These exist independently of our perceptions, thoughts and theories. All texts involve such thinking about thinking about reality. This is so, however diffuse or complex the process becomes in the narrative and its relation with the life-world” (202).

Depending on how one reads possible worlds theory, the relation between reality and literature varies. Possible worlds theory may account for the reality contained in fiction if it is assumed that the intermediary universe it creates, subordinates the primary referent—in other words, that the secondary, fictive referent has absorbed the primary, real referent. In this fashion, the interaction between literature and reality remains intact, nullifying the claim that “literature can only be about itself.” “The name *Hamlet* is neither empty nor self-referential; it refers to an individual of a fictional world” (Doležel, *Heterocosm* 16). Similarly, in an article regarding the fictive referent of the metafictional novel, Linda Hutcheon identifies four levels of reference, only one of which points inside the text. The outer mimetic level of reference is the linkage to the world outside the novel in the sense of the “inevitable and presupposed knowledge” necessary to the creation of the fictional world (“Metafictional Implications” 9). It is this level that is mainly unacknowledged, minimized, or depreciated, allowing scholars to reach the conclusion that literature, and metafiction in particular, can only denote its fictionality.

⁵⁴ See also “The Referential Act” by Thomas E. Lewis who provides a comprehensive account on the same point.

From a different perspective, understanding fiction in terms of referentiality may not be the only way to target the complex web of fiction's relation to reality. As Richard Walsh articulates in *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, the communicative nexus of language, its pragmatic aspect, plays a pivotal role in issues of fictionality, but still remains uninteresting to postmodern narratologists. The study of rhetoric, which operates with inferences—that is, in language things are omitted but communication is possible due to its pragmatic function, and due to the constant act of intuitive inferencing—does not reveal language as an enclosed self-referencing artifice and simultaneously does not detach language from the real world. The world of fiction is filled with *contextual assumptions* by the reader, which are part of a communicative situation rather than of any fictional world (36), and thus literature is anchored to the world through them. They form bridges between the text, other texts, and everything else.

Reality will always be part of the reader's (and author's) schemata—that is, the universal knowledge carried to the act of reading (and writing)—never allowing fiction to break free. As René Wellek asserts in his rather polemical essay against postmodern theory, “literature does represent reality, however distorted and transformed” (45). Literature does not need to represent an accurate version of reality; the nature of reality is ungraspable, unfathomable, unable to be confined and restrained. But literature bases its assumptions and proclamations upon the physical world with which it is in constant interaction. For Linda Hutcheon, the text initially depends upon the reader's knowledge of reality, but the more the reader flips the pages, the deeper she descends to a world that is little by little separating itself from the outside and arrives at a point of self-sustainment (*Narcissistic Narrative* 92). The self-sustaining world of literature is unremittingly fed by the extralinguistic world. It is a vicious circle one cannot escape. “[The] novel is, in fact, related to life experiences in a very real way *for the reader*: that is, the novel is a

continuation of that ordering, decoding, naming, fiction-making *process* that is part of the reader's normal coming-to-terms with experience in the real world" ("Metafictional Implications" 5–6). Due to the fact that reality's existence in literature is so rudimentary (unless, for example, we know what a lighthouse is, we will never be able to imagine its penetrating light into Mrs. Ramsay's dining room) it almost allows one to perceive their relationship as imperceptible.

Literature draws from the elements of our empirical reality—a reality which is undoubtedly chaotic and incomprehensible—in order to devise its own version of another reality, fully dependent upon the first one, no matter how different. Even the most remotely realistic novels encompass a form of reality, that of non-reality, because in order for the reader to understand the context of the fictive reality, he needs to know, however imperfectly, the reality we all share. Theodor Adorno and Garry Potter concur on this matter: "[What] is unreal and non-existent in art is not independent of reality. It is not arbitrarily posted, not invented, as is commonly thought; rather, it is structured by propositions between what exists, propositions that are themselves defined by what exists, its deficiency, distress, and contradictoriness as well as its potentialities; even in these propositions real contexts resonate" (Adorno, qtd. in Tew 204); "[The] most unrealistic text may nonetheless have a profoundly meaningful connection to reality. If this were not so, then we would not have any way of distinguishing an interesting experimental text and gibberish" (Potter 192). No one denies that fiction is fictional, that it creates a crafted universe with beings that do not exist within the real world of the reader, but all fiction, though non-real, shares in the properties of the real and as such, no kind of fiction,—in this case metafiction—may be authoritatively self-referential.

If postmodernism stands in opposition to the realist dogma, any reactionary approach does not necessarily defend realism, or pure mimetic practices: it certainly embodies a

recognition for other modes of representation (such as the fantastic, the grotesque, the utopian) (Wellek 45). In the Aristotelian tradition, where the arts are defined in terms of imitation, substantiating man's inborn instinct to both imitate and enjoy objects of imitation ("mimetic objects" [Aristotle 37]), art exteriorizes what is contained in reality *through* imitation. Nonetheless, Aristotle does not presume that all imitation or representation ought to be an accurate copy. An artist may choose to represent a horse with both its right legs forward without having faulted at his attempt to imitate it (127). Even "untrue" or "unnatural" representations—that is, representations that are incongruous with the functions of nature—go through a process of naturalization under the hypothesis that such narratives are driven and initiated by mimesis. It would not be improbable to maintain that the prison-house of language is in fact the prison-house of the most basic and fundamental forms of reality; "we assume that even the strangest text is about humans or human constructs" (Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds" 82). On the one hand, the most imaginative and improbable unrealities ineluctably absorb the empirical world, and on the other hand, "existence is just as much an image in the mind's eye as in the beholder's" (Whiteside 179).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ There have been at least four responses to fiction's representationality throughout the history of literary criticism and they are worth our attention even in a cursory manner: mimesis (Aristotle, Auerbach), which conceives of fiction as an imitation of the world (not necessarily a true and accurate representation); fictional world theory, which depends upon an intermediary realm where a fictional world unfolds itself with its own rules and norms (Doležel, Pavel); propositional theory, which borrows from mimesis the concept that all fiction is a make-believe game, operating under fictional propositions which begin with the dormant statement "It is believed that..." "It is fictional that ..." (Hempfer; Walton); and relevance theory, which deploys the pragmatic function of language and assumes that communication is dependent upon the content of an utterance as well as what is left unsaid but presumed (Walsh). Every approach bestows to the study of fictionality a unique attribute with a little bit of truth residing in all. A common assumption governing all of the approaches, and one which literary criticism has been adamant about

One may legitimately argue that postmodern theory brushes aside the fact that literature's referent is engrained in the real, partly because it deems fundamentally unnecessary to make such an assertion—a kind of indisputable truth which may not be reiterated. The notion that the literary sign refers to itself and to a fictive reality, however, embodies a groundbreaking realization, one that has not been teased out to such lengths before. If the two notions are separated, if there is the slightest insinuation that the literary referent can stand on its own in a text, without being buttressed by anything that ties it to the real world, then we run the risk of generating a theory of fiction that can only be self-referential. Such a theory would reduce literature to being *only* literature about literature, and to giving its readers nothing but a picture of how the literary world functions.

The provocative display of literature as a self-floating system throws it into a deadlock of nihilism—complementing the nihilistic view that man is superseded by language. Literature with no pronouncements on reality is reduced to nothingness, a speaking thing without speaking. In the words of de Man: “[in the imaginary source of fiction] the human self has experienced the void within itself and the invented fiction, far from filling the void, asserts itself as pure nothingness, *our* nothingness stated and restated by a subject that is the agent of its own instability” (*Blindness and Insight* 19).⁵⁶

recently, stipulates that under no circumstances should fiction be compared to truthfulness or falsehood. Fictionality is situated far beyond such binary oppositions.

⁵⁶ Review the above quotation by Roland Barthes, who states that literature is a named meaning with an empty meaning; and also Roland Suckenic, who, like de Man, sees in the writing of fiction the revelation of a void, “a negative epiphany” (“New Tradition in Fiction” 27).

Consequences of the Postmodern Predicament on Metafiction:

The chain of argumentation moves from the awry concept of ontology (is there reality in literature?) to the equally awry concept of epistemology: can the reader extract *something* from (meta)fiction, or is it simply a self-aggrandizing artifact saturated with nothingness? The transformation of de Man's axiom into the domain of metafiction entertains the belief that metafiction can only be self-revolving, and critics like Rüdiger Imhof promote a subservient, non-utilitarian metafiction:

If illusionistic fiction, in conjuring up a world, can teach us things about the real world, about people, their emotions and manners, anti-illusionistic fiction⁵⁷ too teaches us things: that the only life that counts is our life and not, say Tom Jones'; that Tom Jones or, for that matter, Lord Jim can teach us pretty little to help us come to grips with our existence; that a novel, like any other work of the imagination, is not reality; that it is no more than a man-made object, an artifact, whose rules, normally kept secret by a writer, we have a chance to learn through anti-illusionistic fiction; and because we know these rules, we can liberate ourselves, even if the process may be painful, from the deceptive influence of the illusionistic novel. We obtain thereby an idea of art and its function totally different from the notion we held when equating art with reality; we come to appreciate art as a fabrication, capable of inducing in us, first and foremost, an aesthetic experience, and not as one designed primarily to help us, by a distribution of associated wisdom, get along in life. (Imhof, *Contemporary Metafiction* 25)

⁵⁷ He uses "anti-illusionistic fiction" synonymously with metafiction.

The classical didactic quality of literature as presented by Horace and Longinus is transformed by Imhof to another form of didacticism: that of teaching about the impossibility of teaching about life, and that of teaching about literature.⁵⁸ Imhof conjectures that with metafiction, life experiences are set aside; literature can only discuss and project itself and is at no liberty to impart anything beyond its practices. Not many readers would plunge into a novel in order to discover possible ways to solve their problems, nor would they consider literature a “user’s manual” (to evoke George Perec’s ironic title) in order to learn how to lead their lives.

Nonetheless, even in the most absurd and incongruous fiction the reader projects an image, equally absurd perhaps and highly subjective, of himself and of the world, and takes something away from fiction which might be as fundamental and as elementary as the act of breathing.

Every aspect that Imhof names as being exposed in metafictional novels (that it is a work of the imagination, an artifact, a man-made object) lie dormant in the back of the reader’s mind the moment he reads the word “novel” on the cover of the book, which enacts the “genre contract,” as Genette puts it (*Paratext* 41); this applies to any fictional work, metafictional or otherwise.

One would agree with Imhof when he asserts that “metafiction all but assists us in our escapist

⁵⁸ The statement that metafictional literature is literature about literature resonates with, but is different from, the doctrine “Art for Art’s Sake,” propounded by the Aesthetic movement in the end of the nineteenth century, and driven by Kantian concepts of the sublime. Although, like metafiction, the Aesthetic movement resists utilitarian approaches, promoting instead an appreciation of literature without the strings of morality attached, the Aesthetic movement, places a profound emphasis on the aesthetic beauty of art, something that metafiction is not keen on exercising. On the other hand, there are no literary texts which incarnate “Art for Art’s Sake,” even those most associated with the movement such as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. While the Aesthetic movement develops a kind of manifesto for art (I refer again to the most notable figure of the movement in the English tradition, Oscar Wilde and “The Decay of Lying”), metafiction is not mere theory, but a widespread literary practice.

desires”

(25); instead of letting the reader forget the phrase “a novel” on the cover page, it thwarts his attempts to immerse himself inside the fiction of another world by mainly keeping him on the surface, always aware, always flashing before him in numerous ways: this *is* a novel.

Punctuating its fictiveness and constantly interpolating the reader’s illusion of disbelief is, however, inconclusive evidence that metafiction is only self-referential and self-orbiting, withdrawing from issues that pertain to empirical reality. As Marcel Cornis-Pope writes: “To interpret [metafictional texts] as narrowly self-referential is to miss the ideological impact that a self-critical focus on articulation can have;” it questions “our perceptual and discursive systems, reinventing the rules by which reality is projected” (262, 259).

The increasing interest in cognitive theory in the last twenty years has shown that, on the one hand, real-world knowledge of objects and subjects facilitates our ability to capture the fictional world of the novel, and, on the other hand, the reading of fiction impacts the way we engage with the empirical world. Alan Palmer in “Storyworlds and Groups” articulates a popular argument shared by many cognitive narratologists, and which counters basic postmodern and post-structural conceptualization of character: that readers treat fictional characters the same way they treat real people, for novel reading implies mind reading; that is, we read the minds of characters as if reading the minds of real subjects (181–83). The transference from text to world-knowledge—how an understanding of the text may affect or influence our understanding of real characters, events, and situations—is exemplified by Lisa Zunshine in *Why We Read Fiction* and by Suzanne Keen in *Empathy and the Novel*. Zunshine affirms that literature cultivates our cognitive operations, our “mind-reading” and interpretive abilities, by allowing us to interpret and misinterpret people’s behaviors, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires (6). She considers

foundational the claim that through the reading of characters' minds, we test and challenge our mental processes free from the dangers that arise when those same cognitive abilities are at work in real life interactions. Similarly, Keen cautiously argues that exposure to fiction influences, even minimally, the character and practices of its readers: "novel reading might participate in the socialization and moral internalization" of readers (18). "Readers might obtain socialization experience through characters' reactions to fictive situations, translating recognitions about characters back to their own lives" (18). Keen never concedes to the view that empathetic reading translates to learning to be altruistic, helping others, and the community, nor does she draw a connection between empathetic reading and didacticism. Reading alone does not "inspire prosocial action," but books can influence alongside other means (146): "while fiction reading alone may not form citizens committed to justice, democracy, and nuanced understandings of other cultures ... conscious cultivation of narrative empathy by teachers and discussion leaders could at least point toward the potential novel reading to help citizens respond to real others" (147).

These approaches to literature puncture the façade of a marked discrimination between fiction and reality, exposing instead their interfluidity. The function of metafiction cannot be attributed to the pleasure of reading in order to learn more about how fiction operates; this is a circuit that maintains fiction inside its fictional construction, removed from any connection to the outside. No matter how metafictional a text appears to be, no matter how preoccupied with its fictionality, it nonetheless stimulates, exercises, and tests our minds' abilities, so that transference between how we interpret fictional worlds and how we engage in social environments is possible.

If, when reading literature, according to Imhof, one learns the tricks of the trade, what is the reason for reading metafictional novels? In order to become metafictional novelists? Imhof recognizes the imperative need to address the issue:

The profit one gains from knowing how fiction works is like the profit one gains from discovering how, say, a beloved toy operates. One's concept of art and literature is corrected and enlarged. But it is not only fictions workings, whose secrets are revealed; what is also, and probably more importantly, at stake is the response to fiction.

Metafiction teaches us that the aim of realist fiction for instance is wrongheaded and that our old reaction is inadequate... Since [metafictionists] are aware of the inability of man to tell the truth about the world, because any such statement to this effect is bound to be subjective, they do not consider it worth their efforts to try and do so in the first place. Instead they tell purely fictional stories, and, in the attempt to withhold nothing and tell it all, they even show *how* they go about their business. (26)

Does Imhof imply that metafiction is headed the right way, in opposition to realist fiction which is wrong? Is metafiction deemed superior because it escapes the "lie" of all other types of fiction by acknowledging it may only be self-referential? Although in the evolutionary road of literature's vicissitudes certain periods demonstrate a reaction to previous ones, literature's progression is not one of comparison-of-parts, but one of developmental transformation. In the excerpt, Imhof overtly maintains that in metafiction, one can only discover the whereabouts of fiction, and should seek nothing further; however, would this remark not point to a loss? As

Stonehill affirms, the reader loses something essential, something that probably drew him towards fiction in the first place, when novelists sacrifice too much of the traditional narrative values: “The most engaging and rewarding self-conscious fictions, ... manage to combine a story that we care about with reminders that it *is* a story; and the best of these will be those in which the appeal of the art and the reminders of artifice are both developed to their fullest possible extent” (16). With metafiction, literature self-reflexively problematizes its relation with both language and the world and recognizes that, no matter how hard it tries, it will always carry a form of language and an objectified, processed, and constructed form of the empirical world; moreover, under no circumstances would it neglect to give something more than a panoramic self-portrait.

