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## DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

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**The Academic Novel in the Age of Postmodernity:**  
The Anglo-American Metafictional Academic Novel

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# Introduction

The thing is this.

That of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best – I'm sure it is the most religious – for I begin with writing the first sentence – and trusting to Almighty god for the second.

Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*

As Elaine Showalter observes in her recent book entitled *Faculty Towers* (2005), 'the academic novel is by now a small but recognizable subgenre of contemporary fiction and has a small body of criticism devoted to it'<sup>1</sup>. The curious fact, however, is that albeit the Anglo-American academic novel can boast with an impressively sizeable and versatile literary output, its reception is still organized around one overwhelmingly dominant critical approach: to seek ways of confirming and elucidating how an academic novel describes, comments on or criticizes the experiential reality of higher education. The implication which lurks, unspoken, behind the surprising uniformity of the body of criticism devoted to the subgenre is that academic fiction is a homogenous body of literature which has little to offer beyond its referential reading. Perhaps it is also because of the monopoly of realist criticism that the academic novel today is considered to be an affair which, from a theoretical point of view, has been 'covered', i.e. all the relevant literary observations have been made about it with not much left to say. As further chapters in this study will testify, this is not exactly the case. What is offered in this study is a re-examination of the Anglo-American campus novel of the post-1950s. My research has led me to conclude that the stasis which the monopoly of this fundamentally realist critical mindset has cast around the subgenre has been instrumental in ignoring fundamental changes in its development which have taken place since the onset of the era commonly referred to as postmodernism.

What the title of the present dissertation aims to suggest is that instead of stasis, it is development, it is change that should be applied in order to characterise academic fiction, especially as far as the period following the 1950s is concerned. One chief merit of the present investigation, I believe, lies in its breaking away from the widespread theses that academic

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

fiction is exclusively realist, and that it ought to be made sense of by means of mimetic approaches. The intention with which I set out to write this study is to investigate a so-far much ignored, postmodern phase of the subgenre, and uncover ways in which its reception can depart from the mere seeking for realism in fiction. I wish to point out that the term ‘postmodern’ is a notoriously wide-ranging and much-abused notion and I feel obliged to admit that its attention-attracting application in the title of this study admits a scope of literary issues which definitely eclipses what the present dissertation purports to address. Therefore, it should be noted that from among the various manifestations of the postmodern novel and the numerous theoretical concerns of postmodern literary criticism, it is only and exclusively the metafictional novel, more precisely, the metafictional academic novel which is the prime focus of this study.<sup>2</sup>

I also cannot deny the fact that *The Academic Novel in the Age of Postmodernity* was originally conceived as a defence of academic fiction. Even such notable critics of the subgenre as Mortimer Proctor, John O. Lyons, Wolfgang Weiss and Ian Carter conceded at one point that a significant proportion of academic novels distinctly qualifies as second-rate literature. Indeed, the general reception of the academic fiction has been adversely affected by a number of factors. Firstly, the academic novel is a thematically specialized subgenre, which – some critics claim – prevents it from addressing those grander human concerns which ‘great literature’<sup>3</sup> does. Secondly, it is often maintained that instead of the subgenre’s specialised theme, it is rather the inferior execution of its fictional rendering that accounts for the poor quality of many an academic novel.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, and this point may be closely related to the first two points, most pre-postmodern academic novels would display a considerable overuse of realist literary conventions, which is often held responsible for the general exhaustion of the subgenre. My conviction is, nevertheless, that metafictional academic fiction, ignored though up to this point, is definitely capable of refuting these charges by offering innovative and skilfully written novels. As I progressed with my research I came to realize that despite the pessimistic prognoses that some critics have been unhesitant to spell out concerning the future of academic fiction, the star of the university novel – so to speak –, has been on the rise for the past few decades. Although the tone of the dissertation is occasionally still reminiscent of my initial combative ideas of trying to protect academic fiction from critical assaults, the

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of investigating the more referentially inclined predecessors of the metafictional academic novel, the chronological and thematic scope of the present research is unavoidably expanded at places – e.g. in Chapter Two, entitled ‘Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism’.

<sup>3</sup> Although the concept of ‘great literature’ is notoriously contested and highly subjective, it is the great canonical works of Anglo-American literature that I have in mind here.

<sup>4</sup> The world of higher education has inspired hundreds of novelists with little skill in the art of fiction.

purpose of the final research is fundamentally to illuminate the postmodern developments of the subgenre and focus on those new characteristics that it has acquired for the past decades.

In Chapter One, entitled ‘What Is an Academic Novel?’, I deal with three basic questions concerning academic fiction. Firstly, I introduce and explicate the various terms which are commonly employed to refer to novels about the world of higher education. Secondly, I propose a working definition for selecting academic novels for the purposes of further investigations throughout the entire research. This latter objective is of crucial importance because, as will be demonstrated, the stereotypical ideas concerning academic fiction are, more often than not, misleading. Thirdly, I explore the question of how much academic novels are actually bound by the realities of higher education. The chapter is partly aimed at dispelling erroneous notions concerning the academic novel, and endorsing the observations of such expert scholars of the subgenre as Mortimer Proctor, John O. Lyons, David Bevan, Ian Carter, Wolfgang Weiss, Janice Rossen and Kenneth Womack.

In Chapter Two entitled ‘Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism’ I investigate the interpretative approaches which critics most commonly employ to respond to academic novels. The research material provided in the chapter amply supports my thesis that the dominant paradigm for interpreting academic fiction has been fundamentally mimetic; i.e. aimed at establishing and explicating the referential relevance of a work of fiction, for instance, by focusing on educational, historical, psychological, social or biographical readings. In the concluding argument of the chapter I point out that the erroneous presupposition behind this overwhelmingly mimetic critical approach is that academic fiction, *per se*, aims exclusively at documenting the phenomenological world of academe. The monopoly of referential criticism in the reception of academic fiction, however, has been instrumental in ignoring vital changes in the development of the academic novel. It is these much-disregarded changes the identification and explication of which has enabled me to approach academic novels with new, non-referential critical tools. The theorists whom I referenced for my investigation include Elaine Showalter, Malcolm Bradbury, John O. Lyons, Mortimer Proctor, Ian Carter, Janice Rossen, Sylvia Myers, Palotayné Lengváry Judit, Kenneth Womack, Wolfgang Weiss, George Watson, Brian A. Connery, Sanford Pinsker, Albert Gelpi and Kimberly Rae Connor.

The explicit critical claim embedded in the title of the present dissertation is that there is a ‘pre’ and a ‘post’ state of affairs in the development of the academic novel. While Chapter Two aims to explore the former, and Chapters Four to Ten address the latter, Chapter Three, entitled ‘From Literary Realism to Postmodernism’, takes the transitory phase between ‘pre’

and ‘post’ phases as its subject matter. In Chapter Three I deal with a vital transitory period in the development of academic fiction, the so-called thematic-experimentalist shift.<sup>5</sup> The argument that I put forward to support my proposition is twofold