Metafiction's *Je ne sais quoi*: Calvino's *If on a Winter Night a Traveler* and Michalopoulou's *Wishbone Memories*:

Many metafictional novels contain plotlines whose interpretations move beyond the text's representation and reach the realm of the reader's ontology. Metafictional novels such as Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2002), Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), and Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005), or even more classic examples such as Borges's *Ficciones* (1962) and Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), apart from thematizing their own work as a text, are also underpinned by more traditional and mundane motifs of human interrelations, subjugation, and the metaphysical quest for the impossible and improbable. Other metafictional novels link the novel's quest for identity with subthemes of identity about the self, and the search for identity becomes twofold: through metafictional devices, the novel and the protagonist

speculate their identity. Often, the text or the protagonist, or both, arrive closer to self-recognition through finding a double. This is the case in *New York Trilogy* (1985) by Paul Auster (2008), and in *Indian Nocturne* (1989) by Antonio Tabucchi. If metafiction does not make extravagant claims about reality, it can certainly say much about the reader's relation to fictional texts, as so eloquently do John Barth's *Chimera* (1972), Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), or Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1996). Metafiction plays with the idea that even though the stories that novels narrate are fictitious, the characters are made of paper, and the narrators are not authors, books are still part of the reader's reality and their effect can be transferred from something that is not real to something that is, because it can be felt by the reader. Metafiction is both mimetic and anti-mimetic, both introverted and extroverted, both within itself and outside of itself. As Brian Richardson claims in "What is Unnatural Narrative Theory": even "[antimimetic] elements continually remind us of the dual nature of narrative fiction, all of which is, in varying degrees, both mimetic and artificial at the same time" (38). To argue that fiction with metafiction is so self-revolving that everything outside of it fades is a reductive statement, which does disservice to both fiction and metafiction.

Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979) and Michalopoulou's *Wishbone Memories* (1996) will serve as audible examples that manipulate the interplay between what reality offers to fiction, and how self-reflexive, introverted fiction bestows something to the world that engendered it. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* is "a synthesis of rhetoric, narrative models, and a mosaic of styles" (Krysinski 198). It is the story of a fictive reader, the character *you*, who bought a malfunctioning novel responsible for plummeting him into a consequential series of numerous adventurous readings. Calvino's witty narration has his character-reader jump from novel to novel in an effort to continue reading the first story he began entitled "If on a

Winter Night's a Traveler" by Italo Calvino. Once the protagonist recognizes that, due to a publication error, the book he thought he was reading, is not Calvino's book, he sets off on a journey: on a literary level, he is doomed to read only the beginnings of ten novels of various genres, most of which are interrupted at the moment of climax, while on a fictive-empirical level he is determined to discover who is responsible for the mix up of the books. From his explorations he gains a girlfriend and co-reader called Ludmilla, some knowledge about the act of reading and critiquing novels, and the experience of travelling to a mythic country where he was held prisoner.

The final chapter allows for the entire novel to be interpreted as a Homeric metaphor pertaining to the act of reading fiction. The novel's final lines are:

Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader. A great double bed receives your parallel readings.

Ludmilla closes her book, turns off her light, puts her head back against the pillow, and says, "Turn off your light, too. Aren't you tired of reading?"

And you say, "Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Italo Calvino." (260)

The "you" in this passage cannot be entirely conflated with the reader "you" who held the wrong book in his hands. This "you" is finishing the *right* novel by Calvino. In terms of framing, Calvino presents at least three levels of fictiveness: a. the fiction of the various interrupted novels;

b. the fiction of the reader who reads the discontinued beginnings; and c. another fictive reader, closer to the real one, who reads Calvino's *If on a Winter Night a Traveler*. We may call this reader the *implied reader*, since he seems to fulfill the same function as the theoretical concept introduced by Iser Wolfgang.

Identifying the three levels is almost axiomatic, but where is their defining line situated? Ludmilla belongs to the context of the fictive reader (not the implied) because he meets her when he returns the book and is informed that his copy is defective, as is hers. Ludmilla and the fictive reader are never exposed to the story Calvino wrote, but to Silas Flannery's fiction and to the prank orchestrated by Ermes Manara. An ensuing paradox dangles before *us*, the fourth-level readers: how can Ludmilla participate in two realities? What was Calvino's intention in giving her this metaleptic quality, in raising her from the second degree of fictiveness to the third?

Ludmilla substantiates the "something," the "je ne sais quoi" that any real reader unplants from the fiction she is engaged in and imports into her reality—the *implied-reader-protagonist* brought her from his reading of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Every reader gains something from the act of novelistic reading, thereby smashing the boundaries between fiction and reality, since the very medium of the book she positions in her hands, despite its ungraspability, shares part of itself with the world outside. Ludmilla is a concept, an idea, an epiphany, a revelation that the mind of the reader extracts from the book and commits to memory; she is a piece of literature that escapes her fictional boundaries and becomes fossilized in the real world; she is the "je ne sais quoi" that makes the reading of fiction an addiction, instilling itself forever in the readers' memory, changing them, even minutely, because they have read this book.

In discussing an Italian author at one of his lectures, Calvino states that the world is viewed as a “‘system of systems,’ where each system conditions the others and is conditioned by them” (*Six Memos* 105–6). These systems transgress the boundaries of the fictional and non-fictional, and ooze into the real world, which functions as yet another system in this convoluted stratosphere. Ludmilla is an exemplum of how these multiple fictional worlds condition each other; she is Calvino’s vehicle for displaying “the contemporary novel as an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world” (105).

In Michalopoulou’s *Wishbone Memories*, the influential attribute of fiction is manifested in the trajectory of the protagonist Athena, who, like the Calvinian character, is also a reader. She contributes to the fiction she reads (and translates), while obtaining some kind of self-knowledge in return. A translator of foreign texts for a Greek newspaper, Athena is asked to translate her brother’s novella from English to Greek. Unable to find a publisher, mainly because of the brevity of Elias’s work, Athena decides to expand his collection of short stories by inserting her own narration, a form of diary about her personal life that coincides with the timeline of her translation process. What results are two stories unraveling simultaneously—two distinct voices, one coming from fiction, the other coming from the fiction of the fiction.

Elias deploys magic realism to tell his family’s stories, which are narrated by food. A meatball or a soup, as objective observers, document instances of his family’s life. But Elias both recreates and invents his family. Initially, Athena reports every diversification he makes accusing him of falsehood: “The entire content of the *Parsley Salad* is nothing but a lie. There is no Alexandra in our family. Uncle Foti is still alive. Aunt Isabel only makes French dishes with

béchamel” (89).⁵⁹ But gradually she cherishes Elias’s putative lies more than the real facts she knows. Not only does she come to admit that his alterations are meaningful in ways she was previously blind to, but she also experiences herself slowly slipping into his novel, losing her gravity and being absorbed into the pages she translates. She consciously changes her relationship with every member of her family, seeing each from a new perspective that helps her to understand them and learn more about herself through them. Athena discovers her true love for food, a trade that always ran in the family but, to her, has unmasked itself for the first time in her brother’s fiction. She even quits her job as a translator at a newspaper. Her life changes in the true fashion Elias predicts at the end of his novella: “Books are the most dangerous things in the world. They can put in your head a thousand foolish ideas. And then, everyone blames alcohol. No. Twenty bottles of brandy are harmless compared to satanic books” (414). Athena has gained a new life after reading (and translating) her brother’s fiction, and she attests to the smashing of boundaries: what is fictional can leak out of its fictional world, and can penetrate its outer sphere of immediate reality. *Wishbone Memories* reconciles the two opposing worlds, fiction and reality, by requesting that the reader view life as a novel and the novel as life, for their relation is bidirectional and their influence mutual.

Towards the end of the novel, when Athena becomes a great cook and develops a masterful recipe, she asks the reader to imagine its taste: “Close your eyes. Great. Now chew a wonderful bite from this sweet and sour tentacle. It is soft and warm, despite the fact it remained for days at room temperature...” (363). When she gives an alternative solution for having her readers taste her masterpiece, Athena says: “Another way would be to make a few pounds of this octopus, to cut it in slices and offer it along with the novel. Just imagine what would happen if

⁵⁹ All translations from the original Greek are my own.

the novel was distributed along with a tentacle of *Octopus ax-ax-xra* instead of a bookmark!” (363). With this playful atmosphere, *Wishbone Memories* invites the reader to celebrate fiction’s artificiality, by stretching out a hand and delivering a piece of itself to the real world. If Athena became a new Athena after reading her brother’s fiction, how will the book *Wishbone Memories* affect its audience? Like Ludmilla, Athena’s recipe is the “je ne sais quoi” each reader acquires even after she shuts the book.

Pronouncements which regard (meta)fiction as uninterested in or devoid of the real world, consequently viewing (meta)fiction as proffering nothing to its readers, are puerile efforts to minimize fiction's significance. This is not to deny that language reaches reality through a series of simulacra. It simply acknowledges that reality, or better, a form of reality, will always be nested in every human construct, including language, including literature. It would be exhausting for literature to escape reality, like a turtle wanting to flee its shell, and would be unprecedented for a reader to finish a book without gaining something, like a voyager who travels abroad but returns none the wiser. Unlike other types of fiction, metafiction is cognizant that the reality it contains is not identical to that of the real world, and knows that it does not simply *take* from the world beyond—it also *gives* to the world beyond. Metafiction does not assert itself as nothingness: while it turns within, searching for its own hitherto undisclosed identity, it simultaneously unravels outwardly, bowing before the reader as the real artifact she holds in her hands.

Chapter #5

Twisting the Story: Metaautobiographical Fiction in Karapanou's *Rien ne va plus* and Michalopoulou's *I'd Like*⁶⁰

Margarita Karapanou's *Rien ne va plus* (1991) and Amanda Michalopoulou's *Θα Ήθελα (I'd Like* [2005]) are Greek metaautobiographical fictions, and a new kind of *Kunstlerromane*. They are concerned with women writers who rewrite their life stories by twisting them, allowing their fictional narrators to recount the story of how they wish their life had been. Similar to Freudian dreams, which are *unconscious* wish fulfillments, the retelling of a life story in these metaautobiographical fictions becomes a *conscious* wish fulfillment, one that aims to rewrite the self, not define it. Undoubtedly, the novels are about fictional characters, hence the question of whether their real-fictional lives coincide with the fiction they write is ironic. Nonetheless, each protagonist's quest to weave and twist her autobiography creates a triangular relationship between the past, what is considered fact, and the act of telling: three quintessential concerns of the postmodern period which raise Karapanou and Michalopoulou beyond the domain of their own ethnography and place them among other contemporary writers of their league. Numerous thematic strands could be unpacked in these novels, but the most appropriate for this chapter are those in sync with their metafictional tendency: where does metafiction encounter fictional autobiography, and how do both function in the larger scope of these narratives?

⁶⁰ The title pays tribute to a thought-provoking article by José Angel García Landa entitled "Narrating Narrating: Twisting the Twice-Told Tale," which explores the narratological implications of stories narrated twice: second time narration intensifies the act of telling as well as the content of what is told. The title is also indebted to Ansgar Nünning ("Fictional Metabiographies") who, to my knowledge, is the first to use the term "metaautobiography" and "metabiography."

In order to discuss metaautobiographical fiction, the terms “autobiography,” “autobiographical fiction,” and “fictional autobiography” must first be elucidated. The critical discourse surrounding the predominant term, “autobiography,” is by no means univocal, and many aspects still remain murky and problematic, often including heterogeneous texts. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography* use the term as an umbrella label for life writing which they dissociate from novels;⁶¹ by eliminating the terms “autobiographical fiction,” and “fictional autobiography” they discard the referential and non-referential (or loosely-referential) aspect of the genre, which is accentuated by the other two terms. For my purposes, it is significant to distinguish the three terms since the new terms I introduce need to be set against the conventional notions of autobiography. The rigid typology that I propose is merely suggestive; surely texts are more fluid in belonging to categories. However, my intention is to delineate minute differences in autobiographical expression and this rigidity offers the bedrock for these differences to stand out.

Philippe Lejeune’s seminal work will serve as a catalyst for delving into the newly hybrid genre of metaautobiographical fiction, providing a theoretical framework that, though rudimentary, lies closest to it. Four elemental conditions determine whether or not a novel is an autobiography: a. the *language* is in narrative form or in prose; b. the *subject matter* involves the story of a personality; c. the *position of the narrative* establishes that narrator and protagonist are indistinguishable and the narrative is retrospective; finally, d. the *situation* features a pact between the reader and the text equating the author, a real individual, with the narrator (4). This

⁶¹ In *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*, David Huddart maintains that the term “life writing” is absolved of the derogatory connotations denoted in the term “autobiography,” which has been associated with masculinity and the narratives of the West (2).

fourth criterion is the variable that can turn an autobiography into a fictional autobiography. According to Lejeune, fictional autobiography manifests an ambiguous reading which blends the author's biography with fiction (32), and it is, thus, a work *highly* inspired by the author's life. An obvious example is James Joyce's *The Portrait* (1916). (As Dorrit Cohn indicates, all fiction is autobiographical to a certain extent (30), and the adverb "highly" here punctuates the degree of relation.) For Cohn, on the other hand, in fictional autobiography a narrator recounts her life retrospectively, but the author and the narrator/protagonist are not to be conflated. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is an example of this type. Cohn maintains the term "autobiographical fiction" for novels based on the author's life, and I will comply with her terminology.⁶²

By the same token, it is important to distinguish "metaautobiographical fiction" from "fictional metaautobiography" and even "metaautobiography." The prefix "meta" adds a whimsical tone to these terms, connecting them to discussions on the metafictional novel. Briefly stated, the metafictional novel discloses its fictional makeup, drawing attention to its own construction and artificiality; it breaks the aesthetic illusion by demolishing the imaginary wall between reader and text. "Do not delude yourself," metafiction proclaims, "I am not real, I am an imaginary story." Theoretically, therefore, there cannot be such a term as metaautobiography: if in autobiography there is no manifested illusion, how then can it be broken?⁶³ In traditional autobiography, the author professes to tell the story of his past, as Rousseau artfully does in his

⁶² It is more meaningful to call "autobiographical fiction" a work inspired by the author's life story since the initial word in the phrase is "autobiography," leaving the phrase that begins with "fiction" to incorporate autobiographies that are fictional, where the narrator tells her own biography, which does not coincide with the author's.

⁶³ See also Shari Benstock who claims that autobiography "*covers over* the premises of its construction" (11 emphasis mine).

Confessions (1781), in which the narrator-author Rousseau invites the reader on a trip to his childhood. The problematic assumptions arising in Rousseau, how the reader learns very little about Rousseau's life, the unreliable narrator who omits and conceals, do not transform Rousseau's autobiography into a metaautobiography, since they do not aim at obliterating the frame that accompanies all fictional works, setting them apart from autobiographies in general. Paraphrasing Paul de Man's insightful comment, the interest of autobiography does not lie in its revelation of a true and reliable self-knowledge, but in demonstrating the impossibility of closure and totality both in life and in texts (922). This is a guiding principle in all autobiographies, one that is shared by metafictional texts as well.

Nonetheless, postmodern autobiography has produced metaautobiographies. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977) cannot be called an autobiography in the classical interpretation of the term. In fact, the only reason the reader perceives it to be an autobiography is because of the title, which undermines the novel's content in order to question autobiography as a mode of writing. Implicating the text in the phenomenon it is describing, Barthes's novel erodes the distinction between autobiography and fiction by embodying both; reading the novel either as autobiography or as fiction would "risk repressing the full ambivalence of Barthes's writing ... whereby to read it as fictional depends on reading ... [it] as non-fictional" (Jefferson 114).⁶⁴ A similar example is Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) whose title prepares the reader for both an autobiography and a biography in the same text. As these texts become self-reflexive of their genre and the mode of writing they employ, they

⁶⁴ Also capturing this ambivalence of the text, Smith and Watson note that it enacts both "an autobiographical and an antiautobiographical engagement" (208).

unquestionably belong to a meta-level of autobiography.⁶⁵ Moreover, autobiographies which employ glaring metafictional devices can also be labeled metaautobiographies. *Maus* (1986/1991) by Art Spiegelman is a graphic memoir replete with metafictional techniques. *Logicomix* (2008) by Apostolos Doxiadis and *Ελένη Η ο Κανένας* (*Eleni or Nobody* [1998]) are fictional biographies with metafictional elements that turn them into metabiographies.⁶⁶ In *Maus* the cartoon artist Art Spiegelman interviews his father in order to narrate their family's past. Art Spiegelman the character narrates the story of his father surviving the Holocaust as an embedded narrative superseded by the larger frame of him drawing the cartoons and engaging in the process of making the graphic novel. Drawings of the artist drawing his comic strips conflate the creator with his artwork and make this autobiography a metaautobiography.

Similarly, the terms “fictional metaautobiography” and “metaautobiographical fiction,” introduce their own metaization to the traditional terms. In fictional metaautobiography a

⁶⁵ Even though, *autofiction* —a term coined by the French fiction-writer and essayist Serge Doubrovsky—might resonate as a similar term, “metaautobiography” can be used more generically. Autofiction is *faux-autobiography*. Traversing Philippe Lejeune's proposition that in autobiography the name of the character and the name of the author are one and the same, autofictions use the name of the author in order to produce a fictionalized version of autobiography. As such, I consider autofiction a type of metaautobiography placed next to metaautobiographical fiction and fictional metaautobiography. For more information on autofiction see Alex Hughes. (It is also worth mentioning that Doubrovsky's term is largely ambiguous and interpreted differently by various scholars. See for example Arnaud Schmitt “Making the Case for Self-narration against Autofiction.”)

⁶⁶ In *Elusive Subjects: Biography as Gendered Metafiction*, Susanna Scarparo explores the genre of female “metabiographies” by calling them “biographies as metafiction,” as her title suggests. She examines four novels by women authors, who write fictional biographies of either real historical or fictional women in an endeavor to reinvent, re-imagine, and rearticulate their silent past.

narrator-writer writes her own biography in a metafictional way (Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* [1759]), whereas "metaautobiographical fiction" should refer to novels in which a narrator-writer writes a disguised version of her life story while her "real life" is also simultaneously narrated independent of her.

Metaautobiographical fiction, which, to my knowledge, is a purely postmodern phenomenon, presupposes a novel-within-the-novel or a *mise-en-abyme* structure, so that the two realities, the autobiographical fiction written by the character and the fictional world of the character-writer, are either clearly demarcated or loosely interconnected. Examples of metaautobiographical fiction become all the more popular in the last two decades, but have a substantial history in the postmodern tradition. Dorris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (1985) are two obvious cases of the genre. I am using the term metaautobiographical fiction to underscore that the life of the character-writer and the life of the character he/she is fashioning illuminate one another—I intend to exclude those novels in which a fictional writer writes a novel that does not derive from her own life experiences ("Marshlands" [1894] *The Counterfeiters* [1925]), *At Swim Two Birds* [1939]), or those in which the writing of the novel affects the way a fictional writer's own life is being constituted (*Malone Dies* [1956]). In metaautobiographies, the life experiences of a character-artist are reworked through art, and there is a great interdependence between the artist who crafts and the character who is crafted.

In Sue Miller's *The Lake Shore Limited* (2010), a playwright re-imagines her relation with her deceased boyfriend who was killed on 9/11; her past is reinvented on the stage, after she has meddled with its details, and when she becomes the spectator of both her art and her life, she admits to understanding a part of herself that she was unable to be reconciled prior to having

transformed it into an art form: “You helped me understand why I wrote it” admits Billy, the playwright, to the main actor who disguisedly personifies her in the play, allowing her fiction and her life to converge and unite (288).

A curious case of metaautobiographical fiction is Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988), where the artist is not a writer, but a painter, and the embedded artwork is not featured in a written medium, but in plastic art. Elaine’s paintings function similarly to the novel-within-the-novel structure, but are objects instead. They are delivered to the reader through *ekphrasis*, that is their visual representation is only possible via description. As a collective corpus, her paintings tell the biography of their painter, if only one knew how to read them. They recreate Elaine’s past with a twist; they are never accurate or realistic pictorials of an event or a person in the past, but they embody an experience comingled with desires that either happened or did not happen, entwined with the potentiality of what something would be if it was not exactly what it is. “This is the kind of thing we [artists] do to assuage pain,” Elaine declares, allowing her artwork to take control of how the wounds of the past may be healed in the present (246).

<p><i>autobiography:</i></p> <p>author = narrator = protagonist</p> <p>Jacque Rousseau's <i>Confessions</i> George Sand's <i>Story of My Life</i></p>	<p><i>fictional autobiography:</i></p> <p>narrator = protagonist</p> <p>Charlotte Brontë's <i>Jane Eyre</i> Christa Wolf's <i>Cassandra</i></p>	<p><i>autobiographical fiction:</i></p> <p>author ≈ narrator = protagonist</p> <p>James Joyce's <i>The Portrait</i> Marcel Proust's <i>In Search of Lost Time</i></p>
<p><i>metaautobiography:</i></p> <p>autobiography + metafiction</p> <p>Gertrude Stein's <i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i> Roland Barthes's <i>Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes</i> Art Spiegelman's <i>Maus</i></p>	<p><i>fictional metaautobiography:</i></p> <p>fictional narrator = fictional protagonist + metafiction</p> <p>Laurence Sterne's <i>Tristram Shandy</i> Salman Rushdie's <i>Midnight's Children</i></p>	<p><i>metaautobiographical fiction:</i></p> <p>fictional author ≈ fictional narrator = fictional protagonist</p> <p>Margarita Karapanou's <i>Rien ne va plus</i> Amanda Michalopoulou's <i>I'd Like</i> Doris Lessing's <i>The Golden Notebook</i> Margaret Atwood's <i>The Blind Assassin</i> and <i>Cat's Eye</i> Sue Millers' <i>The Lake Shore Limited</i></p>

Table. 2. Forms of Autobiography

Margarita Karapanou's *Rien ne va plus* and Amanda Michalopoulou's *I'd Like* are also glaring examples of metaautobiographies, and this chapter explores them in great detail. But before I turn my attention to the novels themselves, a few words are to be devoted to the relation between metafiction and autobiography as the making for a new hybrid genre. The conjuncture of metafiction and autobiography is not accidental and it is certainly more significant than one would initially believe. It is an ineluctable amalgamation as natural as the marriage of historiography and metafiction⁶⁷—another hybrid invention of postmodernism—both declaring the constructedness of every narrative, including history and autobiography, two modes of writing that are deemed to be based on facts. Postmodernism unmasks that writing history, writing the past and the self, does not offer direct access to these moments or subjects. As in the case of historiographic metafiction, metaautobiographies contest the notion of the reactualization

⁶⁷ See Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.

of personal past. Past events are not accessed in order to be revived through representation, but in order to be constructed, to be given meaning through the medium of language.⁶⁸ The past cannot be discovered in its totality, but through our intervention, it is doomed to change. As Georges Gusdorf maintains: “[The] past is the past, it cannot return to dwell in the present except at the cost of a complete falsification” (40). Memory, the medium that re-imagines the past, is a displaced interpretation: it reinterprets it in a different temporality by bringing it to the present, and as such the past can never be recovered (Smith and Watson 22).

The influence of autobiography is one of the numerous reasons metafiction flourishes during the postmodern era. Beginning with modernism with its Freudian introspection and its “make-it-new” slogan, the twentieth century embraces autobiographical fiction more than any prior period. Consequentially, postmodernism turns autobiography into a master-trope being preoccupied with all forms of self-exploration. Espousing Barbara Johnson’s observation that the self analyzes itself, man studies man, thought thinks about thought, language speaks about language (xvi), and—one may add—literature writes about literature, fiction in postmodernism writes its own biography. Postmodern metafiction is therefore nothing but an autobiography of its own fiction, embodying autobiography’s inwardness, its quest for the exploration of the self, and its incessant aspiration to discover its own nature.

The field of autobiography provides nodal points concerning the intersection of writing and selfhood, a theme that is carried over most prominently in metafictional novels. Steve Kellman coined the term self-begetting novel to refer to texts whose endings point to their beginning, thereby revealing their creation process. He applies the term mostly to modernist

⁶⁸ With respect to historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon notes: “Past events are given *meaning*, not *existence* by their representation in history” (84).

autobiographical fictions, interconnecting the creation of the novel with the creation of the self. In such fictions, Kellman claims, writing transcends the self into existence: “scribo ergo sum” (5). In spite of the metafictional novel’s indebtedness to the self-begetting novels of the modernist period, the postmodern self-begetting novel separates the two biographical strings that hold it together: while the novel writes its own biography forming its existence through the act of being written, the writer who documents her biography does not seek an ontological affirmation, but, for her, writing becomes a form of *rewriting the self*.

While traditional autobiography unfolds in three main phases “self-life-writing”—a preoccupation with “bio,” writing life; a preoccupation with “auto,” writing the self; a preoccupation with “graphe,” writing the act of writing (Olney 6)—metaautobiographies enter into a fourth realm: “graphe” as the act of (re)constituting the self (Hampel 66). Postmodern autobiographies, or metaautobiographies, reject the concept of “identity characterized by completeness, causality, linearity, order” (89) and focus on the recreation of the self inside a world of language. As Smith and Watson note:

The true self can never be discovered, unmasked, or revealed because its core is a *mise-en-abîme*, an infinite regress. The origin and history of the self, then, are fictions, although the history of utterances of that fiction can be traced. Because the self is split and fragmented, it can no longer be conceptualized as unitary (206).

As the long-held belief that language as a tool of expression is being subverted in the second half of the twentieth century, language constructs the subject in its own process of being constructed, and metaautobiographies bring this aspect to the forefront.

It is within this larger postmodern impulse that Karapanou's and Michalopoulou's metaautobiographical fictions operate.⁶⁹ Stepping outside of their national literary domains, both Karapanou and Michalopoulou leave questions of "Greekness" behind them—something that the Greek reading public cannot unreservedly withstand. In an interview, Michalopoulou voices this concern with respect to Karapanou's work, but her comment applies to her own case as well: "I am afraid Greek literature looks always for ethnic characteristics, for more 'Greekness' and Karapanou goes beyond Greekness. She is not at all interested in that stuff. Her *Hydra* is primarily a psychological landscape" (Plum).⁷⁰ If Karapanou's *Hydra* is a psychological

⁶⁹ The question first put forth by Gregory Jusdanis in 1987 of whether there is Greek postmodernism or not, is far outdated by now. A number of critics have convincingly claimed that Greek postmodernism is not a chimera (Katsan; Kefala; Mackridge and Yannakakis; Tziouvas).

⁷⁰ On a discussion of how Karapanou incarnates questions of Greekness, especially in her first novel, see Karen Van Dyck *Kassandra and the Censors*. In her diaries, *Η ζωή είναι αγρίως απίθανη* (*Life is Wildly Improbable* [2008]), Karapanou cursorily describes the Greek novel as devoid of life, devoid of the ambiguities and conflicting scenarios that make up life. "The greatest secret of every good book [is ambiguity]. Parallel stories, emotions, contradictions. Life itself. This is what is missing from the entire Greek literary tradition. *Ambiguity*. Everything is black or white, good or bad, Rightists or communists. *No*. It is not at all like that" (my translation). «Το μεγάλο μυστικό κάθε καλού βιβλίου [το διαφορούμενο]. Ταυτόχρονες καταστάσεις, αισθήματα, αντιθέσεις ταυτόχρονες. Η ζωή η ίδια. Αυτό λείπει από όλη την ελληνική λογοτεχνία. *Το διαφορούμενο*. Όλα είναι άσπρα–μαύρα. Καλοί–κακοί. Δεξιό–κουμμουνιστές. *Όχι*. Δεν είναι έτσι καθόλου» (339–40). Nonetheless, while both Michalopoulou and Karapanou write against the Greek literary tradition, they also write within it.

landscape, and *Rien ne va plus* is the apex where this psychological landscape encounters metafiction, Michalopoulou's *Hydra* is the metafictional landscape. All of her novels employ metafiction and most of her characters, who find themselves amidst texts and textual fragments, reconstruct their lives either through the act of writing or reading.⁷¹

Both *Rien ne va plus* and *I'd Like* are about a woman writer writing fiction inspired by events in her life, and her fiction bears the same title as the reader's book.⁷² Only at the very end, in the last chapter, is the reader able to distinguish the fiction these women write from the fictional lives Karapanou and Michalopoulou crafted for them. In *Rien ne va plus*, the reader is ushered into the novel-within-the-novel without any indication that part one is a fictional reworking of Louisa's (the protagonist's) autobiography. It unravels the erotic—almost pornographic—story of a woman married to Alkis, an eccentric man both in his sexual ways and in his everyday life. Louisa is presented as the victim of a psychologically oppressive relationship, in which she is always benign, and obedient to her husband's peculiar wishes, while he is utterly egocentric seeking to fulfill even his most subtle needs and desires. Louisa's victimization is adumbrated in the portrayal of her husband's cat. Alkis, a veterinarian, cuts off Caesar's nails so that he will not scratch the furniture and damage the house. Louisa often

⁷¹ Although Karapanou's metafiction is not as experimental as Michalopoulou's, in her diaries, she admits being influenced by precursors of the metafictional novel, such as the nouveau roman and especially Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (*Η ζωή είναι αγρίως απίθανη* [*Life is Wildly Improbable*], 261). Moreover, in an earlier novel, Karapanou explores topics related to the metafictional novel. In *Ο Υπνοβάτης* (*The Sleepwalker* [1985]) all main characters are artists, who, undergoing their own emotional and psychological turmoil, find themselves at a dearth of creativity, while they often voice their take on art and its process.

⁷² An adjacent topic to metaautobiographies is the portrait of the artist writing a novel. For more on this and how it is manifested in contemporary Greek novels, see Angela Kastrinaki and Argiro Mantoglou.

ponders how the cat could ever survive outside of Alkis's home, since Caesar has been deprived of his ability to hunt for food and to protect himself from predators; but like Louisa, Caesar's sole purpose is to painstakingly serve Alkis for the rest of his life. The morose portrait of the husband painted in part one is inverted in part three, where the reader encounters a docile and forbearing Alkis, abused by the lies and eccentricities of his capricious wife. Louisa abandons him several times, admits to abhorring him, and terminates her pregnancy so that he will not be happy, despite the fact that she has also cherished the idea of motherhood.⁷³ Towards the end of the book, Louisa confesses to Alkis how she finished a novel in which she depicted an altered version of their relationship. The reader can now put the texts into perspective, acknowledging that part one is a novel-within-the-novel, while part three offers a reality once removed. While part one and three are narrated in first person, by the mirror images of double-Louisa, the last two chapters introduce a third-person narrative, an omniscient narrator whom we must assume responsible for the entire story. Part three, then, appears as yet another fiction inside the fiction of this narrator.

Karapanou's influence on Michalopoulou is not only self-evident in her novels, but Michalopoulou has often expressed Karapanou's instrumental role in her writing. *I'd Like* and *Rien ne va plus* share many commonalities both in style and in thematization, but most importantly they are navigated by the metafictional impetus of fictional autobiography.⁷⁴ *I'd Like* is composed of thirteen short stories, which at first glance appear loosely connected with

⁷³ For a detailed discussion on the polarity of male versus female roles in the novel, see Sophia Voulgari who postulates that the prototypical, submissive woman of part one is being reawakened in part two in order to live life anew, ready to face "herself and man" («τον εαυτό της και τον άντρα,» my translation, 294).

⁷⁴ Metaautobiographical fiction owes as much to autobiographical fiction as to fictional autobiography.

only common themes, metaphors, and images knitting them together. As the narratives progress, a more lucid image of a larger story emerges, as if the reader holds a 3-D picture and, unless she crosses her eyes, will never see the second, more magnificent illustration. The final story brings together the pieces of the puzzle and reveals the novel's cyclical pattern. Stella, the overarching protagonist, recounts in an evasive way the tragedy of her family: her mother's paralyzing accident; her father's abandonment of the family to be with a woman much younger than her mother; and her sister's death at twenty-one in a car accident. Stella's stories are narrated in the first, second, or third person, are dominated by characters who are writers or literary critics, and function as uniquely crafted pebbles in the orchestration of this literary mosaic. The ostensible polyphony of *I'd Like* disguises Stella's voice, which, in light of the last chapter, imbues every single story. The last chapter reveals, on the one hand, those aspects of Stella's life that have woven themselves into her fabricated stories, and, on the other hand, how she manipulated her hypothetical-real experiences in order to reshape and reinvent them so that they would no longer pertain to their "real" counterparts.

Metaautobiography and the Revelation of Writing

Rien ne va plus and *I'd Like* are *revisionist* metaautobiographical fictions, because they "question and revise the official biographical record of the respective biographies" (Nünning, "Fictional Metabiographies" 199). Both fictional writers utilize the experiences of their past to conjure up a fictional world which will ultimately rewrite and redeem them; for one cannot change the past unless she writes about it. Both women-writers finish their novels shedding a part of themselves, so that they can go on living. A schism of the self occurs at the moment of writing and *through* rewriting. Stella dissects herself and puts a different piece in each of her stories, while Louisa

tears herself apart, leaving one self entrapped in her fiction, when she consciously chooses a different ending from the one offered in her novel. While Louisa's fictional representation, Alkis, commits suicide in the novel-within-the-novel—an omen which is meant to foreshadow her own suicide—Louisa decides not to go through with hers. She kills herself once through Alkis and, by way of metalepsis, it proves sufficient to reawaken her. It is true that the reader is not invited to glance at Louisa's far future; however, by changing the past, Louisa evidently manages to affect the future since not committing suicide is a gift bestowed to her by the act of writing.

In its totality, *Rien ne va plus* defies the title's definition, for Louisa is able to transmogrify both personal history and to refigure her future. “Rien ne va plus” refers to the phrase pronounced by the croupier at the roulette table, the moment the player is unable to make any moves, neither withdraw from the game nor gamble for more. For Louisa, it is a symbolic image of fate: when man, frozen between past and future, is incapable of acting in order to divert future circumstances. In conventional logic, the past is irreversible, impervious to any change, and in this case the future is too: “It's the moment when you can't affect the future anymore, for better or worse” (18).⁷⁵ However, through the power of writing, Louisa reformulates herself and liberates herself from both what happened and what will have happened.⁷⁶ The fictional representation of Alkis in the novel-within-the-novel absolves Louisa of her misbehavior, which now presides over her consciousness as someone else's misdoing. Louisa's remorse is adumbrated implicitly, through the paralysis, isolation, and withdrawal dominating her life after her break-up with Alkis, all of which is placed in opposition to her artistic productivity—she

⁷⁵ «Είναι η στιγμή, στο παιχνίδι, που δεν μπορείς να επηρεάσεις πια το μέλλον, είτε θετικά, είτε αρνητικά» (32).

⁷⁶ More on “self-formation” and how it preoccupies the rest of Karapanou's fiction see Faubion, Fragopoulos (“Violence and Evasion,”) and Iakovidou.

completes her novel. The content of her novel, along with her suicidal inclination and the emphatic quote from part two “Moments of hopelessness should always be transformed into creation,” remain evidence of her possible reexamination (67).⁷⁷ Louisa revises the story of her life as wishful invention, she the victim and Alkis the victimizer, knowing all along that the character of Alkis is truly a representation of herself. In an enlightening article on *Rien ne va plus*, Sophia Voulgari underlines the revelatory effects of fiction-writing, endorsing that although autobiographical writing may embellish and distort life, it nonetheless embodies truths and desires buried in the unconscious, which, after all, expose the subject’s hidden self (298). Louisa’s portrayal through Alkis offers a peek into her unconscious: her remorse and intimate desires as inverted objects. “In reshuffling our past we believe to determine the future” (Tziovas *H Κυριαρχία της Νεωτερικότητας*) and Louisa achieves it through novel writing.⁷⁸ The ending is therefore in light of optimism, one which foretells Karapanou’s next novel, *Nai (Yes [1999])*, which involves a character who, like Louisa, responds affirmatively to life by rejecting suicide.

In *I’d Like*, Stella discovers a form of redemption through her own splintering in her art-creation. In a micro level, through writing, she forgives those who caused her suffering, such as her father and her father’s mistress, whereas in a macro level, writing becomes the only means by which she may fathom the events in her life. One of her characters discovers he is a character in fiction and while he confronts his creator on the phone, the latter admits to what Stella must have as an artistic guiding principle: “For the purposes of the book he had learned to split

⁷⁷ «Πρέπει πάντα, οι στιγμές της απελπισίας να μετατρέπονται σε δημιουργία» (68).

⁷⁸ “In reshuffling our past we believe to determine the future and this notion summarizes the relationship between modernity and identity” «Ανακατασκευάζοντας το παρελθόν έχουμε την αίσθηση ότι προεξοφλούμε το μέλλον και ενδεχομένως αυτή η ιδέα συνοψίζει τη σχέση της νεωτερικότητας με την ταυτότητά μας.» (Tziovas *H Κυριαρχία της Νεωτερικότητας*)

himself down the middle, to do what he wanted to do and what he ought to do at the same time. ‘It’s an important skill,’ he said, ‘especially when you’re faced with tragedy. You can’t change reality, but you can split yourself into two’” (62).⁷⁹ By tearing up one’s self, one part lives what happened and the other(s) its what-if projections in an enchanted, fictional universe. Stella’s novel splinters her again and again in order to help her penetrate deeper into her fiction, while simultaneously assisting her to permeate the nebulous veil of her reality. Perhaps, as George Fragopoulos claims in “*I’d Like by Amanda Michalopoulou*,” this is the endless game of singularity: constantly being torn apart and being reformulated.

In “*Ζόντια*,” (“Teef”) Stella’s fragmentation co-occurs with her forgiving of her father’s mistress. The deranged woman of “*Ζόντια*” is a projection of the sisters’ stepmother, a projection of Stella, and a means by which both sisters absolve their past. Stella’s sister, Christina, who in one of the chapters is presented reading an older version of Stella’s novel giving her critical advice, feels offended by Stella’s portrayal of their family and admonishes her to use antimetathesis, mixing up the real and fictional characters. Christina exhorts Stella regarding the formation of the fictional character of their stepmother: “You have to push things to extremes. Make her go crazy when she gives birth to that little brat. Make her hair fall out. Or her teeth” (118).⁸⁰ While Stella follows her sister’s suggestions, she shows a great deal of compassion to the “other woman,” having her saved from the sanatorium by the student who takes care of her. Stella’s kindheartedness is designated through the caring portrayal of the

⁷⁹ «Για τις ανάγκες του βιβλίου έμαθε να χωρίζει τον εαυτό του στη μέση και να κάνει αυτό που θέλει και αυτό που πρέπει. “Είναι πολύ σημαντικό, ιδίως όταν συμβαίνουν τραγωδίες,” είπε. “Δεν μπορείς ν’ αλλάξεις τη πραγματικότητα, αλλά μπορείς να σχιστείς στα δύο”» (103).

⁸⁰ «Το θέμα είναι να φτάσεις στα άκρα, να τη βάλεις να τρελαίνεται μόλις γεννήσει αυτό το σκατόπαιδο. Να πέφτουν τα δόντια της. Ή, ξέρω γω, τα μαλλιά της» (187).

student in her novel, who represents both Stella and Christina. Christina's image emerges at the end of the story as the student drives the woman away from the clinic in Christina's damaged car after her fatal accident. Even though Christina dies being spiteful to their father's mistress, through Stella's empathy and through Stella's fiction, Christina's resentment is abated posthumously—Stella's wish is being fulfilled through her fiction. Last but not least, the deranged woman represents Stella, who identifies with her father's mistress, having been involved with a married man. Stella impersonates both the victim and the victimizer in this story, and through her fiction, which tears her apart in order to have her probe into the past and transform it, she redeems and is being redeemed.

Besides its redemptive effects, art for Stella proffers a way of reading life. Even in its cyclical, fragmented, and non-linear form, her novel molds and frames reality in ways that only narratives are capable of effecting. In the metafictional novels of Calvino, Borges, and Paul Auster, who are inspirational authors in all of Michalopoulou's fiction, narratives are deprived of beginnings and ends because life does not consist of such delimited spaces; they showcase instead a cyclical pattern, which "stresses narrative processing rather than narrative closure and totalization" (Kakavoulia 119). This circular motion in *I'd Like*—also shared by *Rien ne va plus*—allows for repetition "with re-vision, a return to the past that enables a new future" (Greene 16). Nonetheless, the act of creation for Stella, and by implication for Michalopoulou, provides the means by which reality becomes malleable: "My idea is that if she writes her stories, if she actually sits down and reinvents her life through writing, she will find peace, at last," says Michalopoulou when asked about the art of writing in *I'd Like* (Carter). By filtering the past through language and by contriving stories, Stella manages to comprehend the incomprehensible. The entropic world of experience can only be fathomed if turned into a story; otherwise it

remains ungraspable, dominated by disorder without categorization, classification, or regularity. Stella self-consciously chooses narratives to organize and reconstitute reality; telling means comprehending through reformulating. I shall borrow a quote from *Πριγκίπισσα Σάβρα* (*Princess Lizard* [2007]) which is most pertinent in this context, since no character in *I'd Like* articulates it so succinctly and indecorously: “Certain issues are straightened out only if you write about them” (194).⁸¹

In an illuminating discussion on Greek postmodernism, Tziovas explains a postmodern trait which at first glance would seem contrary to the above argument: “Postmodern fiction is neither in search of factual truths nor of the story’s meaning, but instead accepts the ineluctable fragmentation of the modern world, the defeat of the self in his attempt to change the future or give meaning to his past.”⁸² Karapanou and Micahlopoulou have discovered a *quantum* way out of this predicament, through the writing of fiction, which subverts the dynamics of what can and what cannot be achieved. Louisa and Stella are not after defining the self or making sense of a given past; instead they rewrite the self through language and by implication they recreate (a) new (multiple) past(s). In *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium*, Nicoline Timmer proposes that narratives organize experience, and the self is conceptualized “as language user, or: as a *storyteller*” (41). “Instead of just concluding or simply positing that we are mediated and fractured, the focus is on how we still *do* try to make sense of our selves, *even when* fractured and mediated” (42). Amidst their

⁸¹ My translation. «Ορισμένα θέματα μπαίνουν σε τάξη, μόνο αν γράψεις γι’ αυτά» (194).

⁸² My translation. «[Τα μεταμοντέρνα μυθιστορήματα δεν] αναζητούν πια την αλήθεια των γεγονότων ή το νόημα της ιστορίας, αλλά παραδέχονται τον αναπόφευκτο κατακερματισμό του σύγχρονου κόσμου, την ήττα του ατόμου στην προσπάθειά του να αλλάξει το μέλλον του ή να δώσει νόημα στο παρελθόν του» (*Palimpsest* 270).

fragmented selves, the only way to make sense of the past is to rewrite it, and the only way to fathom the self is through self-narration and fictionalization.

An obvious implication of self-(re)invention is the fact that it ceases to raise questions of memory as an invocation of the past. The conscious reconfiguration of the past and the self into a new multiplicity undermines the premise that autobiography should depend upon the guidance of memory. Memories are not accurate or inaccurate, verifiable or unverifiable, but are events that give access to moments that, in turn, can produce *alternative* memories. In this respect, memories do not derive from experience, but may be created independently of them. Stella is being exonerated from her past not merely by reshaping a version of it, but mostly by substituting for it a multifarious alternate reality. Certain stories show an alternative universe, which could only exist independently of others. The first story of the collection demonstrates the what-if scenario of her parents never having children; what their lives would look like. Stella imagines them devoted to their careers, their infertile marriage proving fertile in their artistic creations—her mother is a painter and her father an unsuccessful writer—and their love enduring even in old age.⁸³ In another story, Stella portrays two sisters growing old together, one dying in a car accident, the other of cancer, thereby simulating the tragic events in her life but projecting them far into the future. The multifariousness of the stories points to a *quantum* cosmos, rich

⁸³ The first story is seemingly divorced from the others, whereas it in fact embodies the centripetal force which converges all of them together. When, with a frantic sensibility, the unnamed woman flees from her quotidian life and without realizing it she wakes up in Paris, she subconsciously seeks a fresh start: to relive her love with her husband in the city where it was first kindled. The story ends with her husband's consent in starting anew. The rest of the stories, therefore, portray the potential of their fresh start, a less appealing life than the one they initially shared, since they grow increasingly apart. In addition, the first story points to the end and the final story to the beginning, when the narrator picks up the red beret from Christina's stretcher as she lies dead after the crash.

with multiple universes, each one with its own reality, certain ones contradicting the existing reality that Stella lived, but all of them co-occurring and coinciding: a broken-up and fragmented self is shown in a broken-up and fragmented universe, inside a broken-up and fragmented text (modified from Hampel 63).⁸⁴ For Stella, and for Louisa, the self is not composed only of its past experiences and memories, as Freudian psychology would attest, but of both everything that happened and did not happen, and as such the self will forever remain fragmentary, always dispersed in its vertiginous realities whether old or yet unfulfilled.

It is under the conceptual sediment of what-ifs that *I'd Like* operates as a title and the stories as wishful inventions. The title functions as a metarepresentation for the content of most of the stories (with the exception of the mother's and sister's accidents, which are the two events Stella tries to reconcile throughout her fiction).⁸⁵ "I'd like" is the cognitive "tag" or frame that envelops the fictional world of each story. Stella voices through her fiction that she *would like* to grow old with her sister, she *would like* to have been more empathetic to their father's mistress, she *would like* Christina to have forgiven their father's mistress, etc. As one of Stella's characters points out, "I'd like" brings one closer to the realization that wishes remain unconsummated: "'I'd Like.' How stupid, how overly refined and polite—so many trampled wishes in two little words. If I really wanted them to come true, I would have used the simple,

⁸⁴ As Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* has observed: "This is ... precisely the postmodern condition: an anarchic landscape of worlds in plural" (37); "postmodern fiction *does* hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality now more than ever before, is plural" (39).

⁸⁵ For more information on metarepresentation and how it is employed by cognitive theorists, see Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction*.

concise verb ‘want’ ... You know what I’d like? To accept the idea that longing simply exists” (15–6).⁸⁶ Inside fiction, however, wishes may come as close as possible to being fulfilled.

Both *Rien ne va plus* and *I’d Like* understand the self in terms of fragmentation, discontinuity, and alterity, but also in terms of relationality. As Nancy K. Miller has claimed in an illuminating article, autobiographies constitute the self through its positioning to the other: “representing the other—the one who is not us, even the one against whom we understand who we might be—also allows us to perform that which is most us.” Louisa’s and Stella’s self-constructions are contingent upon their interrelations with living or dead others, and it is upon this bedrock that their fictional autobiographies form themselves in a re-imagined universe of potentialities and infinite concurrencies. Stella’s autobiographical novel is written in the shadow of her sister’s death, and Louisa’s against the shadow of Alkis. The “other” incarnates their fictional selves in order to represent them vicariously, and they, in turn, rethink themselves through the mirror of otherness.

Metafiction and Metaautobiography

Rien ne va plus and *I’d Like* are suffused by themes that reinforce and buttress their metafictional tendency. In *Rien ne va plus* the theme of lying is featured most predominantly, while Michalopoulou chooses mundane yet lyrical images and metaphors that dramatize the metafictionality of the novel, and furnish it with aesthetic coherence. Louisa is a pathological liar and when she vociferously expresses her ideology of lying, she voices what the metafictional

⁸⁶ «‘Θα ήθελα’ τι κουτό, σπάταλα ευγενικό και παρηγορητικό—τόσες τσαλαπατημένες ευχές σε μία λέξη. Αν ήθελα να πραγματοποιηθούν, θα χρησιμοποιούσα το απλό και κοφτό ρήμα ‘θέλω’ ... Ξέρεις τι θα ήθελα; Να συμφιλιωθώ με την ιδέα ότι οι επιθυμίες απλώς υπάρχουν» (35).

novel would like to dictate to its readers. “I told you more innocent lies, too. You might ask if I liked some vase in a shop window, and I’d say no, even if I liked it a lot” (167).⁸⁷ The first time she speaks to Alkis on the phone after their divorce, she lets loose a torrent of language that seems peculiar in its childlike form and its argumentation. Louisa’s monologue, however, radiates with meaning, once she is perceived as the personifying voice of the novel. Alkis and Louisa take the shape of the reader and the text respectively, and suddenly the simplicity of the language and the extremity of her arguments are transposed to a metafictional realm. “Why did I tell so many lies? I don’t know. I only enjoyed lying to you. To everyone else I always told the truth. Perhaps it was because those lies gave life a phantasmagorical glow. I could turn each day into fireworks, shape it however I wanted, as if I were God” (168).⁸⁸ It is the novel speaking to its readers through Louisa’s voice, admitting to its fabrications, its lies, its formulation. Its creator is a godlike entity who improvises and invents.

To embellish reality with makeup, with silk and royal purple, isn’t that what we all should be doing? Beneath the life we live every day the silk and the purple are hiding, waiting for us. A person just has to dare to throw off his everyday clothes, to rip them off and to put on the silk and purple that exist, I know it. But we’re the ones who cover them

⁸⁷ «Σου έλεγα και ψέματα ακόμη πιο αθώα. Με ρώταγες: ‘Σου αρέσει αυτό το βάζο στη βιτρίνα;’ Και σου απαντούσα: ‘Όχι’, ενώ μου άρεσε πολύ» (166).

⁸⁸ «Γιατί έλεγα τόσα ψέματα; Δεν ξέρω. Μόνον σ’ εσένα μου άρεσε να λέω τόσα ψέματα. Στους άλλους, έλεγα πάντα την αλήθεια. Ίσως, γιατί η ζωή, με το ψέμα, έπαιρνε μια λάμψη φαντασμαγορική, έπλαθα την κάθε μέρα όπως την ήθελα εγώ, σαν να ήμουν ο Θεός, την έφτιαχνα ένα πυροτέχνημα» (167).

up. Out of boredom, indifference, fear. Mostly fear. So right from the first moment I met you, *my lies were always the truth...* (167–8 emphasis mine)⁸⁹

As her monologue progresses, Louisa becomes more and more the vehicle through which the novel substantiates its beliefs. Here Karapanou valorizes the act of novelistic creation, which ascends beyond such binary oppositions as truth versus lies, fact versus fiction. Art embellishes reality in order to strip it from its excesses and reinstate its embellishments. Art lies, and “lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art” (Wilde 37). Louisa reaches the climax when she asserts that reality can never be closer to truth but in the form of a lie: “true reality is liquid like a stream, pure and treacherous like a desert wind, real only when it’s false” (169).⁹⁰ In addition to manifesting the fluidity and deconstruction of binary oppositions such as autobiography–fiction, love–hatred, male–female (Voulgari 296), this oxymoron encapsulates the quintessential postmodern dictum (one unequivocally shared by *I’d Like*): reality, a fluid and inconceivable substance, can only be shaped through the medium of language; it can be given meaning, it can be constructed only through narratives, albeit narratives that operate under the vicious mask of fiction, which connotes a lie.

⁸⁹ «Το να στολίζεις την πραγματικότητα με φτιασιδία, με μετάξι και πορφύρα, αυτό δεν θάπρεπε να το κάνουν όλοι; Γιατί κάτω από αυτή την ζωή που ζούμε καθημερινά, κρύβονται το μετάξι και η πορφύρα, και μας περιμένουν. Αρκεί να τολμήσει κανείς να πετάξει από πάνω του τα καθημερινά του ρούχα, να τα ξεσκίσει από πάνω του, και να τολμήσει να φορέσει το μετάξι και την πορφύρα που υπάρχουνε, εγώ το ξέρω. Αλλά εμείς είμαστε αυτοί που τα σκεπάζουμε. Από ανία, αδιαφορία, φόβο. Ιδίως φόβο. *Αρα τα ψέματά μου ήταν πάντα η αλήθεια ...* » (167–8).

⁹⁰ «[Η] πραγματικότητα η αληθινή είναι ρευστή σαν ρυάκι, αγνή και ύπουλη σαν τον σιμόν της ερήμου, πραγματική μόνον όταν είναι ψεύτικη» (168).

The most overt references to metafiction in *Rien ne va plus* are given through readings of two famous paintings: Delvaux's "The Hands" and Giorgione's "La Tempesta." In Delvaux's painting, Louisa sees within its fictional frame the painter's own hands participating as objects in the world they are painting. "La Tempesta" appears more than once: the first time, it establishes an identification between Louisa and the mother child-bearer of the woman in the painting; the second, it decorates the final pages of the novel with a twist—Louisa dreams she enters the painting and, mesmerized by its tranquility, she falls asleep therein. While "The Hands" signifies Karapanou's and Louisa's shadows percolating through their texts, reminding the reader of the creative hands that weaved and composed them, "La Tempesta" betokens a Louisa who finds peace by cohabitating a world of fiction with her anti-self. Thus, the symbolism of *Rien ne va plus* is re-doubled once more through the employment of Giorgione's painting: the motherly figure in the painting (a representation of Louisa in part one) stands in marked contrast to the Louisa who enters the painting at the end of the novel as an anti-mother figure (she has a miscarriage of her first child and, as it is revealed by the final chapter immediately following this dream, she abandons her second one). Louisa can encounter her opposite self in a fictional reality, which will transcend her by reformulating her. Embedded in the fiction that encompasses both her opposite versions, Louisa in the painting and in *Rien ne va plus* is reconstituted; a revision that can only occur through art.

In *I'd Like*, the metafictional effect is embodied in the novel's fabric; as the novel is being weaved, its metafictional strands hold it together. The images and metaphors that recycle throughout Stella's stories and which, at first glance, are the only ostensible connective tissues, are deliberately chosen by Michalopoulou to both conceal and foreground the metafictional impetus of the novel. Some are exact repetitions featured almost in every story such as the

phrase: “I don’t want to do anything. Just watch.”⁹¹ It appears seven times in different contexts, and in grammatical variations of person and tense. Contrary to the title’s wishful propensity, which discloses the wish for *something*, this phrase signals the wish for *nothing*. The passive inclination of the characters who assert it is momentary, but their voices are colored with the disappointment that whatever they wish can never be fulfilled. The phrase embodies the desire to do nothing, but glare—the desire to become an observer, a spectator of sorts. But isn’t this a description of the reader in her most literal form? Doesn’t the reader stare at a piece of paper literally partaking in nothing else? The phrase is a snapshot of the reader reading—a picture of her reality inside the book she is holding. In one of its numerous contexts, the character who utters the phrase compliments it with: “I just want to watch while other people make art. And to be jealous” (8).⁹² Michalopoulou, an avid reader of postmodern theory, such as Roland Barthes and Iser Wolfgang, is aware of the reading process as a constructive process, and the “reader as a producer” rather than as a consumer (Barthes, *Pleasure* 4). But the reader can never be deprived of her most constitutive characteristic: she is physically occupied with nothing but staring at someone else’s art. In the opening lines of *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes defines the reader in similar terms, as someone who: “abolishes within himself all barrier...; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony...: he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure” (3).

Another recurring image is the almond tree.

⁹¹ «Δεν θέλω να κάνω τίποτα. Απλώς να κοιτάζω» (21, 45, 90, 134, 146, 159, 194).

⁹² «Θέλω να κοιτάζω την τέχνη των άλλων. Και να ζηλεύω» (21–2).

On her way to the bank her jacket got stuck on a branch that was sticking out from some stranger's garden. The branch, weighed down with almond blossoms, had thrust its way through the chain-link fence, refusing to be contained. Her thoughts returned to the advertiser. *Please, let him come back.* She twisted the branch in her hand to free the button on her jacket. The blossoms quivered and fell; only a few remained clinging to the branch. She reached out and shook a nearby branch, too, to see that white rain again. *But he has to come back on his own, she thought, I can't invite him.*

She looked down at the white and pink blossoms on the sidewalk. So neglected. Cut off from the context that gave them meaning. (29–30 emphasis mine)⁹³

The almond tree symbolizes the novel's structure, the branches being the individual stories, which seem independent and self-expanding but in reality are attached to the trunk, the final story, which holds them together. The narrator in the above excerpt observes the blossoms scattered on the sidewalk and wonders how cut off they look from their context «αποσπασμένα από τη σημασία τους»; thus, they signify the novel's fragmentary nature, which according to Michalopoulou, reflects the fragmentary nature of modern life (Fragopoulos "The Amanda Michalopoulou Interview"). The almond tree appears more than once in its natural form and

⁹³ Στο δρόμο για την τράπεζα η ζακέτα της πιάστηκε σ' ένα κλαδί αμυγδαλιάς που ξεχειλίζει από ένα ξένο κήπο. Το κλαδί είχε γείρει από το βάρος κι είχε τρυπήσει το συρματόπλεγμα, ασυγκράτητο. Το μυαλό της πήγε στο διαφημιστή. Ας ξαναγυρίσει, Θεέ μου. Στριφογύρισε το κλαδί στη χούφτα της για να ελευθερώσει το κουμπί. Τα λουλούδια τινάχτηκαν με ορμή, μετά βίας συγκρατιόντουσαν στο κλαδί. Ταρακούνησε κι ένα διπλανό κλαδί για να ξαναδεί την άσπρη βροχή. Αλλά το θέμα είναι να ξαναγυρίσει μόνος του, όχι να τον παρακαλέσω εγώ, σκέφτηκε. Κοίταξε τα άσπρα και τα ροζ ανθάκια στις πλάκες του πεζοδρομίου. Τόσο παραμελημένα. *Αποσπασμένα από τη σημασία τους.* (56–7)

numerous times in the form of simulacra: the almond blossoms are portrayed on a mug, on a carpet, on the swim suit the mother wears the day she is paralyzed, and on Christina's underwear found in her suitcase the day before her accident (52, 57/59, 66, 119).⁹⁴ Inside the text the tree is not real; on the mug, which is inside the text, the tree is twice removed from the real. Isn't this the embeddedness that the novel-within-the novel simulates? Just like the almond tree, there is a putative real Stella inside *I'd Like* enmeshed in her fictional reality, yet inside her own fiction, there is another Stella, a copy of the real one. One thing inside another ad infinitum creates the formula of the *mise-en-abyme*, a metafictional technique interlinked with the novel-within-the-novel.

More images proliferate in the narratives: the rain, its drops a symbol of falling words ("Outside the car the rain pounds. Inside their words," [115]);⁹⁵ the porcelain cat with its yarn: another symbolic depiction of the reader who is after the formation of meaning constantly unraveling the density of the yarn the writer put together; and the "red beret," a symbol of revival through story telling. The red beret, which initially appears when the narrator of the first story picks it up from Christina's dead body at the emergency room, is the quintessential image of *I'd Like*. While placed on a dead body, it finds a new owner, passing from death to life again. Similarly, the novel begins with a disguised picture of dead Christina in the background, lying on a stretcher at the hospital, only to be resurrected through the subsequent narratives and die again at the end. Walter Benjamin's idea that the meaning of life cannot be extracted until the moment of death (94) is captured in the manifestation of the red beret, which becomes the vehicle for

⁹⁴ Equivalent pages in the Greek text: (91, 96/100, 110, 189)

⁹⁵ «Έξω απ' το αμάξι σφυροκοπά η βροχή. Μέσα οι λέξεις» (180).

telling: it is because the red beret was taken from the body that the story propels itself, telling the story of its metaphysical travels, from one cosmos to another.

The careful modulation of these images should not overshadow how they collectively relate to metafiction: all are underpinned by the same metafictional technique of metalepsis.⁹⁶ Metalepsis, according to Genette, is the term that allows for objects or characters to wiggle between narrative levels by means of disturbing their demarcated domains (235); “[so] that entities can pass back and forth across the semipermeable membrane between two texts, as well as between the real world and the world of fiction” (McHale 36). The fact that the red beret—which the reader intuitively assumes is the same in all of the stories—is in the possession of characters who live alternate realities, and the fact that the rain can be seen both by old Stella, giving advice to her younger self, and by young Stella, is demonstrative of the pliable character of metafictional novels, whose objective is to thwart the borders that separate reality from fiction, although *this* reality is also fictional.

Almost no metafictional novel omits a discussion on the epistemological and methodological problems involved in “life-writing” and “life-reading” (modified from Nünning “Fictional Metabiographies” 202). Karapanou mocks the traditional view that readers strive to discover the author behind her words by equating life-reading with fiction-reading. John, Louisa’s lover before she marries Alkis, is an American painter who falls in love with her fiction and falsely believes he is in love with Louisa. But if fiction is a lie, if fiction is an untrue representation of the self, what can the reader discover from her fiction? After their official encounter, John is utterly disappointed and wishes he had never read Louisa’s books. He does

⁹⁶ See Fludernik *An Introduction to Narratology* on the relation between metafiction and metalepsis.

not, however, reprimand himself for falling in love with an idea he fabricated, thereby continuing to admire her novels regardless, because, for John, life and fiction are intertwined to the point of substitution. Louisa is no less deceived when she falls in love with John through his passionate love letters, but, unlike him, she acknowledges that her fantasy was all to blame—“Once again my imagination had gotten the better of me”⁹⁷ (86)—by allowing language, an unsubstantive medium, to substantiate a “real” entity.

While Karapanou’s take on reality would confirm Ansgar Nünning’s observation that metaautobiographical fictions always suggest “an ineluctable and insurmountable difference between a life and a book” (“Fictional Metabiographies” 197), Michalopoulou views the relationship between reality and text as bidirectional, one being positively influenced by the other. For the character-readers in *I’d Like*, fiction can reveal something about themselves: “He said that at the end of reading, everyone always comes up and wants to talk to him. That’s how he knows he hasn’t yet written the thing that will make people uncomfortable, that will make them realize some shocking truth about themselves” (9).⁹⁸ And elsewhere Stella tells Christiana: “If you dig down deep enough in any story, you will find an explanation of your own life. That’s how it works. That’s why we read books” (118).⁹⁹ Going against the postmodern grain where (metafictional) literature can bestow nothing to its readers but an understanding of itself (Imhof *Contemporary Metafiction*; Federman “Surfiction”), Michalopoulou does not hesitate to express

⁹⁷ «Την πάτησα πάλι με την φαντασία μου» (98)

⁹⁸ «Μου είπε ότι στο τέλος μιας ανάγνωσης όλοι τον πλησιάζουν για να του μιλήσουν. Από αυτό καταλαβαίνει ότι δεν έχει γράψει ακόμη κάτι που θα κάνει τους ανθρώπους να νιώσουν άβολα, να ανακαλύψουν μια συνταρακτική αλήθεια για τον εαυτό τους» (24).

⁹⁹ «Αν σκαλίσεις ένα διήγημα, βρίσκεις μια εξήγηση της ιστορίας σου. Έτσι λειτουργεί. Γι’ αυτό διαβάζουμε βιβλία» (186).

that “something,” a kind of “je ne sais quoi,” is gained from every reading—a preponderant characteristic of Michalopoulou’s fiction employed elsewhere in her novels, such as in *Γιάντες* (*Wishbone Memories* [1996]) and *Πριγκίπισσα Σάβρα* (*Princess Lizard* [2007]), in which the character-readers improve their lives because they acquire something from the fiction they are reading that speaks directly to them.

The imbricated structure of *Rien ne va plus*, together with the enigma of part two and the external narrator introduced at the end, articulate the novel’s metafictional performance most aptly. Part two is enigmatic both in its content and its placement. It is a short section, with no identified narrator, no identified space or time, comprised of single quotations of wisdom, portraying disembodied voices, saturated with poetic and philosophical opulence. Situated between the true and untrue versions of Louisa’s narratives, this section takes the form of a mirror, which, through its apocalyptic wisdom, projects a reversed mirror image of the two narratives as reflections of each other, and the two Louisas as doubles.¹⁰⁰ The self and the reflection do not coincide, because this mirror is not made of glass, but of language; hence the amorphous nature of these aphorisms, which point to themselves as free-floating discourse. Since at the center of the novel one encounters a mirror, *Rien ne va plus* oscillates back and forth on its own axis with no end in sight. “The end has arrived. But not even that can release me. Because there is no end” (62).¹⁰¹ This is how part two closes and, whether it is Louisa speaking

¹⁰⁰ The mirror stage in Lacan represents the moment when the child identifies with her reflection, believing herself as one entity, separated from the social other. Part two enables Louisa to see herself as singularity stemming out of a plurality of selves: the conscious and the unconscious, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

¹⁰¹ «Επήλθε το τέλος. Αλλά ούτε αυτό θα με απαλλάξει. Γιατί τέλος δεν υπάρχει» (73).

or the unidentified narrator, it endorses the novel's openness and underscores the importance of part two as a symbolic ending embedded in-between two beginnings.¹⁰²

The unidentified narrator(s) of part two, with the lingering question “who is speaking?” is juxtaposed with the third-person narrator—the external narrator (Bal 22)—whose narrative marks the novel's end. Part one is narrated in the first person by the content-bound narrator-Louisa, part two is devoid of a specified voice, and part three offers a combination of first and third-person narratives, by Louisa and an external narrator introduced in the last two chapters. Although this external narrator is given a very small part, its¹⁰³ significance outweighs its brief involvement. On the one hand, it accentuates the demarcation of the fictional layers—the diegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic narrative levels—whereas, on the other hand, it helps the reader raise herself from being immersed in the deepest fiction to reach the closest layer there is to her reality. The external narrator delivers her to the surface, by letting the reader “see” the first-person narratives as fictions inserted in the fictional narrative of yet another narrator.¹⁰⁴ Most metafictional novels deploying the novel-within-the-novel structure begin with a frame story, which encloses the fiction of the fiction; in *Rien ne va plus*, however, the reader is casted

¹⁰² In *I'd Like*, the metaphor of the mirror appears numerous times as a metaleptic device. For example, the phone and the television in two stories function as mirrors reflecting alternate realities: a character calls his home and his self answers the phone informing him that he is his creator, author of his fiction; old Stella encounters young Stella while the former watches a video from her childhood and the latter is being taped by her father. The media of television and phone accentuate metaleptical devices which allow characters inside Stella's fiction to cross the border between their fiction and their reality.

¹⁰³ To avoid using the feminine pronoun to refer to the external narrator, which might imply a relation to Louisa, I opt using the neuter pronoun.

¹⁰⁴ Hence the reason I prefer Bal's term “external narrator” over the conventional “third-person;” it carries the connotation of a narrator situated outside the narrative.

at the very depths of fiction, reaching the surface only when she encounters the third-person narrative at the very end of the book. Like Louisa's cousin who in her dream decides to fall asleep in order to dream (a dream within a dream) and finds himself at the center of the earth before he slowly ascends to the surface again, the reader unpeels the various narratives with the external narrator facilitating the unpeeling of the final layer.¹⁰⁵

In contrast to *Rien ne va plus*, which seems to release the reader from its convoluted (meta)fictional structure, *I'd Like* with its second-person narration of the last chapter entraps the reader inside its fiction. Michalopoulou utilizes the second person narrative profusely in all her novels—a tribute to Calvinesean metafiction—and *I'd Like* is no exception. Nonetheless, contrary to her other works, you-narratives in *I'd Like* serve different functions. In the second story (“A Slight, Controlled Unease”),¹⁰⁶ the Calvinesean “you,” addresses character and reader alike: a woman is conversing with the novel she is reading, and the pronoun “you” refers to both the woman-reader—who is assumed to be Christina reading the complete version of Stella's book—as well as to an implied reader. The last chapter is also narrated in the second person, but this time it is a self-dramatization of the first-person. Here, “you” is Stella conversing with herself, recapitulating (in her mind perhaps) the events that were influential to her novel's creation; this “you” is what Bal has called “an ‘I’ in disguise, a ‘first person’ narrator talking to himself” (30). The polysemy of the last chapter lies on the fact that it can be read as the frame of the novel-

¹⁰⁵ The third person narrative of the final chapters may reveal the last layer of fiction which coincides with *reality*. It is known (not documented) that *Rien ne va plus* is a fictional autobiography of the real author, Margarita Karapanou. Taking the veracity of this speculation for granted, the third person narrator can represent Karapanou's presence in the fiction, as the overarching voice which invents and reinvents herself through cycles and cycles of fiction making.

¹⁰⁶ “Μικρή ελεγχόμενη ανησυχία”

within-the-novel—ergo situated outside Stella’s fiction by a narrator who has been concealing herself—or as still the last chapter of Stella’s book. This second interpretation is enforced by the employment of the second-person narrative. By choosing to narrate the last story in the second person instead of the third, Michalopoulou rejects the omniscient narrator, who, unlike in *Rien ne va plus*, would have strengthened the stories in relation to Stella’s reality, and would establish the last chapter as the frame. If, according to narrative theory, the narrator is located between the book’s fiction and the reader’s reality, as a quasi-fictional persona (Booth 158), unless the reader encounters the narrator’s level, she does not exit the fiction she is submerged in. With the second-person pronoun and with the title “*I’d Like (Orchestral Version)*”¹⁰⁷ the reader is detached from the narrated events of the preceding chapters, acknowledging that instead of the objective camera of an external narrator, we are led into Stella’s (fictional) reality through her mind, and as such it is as if we never exit her fiction. Therefore, this novel-within-the-novel has no outside novel; it is a novel-within-the-novel having as its frame itself.

One definition of postmodernism underscores the rejection of master narratives (Lyotard xxiv), and its significance on metafictional and metaautobiographical novels is twofold: while grand narratives are minimized due to a loss of credibility in *universal* truths, there is a compulsory drive towards mini-narratives—as Brian McHale wittingly propounds (*Constructing Postmodernism* 24)—which bow to *personal* truth. Neither do Stella nor Louisa attempt to recapture and sublimate the past in an effort to record an all-encompassing narrative from which conclusions may be extrapolated for themselves and for their readers. Since for these character-writers writing the past is another intellectual concoction—the past is not there ready to be

¹⁰⁷ “Θα Ήθελα (ορχηστρικό)”

revisited, but to be re-made—they do not hesitate to reshuffle and reorder it in ways most meaningful to them. In Karapanou's and Michalopoulou's fiction, the real self and the fictive self are interwoven, keeping each other alive and sane. There is no intention to distinguish them, but to conceptualize them instead as one, so that we maintain their hybridity, their multiplicity, and their incongruities as variations of the same self. The metafictional tenet percolates effortlessly throughout the novels having been instituted in these principles and the metaautobiographical novels of Karapanou and Michalopoulou take their decisive shape.

Chapter #6

Metafiction in the Post-Technological Age: The Case of *The People of Paper* and *MetaMaus*

The transitional phase our culture is undergoing, in conjunction with the question whether postmodernism is still flourishing or has arrived at a point of saturation, are intriguing subjects that should find interest in recent metafictional studies. Is the postmodern edifice starting to dismantle itself, and if so what might be the consequences for the metafictional novel? How is the metafictional novel adapting from the postmodern mind to what is forthcoming? Does the phrase “postmodern metafiction” adequately reflect the kind of self-reflexive literature that *postdates* postmodernity? In this chapter I begin by examining the possible demise of postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon, which warrants the need for a new cultural dialogic. In the second half of the chapter, I turn my attention to two contemporary metafictional novels, *The People of Paper* (2005) by Salvador Plascencia and *MetaMaus* (2011) by Art Spiegelman, that inhabit the post-postmodern era, and I argue that post-millennium metafiction differs from postmodern metafiction in at least two ways: it is technologically influenced, and it combines an astute fictionality with the realization that fictionality can be transgressed. The technological enhancements of the last twenty years are affecting the progress of book making, whose printed form will soon appear antiquated, while metafiction’s self-awareness is surpassing the fictional, requesting the reader to peek through an artificial construction in order to reach a place where the real world and the fictional are not alien to each other.

Postmodernism or Beyond?: The Need for a New Cultural Dialogic

Studies on postmodernism, or on the self-reflexiveness of postmodern fiction, have always been affiliated with modernism, for postmodernism is conceived against the background of what has preceded it, as both a continuation and a break from the previous tradition of modernism (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 49–50). Seminal studies on postmodernism and postmodern fiction such as Silvio Gaggi's *Modern/Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Ihab Hassan's "POSTmodernISM," and Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* begin, first and foremost, by differentiating postmodernism from modernism. The conceptualization of postmodernism is contingent upon modernist tendencies, and any discussion of the former intuitively, and by necessity, entails a discussion of the latter. However, could it be that at the turn of the millennium the binary modern/postmodern should be transposed to a different binary: postmodern/its beyond?

A number of contemporary critics agree that postmodernism is no longer a fitting word to express today's cultural milieu. If postmodernism is seen as in the process of dying, the more urgent and pertinent question would be to examine it, not against what anticipated it, but against what is expected to emerge, against what is in fact already emerging. "Now that generic technologies, liberal globalization and human rights are triumphing, the label 'postmodern' is starting to look old; it has exhausted its capacities to express the world now coming into being... That era is now ended" (Lipovsky 30). Similarly, and as early as 1993, Raymond Federman predicated the end of postmodernism with a lyrical image:

[Postmodernism] simply came and went like a flock of migratory birds, and we followed its flight across the sky, and watched it disappear over the horizon. Out of a

strange necessity, but above all because it carried in itself its own demise ...

Postmodernism had to either die or go elsewhere and become something else, which is what it did, even though it continues to be called by the same name. (“Before Postmodernism” 52, original ellipses)

Federman views postmodernism as a phenomenon that came and went, without being pushed out by a successor that displaced it; whatever postmodernism might have brought with it in its short stay has dissipated without leaving a trail. It is a rather idealized image of postmodernism—since its death is not attributed to any failures—a statement that, coming from a postmodern novelist, is well justified. Federman’s last phrase insinuates that although the term persists despite the eclipse of its practice, it does not cover the same intellectual activities that postmodernism originally meant to demonstrate. Nonetheless, he refrains from exploring what these other practices might entail or what they may reveal. What do the present and immediate future hold once postmodernism is made obsolete and what are the risks our generation takes in retaining the same term whose basic morphology no longer corresponds to its old manifestations?

Hans Bertens in *The Idea of the Postmodern* helped standardize the beginning of postmodernism in the 1960s, and the present chapter will abide by this date as an artificial indicator of its establishment. Some critics situate the dawn of the modern period in the Enlightenment and argue that we dwell in the same tradition, with enlightenment, modernism, postmodernism, and everything in between as evolving phases of the same intellectual thought (Habermas; Harvey; Jameson *Postmodernism*), and with the inevitable successor of postmodernism still being encompassed in this vast conception of modernity (Kirby 2; Zima 14–

5). Eshelman Raoul along with Neil Brooks and Josh Toth speculate that the end of postmodernism occurred in between two falls: the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, which symbolizes the ideological fall of communism, and 9/11, the fall of the Twin Towers, which is the onset of a new era haunted by the fear of terrorism. Somewhere between 1989 and 2001, postmodernism died—or it began its slow and strenuous denouement, whose end is marked by a continual mourning: “this emerging epoch seems to ‘mourn’ the apparent loss of the very idealistic alternatives that postmodern strove to efface. Moreover, and if we recall Derrida’s own take on mourning, this period can be defined by its desire to get over—or, rather, to finally lay to rest—that which came before” (Brooks and Toth 3). In this definition of the *after*, Brooks and Toth name the oxymoron that postmodernism persists by resisting itself; it is both a ghost of the past and a new affirmation, for at the moment we are experiencing its exodus. But if postmodernism is on its way out, leaving still a trail of its presence, its nascent successor has surely not taken a decisive form, and while it is imperative to acknowledge that there might be a separation, there is also a continuation of the old. Certain constitutive postmodern traits are maintained, while they are pairing up with new practices, some that dismantle the traditional edifice of postmodernism and others that transcend from it completely. We may repeat what Habermas once wrote about modernism: “[It] is dominant but dead” (95).

There are many ways to examine the future: by looking at the current trends in culture and in the arts (Eshelman; Kirby; Rowe); in the sociopolitical formations that affect the way culture is molded (Brooks and Toth; Charles; Lipovesky); in the trajectory of the future of literary criticism and continental philosophy (Bryant et al.; Fludernik “Narratology in the Twentieth Century”; Klein); or in all of these areas collectively. In a homologous way, one may fathom the future with respect to the past by criticizing postmodern practices, highlighting their

failures and reiterating their paradoxical and contradictory axioms (what most of the articles in *Theory's Empire* attempt to accomplish),¹⁰⁸ proposing something else in postmodernism's place (what *Critical Realism* tried to achieve as early as the nineties).¹⁰⁹ Postmodernism, as continental philosophy, (along with phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction) is accused of mediating reality and culture through human thought and textuality, but this "linguistic turn" is yearning toward a "speculative turn," that is a return toward an examination of reality itself independent of thought and humanity (Bryant et al. 3). Additionally, postmodern textuality is condemned for an overemphasis on plot-line, inadequacy in producing insightful and revelatory narratives, and promoting a vacant spirituality (Kirby 23, 25).

A recent example of an attempt to dislodge the postmodern comes from Raoul Eshelman who proposes the term "performatism" in *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism* as the new cultural paradigm. According to Eshelman, performatism—a trend in popular culture found in films, literature, plastic arts, even in architecture—is a return to monist aesthetics endowed with "a distinctly *theist* cast" (13). The uncertainty of postmodern aesthetics, with their infinite regress and immanent undecidability, are turned into a new aesthetics where dogmatic guidelines lead the spectator to narrative closure, while enforcing a "reader identification with the subject" of the aesthetic product (39). Not only do these transformations indicate a resistance to postmodern tendencies, but also a conscious endeavor to escape it. Performatist works embody a "metaphysical optimism" that postmodernism never favored (8). As Nicoline Timmer points out: "it is not unthinkable that after endless proposals for *deconstructions*, a desire to *construct*

¹⁰⁸ See especially Vincent Descombes's "The Quandaries of the Referent" and Raymond Tallis's "The Linguistic Unconscious."

¹⁰⁹ See *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* edited by López, José, and Garry Potter.

will break through,” and Eshelman’s treatise manifests this yearning (21). Despite Eshelman’s having found a distinctive property that distinguishes postmodernism and performatism, however, his theoretical framework is applicable to a handful of works, and only time will tell if they are representative of the new epoch. As of now, Eshelman’s position is yet another conspicuous endeavor to renounce the postmodern and propose something else in its place, another demonstration of the imperative need for a new dialogic.

From a culturally different position, fundamentalism contests the persistence of postmodernism and challenges whether the growing spread of the former indexes the demise of the latter. An informative article by Paul Maltby, “Postmodernism in a Fundamentalist Arena,” problematizes the poles of postmodern nihilism instilling the doubt whether the two trends can be subsumed under the same label. These concerns are in direct confrontation with questions of generative theoretical discourse; in other words, how is theory produced? Does it reflect the culture it attempts to describe and examine, or does it fabricate it? Is postmodernism a label that explains culture, or does the cluster of postmodern clichés frame cultural thought today? Although postmodernism was initially affiliated with pop culture remonstrating against the elitism of high modernism, it is now accused of being highly elitist and inaccessible, grounded in theoretical abstractness, mainly entertained by the academia, and therefore removed from the masses. Implicit in Maltby’s article is the need to reconcile the two opposing trends of thought (fundamentalism/postmodernism), and observe whether the growing number of fundamentalists in the U.S. might be an indicator of postmodernism’s dissolution, and a return to a more conservative mentality, that repudiates postmodern skepticism and yields to traditional coercive powers.

In a further attempt to separate contemporary man from his postmodern ancestor, Sebastien Charles defines the contemporary post-postmodern subject in terms that perpetuate contradictoriness and incongruity. For Charles, the hypermodern subject is on the precipice of a schizophrenic tantrum, for is characterized by a set of contradictory paradoxes that prolong and amplify the postmodern predicament. He is a Narcissus unaware of his immaturity, and irresponsibility, who nonetheless “presents himself mature, responsible, organized, efficient, and flexible. ... Hypermodern individuals are both better informed and more destructed, more adult and more unstable, less ideological and more in thrall to changing fashions, more open and more easy to influence, more critical and more superficial, more skeptical and less profound” (11–2).

This ambivalence is partly dependent upon the fact that there is no theoretical or spiritual discourse to reassure and guide the hypermodern subject, since postmodernism with its defiance towards eternal truth has supplanted the old—and to a certain extent admittedly flawed—cultural signposts. In the prominent postmodern figures of Derrida, Lacan, Althusser, Lyotard, the only certainty is that certainties do not exist, that specifiable ends are indeterminate, that totalized meaning is infeasible. Postmodernism has been assiduously criticized for these proclamations, often accused of “dogmatic relativism” (Marshall 15), on the one hand repudiating single truths in favor of multiplicity and diversity, while on the other hand decreeing the existence of a single truth on the matter of truths: that of being many. Resistance to this ideological sediment characterizes the period that comes after postmodernism, which seems to contest the postmodern that privileges “individualism and solipsism over the illusion of communal bonds, religious faith, ethical claims” (Brooks and Toth 6).

Finally the advent of the Internet and the post-technological advancements of the new millennium no longer adequately fit the postmodern label. Linda Hutcheon emblemizes the

quintessence of postmodern culture in the medium of television (*Politics* 10), as it is also foreshadowed by Baudrillard in his hyperreality. If television epitomizes the postmodern, the Internet should be the hallmark of the *after*, which is coincidentally located between the two falls: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers. The Internet's inception in 1991 revolutionized those developed industrial countries that experienced its impact. Globalization, transnationalism, cross-culturalization, even consumerism and "commercialization of lifestyles" (Lipovetsky 31) are being narrativized in a nebulous space in which pieces of knowledge may be accessed: ethnic histories of the dominant or the unspoken, personal diaries, private videos, unpublished works of art, previously inaccessible documents, pictures, paintings. The media, which used to control the distribution of information—or misinformation—have been overcast by domineering websites in the age of the Internet: Youtube, Facebook, Tweeter. The narratives of our modern contemporary culture, in the post-industrial and post-technological world, stem from unprecedented interactions between humans, the medium of language—which postmodernism assures is a flawed medium—alongside the medium of technology. Technology, and especially the Internet, is a prominent and stand-out medium, circulating information ubiquitously and instantaneously, compressing the conventionality of the spatiotemporal, and producing a flooding of information that leaves one more informed and less knowledgeable at the same time.

But the Internet diverts from the postmodern as well as it prolongs it. More than ever before, "the present is experienced as if it were always already narrated in retrospect" (Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* 97). Although, Mark Currie's remarks are not made with Facebook and Tweeter in mind (he is writing in 1998), they most aptly prefigure today's Internet age. Acts of reporting install and secure what has happened as infallible fact, demonstrating that

“we do not really believe something to be real until it is achieved as narration” (100). Our lives happen the moment we publicize private experiences, the moment we assure there is an audience watching over us, analogous to the way we watch over celebrities on reality T.V. and read about their lives in gossip magazines. Our lives happen because we report them, because we open up our private rooms without really opening our doors.

Different avenues, therefore, herald the need for a new dialogic; one that is neither synonymous with, nor a categorical break from, the tradition of postmodernism, but begins to emerge as the new cultural paradigm of modern times. Critical realism, renewalism, hypermodernism, performatism, and digimodernism, are some of the neologisms employed to name postmodernism’s successor, but none has prevailed thus far. What is more, their approaches, their examples, and their renderings yield vastly different interpretations, which hardly form a consensus; however, paradoxically, they all foresee a return to “new” forms of realism, whether in the arts or in philosophy, a retrieval from the subjective and the individualistic to a more open speculation about the nature of reality. Only time will tell if these attempts to theorize the present will simply be reappropriated back to the same label “postmodernism” as variations or its evolving chapters.

Post-Millennium Metafiction:

When it comes to addressing the textuality and the narrative forms that the post-postmodern era seems to be surfacing, the Internet, digitalization, computerization, and computationalization hold a pivotal position. In his theoretical disquisition on *Digimodernism*, Alan Kirby maintains

that even if we assume everything has remained unchanging since the dawn of postmodernism, certainly one thing has changed:

[No] matter how inventively you interpreted *Gravity's Rainbow* you didn't *materially* bring it into existence, and in this Pynchon's postmodern exemplum exactly resembled *Pride and Prejudice*. [By contrast,] the digimodernist text in its pure form is made up to a varying degree by the reader or viewer or textual consumer... [S/he] makes texts where none existed before. (51)

Digimodernism, according to Kirby, expresses a rupture that is impelled by technological innovation, and permits divergence from the classical modes of textuality. Moreover, it yields forms that allow for the kind of interaction between audience and medium that were inconceivable in the recent past (50).

Although Kirby treats textuality openly, encompassing a variety of its manifestations in animation films, in web interfacings such as chat rooms and blogs, and in interactive programs on T.V. like *Big Brother*, Katherine Hayles's study on electronic literature, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, employs the same springboards of digitalization and computationalization to discuss only the advent of literature and how it is impacted by these extraneous forces. A compelling argument that Hayles makes is that post-millennium print literature is highly influenced by the games and gimmicks electronic literature has the power and potentiality to engage in (159–61). Because of the freedom electronic literature possesses in its

performance, the print book imitates certain practices that can be adapted for the printed page, and innovative new forms arise.

The People of Paper (2005) and *MetaMaus* (2011) are metafictional novels published after the turn of the millennium, which have diverged from postmodern metafictional literature and are therefore indicative of the new practices post-technological literature is advancing upon. Their metafictional engrossment marks a shift from more *traditional* representations in postmodernism, while at the same time the impact of technology on their narrative instantiates the first of the two differences that post-millennium metafiction exemplifies. (Perhaps it is too early to refer to traditional metafiction, and I admit using the phrase being fully aware of its problematic assumptions; it should be acknowledged that postmodern thought functions as a background to these texts, which can also be read under a postmodern framework.)

While early postmodern metafictional novels toy with their typological formation, their typesetting and typeface, producing narratives that resemble concrete poetry—with the most notable Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971)—post-millennium metafiction experiments with an all-encompassing revolutionary visual effect. For metafiction, the playfulness of the graphic surface foregrounds the artificiality of fiction, covertly requesting the reader to imagine its book-making process, now in its digital execution. *MetaMaus* is a paradigmatic illustration of the conjuncture of metafiction and the multimodal novel. In a multimodal novel the linguistic elements on the page share the same prominence as the maelstrom of non-linguistic components that also flood the page and this assemblage creates a metafictional effect. *MetaMaus* features a combination of photographs, comics, drawings, pictures of book covers, grids, and an elaborate family tree, in addition to an already rich repertoire of linguistically opulent material, such as personal interviews, handwritten notes, and

letters. The colorful printing of the book does not resemble a novel, but manifests a combination of influences, from the comic-strip tradition to the familiarity and playfulness of the web page. In a less radical fashion, *The People of Paper* is also toying with its text formation. Chapters alternate between the normative linear structure of conventional printing and the printing of a newspaper format, where the text is printed vertically on the page in columns each devoted to a particular character. Scattered throughout the book are images that enhance the content of the narrative with the implementation of the visual. A silent music score featuring no notes, a tarot card of the devil, a food (and social) pyramid with the element of sadness added to the bottom, are some of the non-verbal components that are absorbed into the text's narrative form. Words occasionally appear crossed out, deleted, or smeared with black ink. Long sections are covered with ink in various geometrical shapes, as characters strike out their author and prevent him access to their consciousness. The contemporary text is created inside a digitalized world where it must go through computerization before it solidifies into the printed form (Hayles 159, 164). Since text, image, and sound can all converge in the digital world, the contemporary (metafictional) novel absorbs these influences, losing thus its monochromatic balance and its singular association with verballity, discovering yet another level for its flamboyant fictionality to march on.

MetaMaus is distributed with an interactive DVD, which includes the first two volumes of *Maus* (1986/1991) in digital form, along with extra material like radio interviews and critical reviews. That *MetaMaus* is accompanied by a DVD represents the coalescence of old and new forms of book making. The DVD is a positive affirmation regarding the future of literature—DVDs and not printed texts will circulate in the near future—and at the same time the printed book, with all its innovative formulations, becomes implicitly obsolete. This realization turns

into a concern about the future of printed literature in *The People of Paper*, which explores it as a thematic trope. One of the characters in Plascencia's novel is an origami figure, a woman made out of paper, "created not from the rib of man but from paper scraps," when her creator, Antonio, "split the spines of books, spilling leaves of Austen and Cervantes, sheets from Leviticus and Judges..." (15). Merced de Papel is a multivalent symbol of printed literature. She is the only survivor of her species, threatened by the natural elements of rain and fire for a possible instant annihilation, which will also mean the utter obliteration of her kind. In a passage that looks past the end of the book and extends its gaze at its future readers, Merced de Papel is confirmed as the symbol of the printed page, the paper with its rough edges that the reader will be intimate with when flipping the pages of *The People of Paper*:

And there were those readers who, when alone, opened the book and licked the edges of the pages, imagining that they too were going down on Merced de Papel, their blood gathering and channeling in the furrows of the spine. And they, these readers who were intimate with paper, went out into the world licking their lips, showcasing their scars and sore tongues, adding to the loves of Merced de Papel. (166)

It is not coincidental that Merced de Papel is an extinct species. Her character fears and anticipates the future of its form, which will be superseded by the age of digitalization.

The People of Paper is a quintessentially metafictional novel and has its origins in the Latin American literature of magic realism and in Garcia Marquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). In a whimsically comic fashion, the novel tells the story of Mexican immigrant

Frederico de la Fe and his daughter Little Merced, who flee Mexico to Los Angeles in search of a better life, after Frederico de la Fe's wife, Little Merced's mother, has abandoned them. Their story represents the story of the Chicanos who live in despicable conditions, being exploited and oppressed by an inescapable tyranny. On a symbolic level, the novel is a return to the mythical stories of rebellion against the Gods, servants against masters. Frederico de la Fe turns the workers and gang members—who fight with roses not with guns—against their creator, their author, their watchful eye, Saturn. Saturn initially appears as one of the planets in Frederico de la Fe's sky, but as the novel unravels, he is revealed as the author of *The People of Paper*, Salvador Plascencia. Convinced that his wife left him because Saturn wanted him to depart from Mexico in order to write a story out of Frederico de la Fe's sorrow and sadness, Frederico de la Fe wages war against Saturn. It is “a war for volition and against the commodification of sadness ... against the fate that has been decided” (53).

The characters employ numerous tricks to shield themselves and their thoughts from Saturn, in an effort to sabotage his book; at times they succeed. Technology slips through the pages, as a thematic trope, when the characters cover their houses with the lead of mechanical tortoise. This mechanical tortoise transmits the characters' thoughts in a binary code, the language of computers made with alternations of zeros (0) and ones (1). Since, Saturn does not receive thoughts in the form of human language, but rather in binary code, he loses track of his characters and his story begins to disintegrate (Hayles 171). The first time he encounters the binary code, and being unable to decipher it, Saturn, or Salvador Plascencia, records it unprocessed:

SATURN

The sky was growing gloomy, a cloudy and saddened sky. The meteorologists cleared the weather map, taking down the yellow sunrays and replacing them with gray magnetic clouds.

Federico de la Fe and EMF bunkered down, coming out only for quick chores and then shutting their doors. Only Smiley stayed outdoors, but even he, who often stared at the sky, not in contempt but with a faithful sense of wonder, eventually also went inside and shut his lead door, leaving only the mechanical tortoise.

The escaped tortoise was making its way south, propelled not by a forward crawl but by pushing dirt behind its legs, bringing Tijuana closer one scoop of earth at a time.

In the morning mist the dirt became muddy and heavy and the tortoise tucked its head and feet into the shell to rest, leaving its tail hanging, waiting for the heat of sunrise. Everybody was encased by lead, every thought protected, nothing left to hear or see. It was a lonely day, much like the meteorologist had predicted, the whole world shunning Saturn.

Federico de la Fe and EMF would not notice because they also could not see through lead, but something was happening. Saturn was unhinging from its orbit and slowly moving deeper into the solar system, away from the roofs of El Monte, eventually becoming the farthest planet from the sun, its glowing rings dulling to rust and cumulus clouds cloaking its atmosphere.

LITTLE MERCED

MECHANICAL TORTOISE

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Illustration.1. Plascencia, *The People of Paper* 96–7. Copyright © 2005 used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

In the post-technological era, the boundaries between the extralinguistic and the intralinguistic world are transgressed, and technological language is another language of signification added to the equation. The zeros and ones on the page do not foreground fictionality and the process of fiction-making *per se*, as most metafictional novels aim in doing, but function as indicators of the process of digital-fiction making. They are reminders of the digital formation of the novel. In other words, they draw attention to the fact that fictional language has resulted from the development of computerization, and that it has been processed through the binary code first

before it is transformed once again into language to be recognized by the human eye. If Saturn is trying to decode the computer language in avail, the course of book making incarnates this process successfully. The technological language is a constitutive part of its composition, being concealed behind the legible, alphabetical language that the reader views.

A marked difference between the metafictional rendering of *The People of Paper* and twentieth-century metafictional novels, such as novels by John Barth (*Chimera* [1972], *Lost in the Funhouse* [1963]), or John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter Night a Traveler* (1979), and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is their engagement with embeddedness. The first wave of metafiction places an emphasis on the complexity of layering and their stratification into various diegetic levels. "Literature does not recognize Reality as such, but only levels," writes Calvino who defines literature in terms of its distinctions of fictional reality (*Literature Machine* 120, 101). The frames of these metafictional texts clearly separate the degree of embeddedness and allow the reader to perceive a hierarchy between authors, characters, and characters in novels-within-novels, thereby underscoring the degree of fictionality displayed in each layer. In Calvino's case, for example, a "real/fictional" author named Calvino wrote *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, which is about a character-reader reading Calvino's novel; there is Calvino (real/fictional author), the reader (reading Calvino's book), and the reader in the novel-within-the-novel (character in Calvino's book). Traditional metafiction aspires to demarcate the borders—the borders as boxes—that deftly separate the contained artworks from their outer sphere and, although they blur the boundaries between what belongs to the fictional and the non-fictional levels, they delineate an onion-like structure with

visible layers.¹¹⁰ The reader compares these world structures with each other and with his own reality in order to “accept the textual truth” that each one embodies (Eco, *Role of the Reader* 37). Metalepsis occurs as a disruptive element, an infringement that erodes these structures by traversing them, stirring up in the reader “a feeling of disarray, a kind of anxiety or vertigo” (Cohn, “Metalepsis” 110). Most conspicuously, metalepsis is characterized by “recognizable, *logically distinct levels or possible (sub)worlds...*; these levels ... differ ontologically from each other and can be distinguished ... by the opposition ‘fiction vs. reality’” (Wolf, “Metalepsis” 89–90). In postmodern metafictional novels, metalepsis accentuates the degree of fictional differences among levels, and destabilizes their set domains without nonetheless eliding their hierarchy; in other words, elements of a lower structure that move to a higher degree acquire the functions, qualities, and ontological status of the given structure.

Antithetically, in *The People of Paper* both an affirmation and a refutation of the embedded layers are constantly at stake, and metalepsis loses its prominence as a literary device that disrupts these narrative structures. While the levels of embeddedness are made clear by unflinching markers, at the same time, they lose their significance as dividers of fictional and non-fictional spaces, and therefore whenever metalepsis occurs it is not an abrupt interpenetration but enforces the impression that all embedded layers are part of a singular concordant structure in which elements can move up and down like fish navigating at the deepest and most shallow sea

¹¹⁰ In Doris Lessing’s example, the writer of *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is a problematic case of a character belonging in more than one fictional and non-fictional levels. Anna is both the writer of *The Golden Notebook* and the protagonist of Lessing’s novel. The levels of embeddedness are well stratified, nonetheless. Anna’s red and black diaries are deemed less fictional than her yellow notebook, which presents a novel-within-the-novel with a fictional character crafted by Anna.

levels. In *The People of Paper* the paradoxical substantiation *and* negation of these levels results in their overall dismantlement. When one of the characters, Smiley, is determined to find Saturn's home, he is given detailed instructions how to get there. Similar to Jack in "Jack and the Beanstalk," Smiley climbs a foothill, reaches for the sky made out of paper-marche, peels off part of it, and lifts himself up to the world of his creator. In the physical space of the novel, Saturn's universe is located directly above the sky of his fictional characters. He inhabits the skies as an omniscient and omnipotent godly presence, observing them with his telescope and reporting their lives on paper, giving the assumption of a "hostile, colonizing power" (Cooney 210).

This ostensible separation between characters and creator is quickly liquefied. Not only does the physical space of Saturn's universe and his fiction resemble each other, but Saturn, Salvador Plascencia that is, is delineated in the same fashion characters are portrayed. He appears as yet another Chicano, who shares in the same predicaments and faces the same sorrowful ordeals as his fictional constructions; one who like them is being colonized, this time by his girlfriend's new and white boyfriend (Cooney 210). Frederico de la Fe becomes Plascencia's fictional counterpart, whose lives are intriguingly linked. Frederico de la Fe was abandoned by his wife Merced who flees with her neighbor because her husband could not control his full bladder when fast asleep. Analogously, the day Frederico de la Fe wages war against Saturn, Saturn pees on his bed and Liz, his girlfriend, abandons him for a white male. "This is what happens, the natural physics of the world. You fuck a white boy and my shingles loosen, the calcium in my bones depletes, my clothes begin to unstitch. Everything weakens. I lose control. The story goes astray. The trajectory of the novel altered because of him. They colonize everything: the Americas, our stories, our novels, our memories" (117). Colonization is

turned into a metafictional metaphor, where characters fight their creator drawing on “postcolonial models of political resistance” and struggling against acculturation, while their creator is giving his own personal fight against the same cultural elements (Cooney 210).

This is not a case where an author writes his life into paper, but a scenario where the fictional influences and imbalances the narrative level that supersedes it.¹¹¹ As Brian Richardson remarks when analyzing narratives with “conflated” temporality, the contained narratives “move from setting to setting, and inevitably the ‘separate’ times and spaces begin to melt or bleed into each other” (“Beyond Story and Discourse” 51). Liz admits that everything changed because Saturn decided to fight the war instead of surrendering: “I loved you, I loved you very much, but things changed. You went away to fight Frederico de la Fe and then there was someone else...” (137). Frederico de la Fe wars against tyranny and, like a ripple effect which can take on a metaleptic quality, Saturn is inflicted with the same pain he imposed upon his main character. Only Frederico de la Fe’s pain, and that of the rest of the Chicanos in Saturn’s novel, is a doubly intensified pain: having abandoned their idyllic Mexican landscape, they have to face an estranged Los Angeles, in addition to the encroaching eye of their creator. The invasion of the characters and readers into the world of the author, a paradigmatic example of metalepsis which would otherwise shake up the demarcated spaces between authors and characters, has an anticlimactic effect. Saturn is presented as identical to the rest of the characters. No stylistic differences separate them, nor do any other markers point to his superiority as the creator. Characters and author are both presented with the same two-dimensionality on paper; both

¹¹¹ This is a case that modern narratological theory would identify as “unnatural narrative.” See for example “Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Practices” (Albert et al.) and *Unnatural Narratives—Unnatural Narratology* (Albert and Heinze).

lacking psychological depth, both remaining products of their own narratives, both affected by the ailments of physical and psychological colonization.

The triad of narrative levels is completed with Merced de Papel, who theoretically belongs to the diegetic level below Frederico de la Fe, since she manifests the printed world that Frederico de la Fe's universe possesses. She is the fiction(s) inside fiction; she is the palimpsest of copies inside a copy. Yet, in the fashion of magic realism, she is materialized and remains on Frederico de la Fe's narrative level taking the status of characters like him. She does not invade Frederico de la Fe's world by way of metalepsis, but belongs to it naturally. Ultimately, all three narrative levels coalesce, and Merced de Papel and Saturn fall into the same metafictional realm, with no "textual truths" (to reuse Eco's phrase) to distance them. The underlying irony of these observations is that the three levels of removed reality—author (presumed reality), character (fiction), and character in fiction (fiction-within-fiction)—share the commonalities that raise all of them beyond their metafictional existence into a landscape of narrative equality; an equality that is taken from them once the metafictional tricks are revealed. They undergo the same dilemmas and face similar crises especially in matters of love.

Melancholy and sadness and how to cope with such psychological pain is a theme that stands out in *The People of Paper*. Even the war is set against the "commodification of sadness" (53); whereby sadness becomes a marketable quality, so that products are made and sold to either combat, soothe, or take advantage of it, with the intention of profit. From the characters' point of view, Saturn's novel, *The People of Paper*, is one such product, selling their grief for fourteen dollars—the actual price of the book—with the ultimate intention of fame and profit. Liz openly accuses Plascencia of such vanity:

So I have moved house and replaced you with a white boy, but that is nothing compared to what you have done, to what you have sold. In a neat pile of paper you have offered up not only your hometown, EMF, and Frederico de la Fe, but also me your grandparents and generations beyond them, your partia, your friends, even Cami. You have delivered all this into their hands, and for what? For fourteen dollars and the vanity of your name on the book cover. (138)

This is a trait that the post-technological era has bestowed to the novel as a thematic trope, emphasizing a consumerist society, where the novel itself cannot escape its tangles, but it is being dragged along as yet another commodity. Furthermore, sadness is woven in the novel as a leitmotif that recurrently transgresses the narrative levels of characters. Whether characters belong to Saturn's level or to Frederico de la Fe's, they cope with psychological pain and matters of love by inflicting the body with excruciating physical pain on their own volition: Saturn's next girlfriend, Cameroon cannot survive without the deliberate bee stings; Frederico de la Fe intentionally burns his hand in the wood stove to get over the pain of his lost wife; and the curator devises unorthodox methods to cure characters from all sorts of melancholic tantrums.

The blurring of the three narrative layers does not reveal a fictional world created hierarchically, but a fictional world whose various levels fall back into the same plane, so that flatness and discursivity coexist. Unlike the postmodern metafictional novels, which constantly remind the reader of their artificiality in aspiring to thwart the reader's illusion of disbelief and promote the notion that they are stories of experimental imaginary practices offering their own

take on reality, post-millennium or post-technological metafiction emits a different kind of proclamation: it predicates that it is telling a fabricated story, one that is mainly constructed by means of language, but once one passes its superficial fictionality and digs deeply inside it, s/he acknowledges how much it resembles the real world; how much its characters resemble real subjects; and how much truth surfaces from a story that could not be more removed from the real and steeped into the fictional. Nicoline Timmer in *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium* proposes that in the generation of novelists who contest certain postmodern clichés, there is a renewed interest in the portrayal of the self as human being “no longer dismissively conceived as mere ‘paper [being]’” (19). In *The People of Paper* this renewed “return to the human,” can be detected in a paradoxical context (52): characters are portrayed as paper entities based on the title, but at the same time they have a disposition for life and freedom that extends beyond their fictionality. Their author resides in the same ambivalent in-between state of being fictional and non-fictional at the same time. *The People of Paper* does not aim to showcase characters as mere fictional subjects, but through their fictionality to bring out the “human” in them.

Post-millennium metafiction reclaims what postmodern metafiction has been mostly accused of: of an indifference to relate to its readers beyond its own compositional formation as fictitious discourse. Metafiction is a form that will last as long as the novel lives, for postmodernism provided fiction with a kind of self-awareness that made it more astute and more suspicious about its relationship to both its own use of language, and its own use of reality. In the post-technological epoch, metafiction remains tangential to the trajectory of the novel, but breaks free from the fear of making claims about the historico-socio-political stratifications in society. In the case of *The People of Paper*, Plascencia’s metafiction does not impede him from

taking a stand with regards to colonization, matters of ethnicity and race, labor and exploitation, and about “local histories of sadness” (Saldivar 581).

MetaMaus yields the same findings as *The People of Paper* when it comes to its metafictional engagement of the post-technological world, although its route is dramatically different. Admirably metafictional, *MetaMaus* is a graphic autobiography of its author and a metafictional biography of the first two volumes of the acclaimed best-selling comic novel *Maus*. In its turn, *Maus* is an “autographic,” that is a graphic memoir, which also employs metafictional components in delivering the story of Spiegelman’s Polish family: his parents, survivors of the Holocaust, the concentration camps, and the gas chambers, finally flee to the U.S. in order to start life anew amidst the trauma of war, the loss of their family members, and the devastation of being foreign to a country they were forced to make their own. The comic strips that accompany the story of *Maus* depict the Jews as mice, the Nazi Germans as cats, the Polish as pigs, and the Americans as dogs; an animalistic story about the animalistic instincts of a society that has shed its humane appearance and has disintegrated into beastly forms. Organized in the form of interviews, *MetaMaus* explains its formation and the numerous underpinnings that orchestrated its completion. It incorporates earlier drafts of certain pages, drafts of sketches, while it narrates Spiegelman’s personal struggle with writing, and what has led to the novel’s decisive form. The series of interviews reveal what has been left out of *Maus*, details of Spiegelman’s childhood, and other ontological, eschatological, and epistemological questions about its literary choices.

Similar to *The People of Paper*, *MetaMaus* transgresses the narrative levels that pertained to its predecessor. It might appear puzzling how autobiographies can entertain various fictional

and non-fictional levels, since the sheer nature of an autobiography entails its absolution from fiction making. Nevertheless, *Maus* narrates the story of its making first, whereas the story of the family is injected as the story-within-the-story, a narrative recounted in the intradiegetic level. The outer sphere of the narrative shows Spiegelman coping with the raw material his father provided him during his interviews; in turning them into sketches and organizing them into a sequence of narratives. Despite the fact that the embedded story is not considered fictional, it nonetheless gives the impression that even though it is a true story, Spiegelman is crafting it based on the scraps from his father's memories, reconstructing it years after its passing. In effect, the outer narrative level of *Maus* is elaborated and amplified to make up the content of *MetaMaus*, consisting of those questions that readers often ask about the novel's construction.

In *MetaMaus*, the transgression of the narrative embeddedness surfaces on its unconventional introduction. The novel opens by tearing up all possible illusions about fiction and fiction making, even the making of autobiographies. Whereas in *Maus* everyone is depicted in animal forms, *MetaMaus* opens with the aspiration to tear off the mask of the pretender: "Maybe I could even get my damned mask off. I can't breathe in this any longer" admits Spiegelman in the introduction of the book, ready to reveal his real persona by relinquishing the fictional mask he has been wearing (9); but behind the mouse-mask, a skeleton emerges, not the true face of Spiegelman:

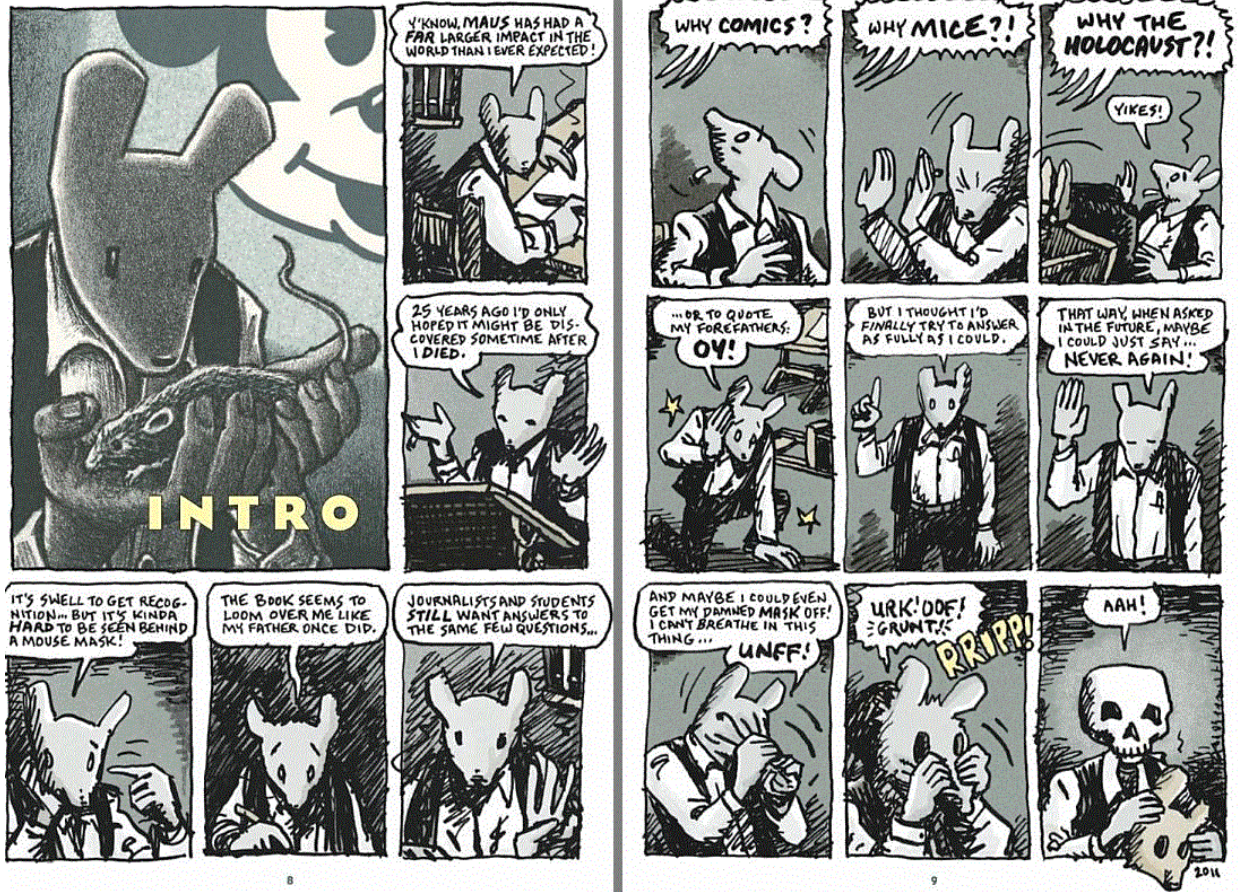


Illustration. 2. Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 8–9. Copyright © 2011 used by permission of Random House.

It is only at this particular moment in the book that the skeletal scalp is portrayed. The rest of the pages feature the real image of Art Spiegelman either in comic strips or factual photographs. On the one hand the skeleton suspends the revelation of the authorial face, but what does Spiegelman really intend in substituting for the face of the author a carcass? On a symbolic level, the skeleton connotes the story of a dead and deadly past, one that resurfaces and reconfigures in the pages of *Maus*, and it is further explored and penetrated in *MetaMaus*. *Maus* is a story of “dehumanization” as Spiegelman himself calls it (*MetaMaus* 37) and behind the skin of animals, only bones can be extracted. On a metafictional level, the skeleton is a reminder that stories are

not simply stories, that fictions are not simply fictions, that even the most personal experiences can have an endearing effect on those who vicariously live through them. Behind the fiction of a mask a skeleton is nested, for the dead and decomposed body represents the story of everyman. If postmodern metafiction with its self-reflexive propensity promotes a kind of art that is preoccupied with the fictional, an art that proclaims its fictionality intrinsic to its nature, post-millennium metafiction reconciles this new postmodern tenet with more classical renderings. Its aphorism is that behind even the most personal stories, behind the making of a past undergoing the process of being re-written and re-documented, one discerns the story of everyone, the story of himself.

Postmodern metafiction emphasizes the artificiality of fiction, cautioning readers against believing it beyond the realm of fictional discourse; fiction's artificiality in postmodernism remains essentially autotelic, "a synthesis of *logos* and *techne*," the intricate interrelation between what is written and the style and language it is delivered in (Krysinski 198). John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) reveals that his story is a fabrication springing out of the intention to imitate the writing style and structure of the Victorian novel, and that the reader may not be duped believing in the characters' real existence. Post-millennium metafiction does not negate this postmodern stipulation; it simply expands it by affirming that despite their overt fictional make-up, fictions, or narrative constructs, can transgress their fictional landscape and inhabit a place that profoundly resembles the reader's. Never forget that fiction is fictional, post-technological metafiction declares, but never forget that fiction can transgress its fictionality either.

A Few Remarks in Place of a Conclusion

This dissertation has considered metafiction in three phases: its historic standing as a literary term along with the conceptions and misconceptions that adorn its meaning; its past and present manifestations and their interrelatedness; and its potential future, dependent or independent of postmodernism. In the last chapter, I mention that now that fiction has discovered its fictionality as a thematic trope, it will not easily get rid of it. A kind of self-conscious and self-reflexive thread will always be woven into fiction's textual fabric. Will metafiction wane? As long as the novel continues to experiment with itself and toy with its very substance, structure, and style, metafiction will be reiterated.

What remains uncertain about metafiction, however, is not whether it can withstand the test of time, but how it will evolve in order to handle the unbelievably rapid changes in our society. In chapter three I briefly discuss how metafictional practices during the Enlightenment serve a different purpose than modernist and postmodern manifestations. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, metafiction is employed as an exercise of reason. The reader stimulates her thinking by detecting the hidden codes of the text—the same operations needed to decode the perfectly orchestrated universe. In modernism, metafiction retains the Enlightenment notion that the universe is somewhere hidden in its totalized form, despite its ostensible fragmented nature. As a result, the metafiction produced in modernism call for the sublime to account for what the human being and society are incapable of achieving: reaching the universe's entirety is attainable through art, the only means that can elevate the human baseness into a mythical, mystical, and spiritual totality.

Postmodernism punctures the façade of a unified universe, acknowledging and conceding to its fragmentation. The chaotic hiatus suggests a totalized entity, only because language, signification, and simulacra deceive us in their homogeneity. Once postmodernism abandons the notion of a complete cosmos complemented by universal knowledge and a supreme being, fiction renounces its ties with the sublime and clings to its fictionality. One must be cautious, nonetheless, not to confuse this repudiation with an overall abandonment of fiction's relation to reality. Fiction, with metafiction, discards the spiritual, the whole, the universal, but continues to speculate about earthly matters, the historico-socio-politico-cultural issues to which it remains attached.

As I surmise in the last chapter, post-postmodern metafiction seems to consciously respond to those accusations that metafiction is only fiction about fiction, and discovers ways to foreground its universality as a literary form. How radical will the difference between postmodern and post-postmodern metafiction end up being? I hypothesize that in the next few decades postmodern metafiction will shift gears. Fiction will find new, iconoclastic ways to re-address and re-attest to reality, knowledge, and spirituality—the three most notorious foes of postmodernism. The shift will be unavoidably pertinent to the tantalizing developments of the future and how those developments affect the next cultural milieu.

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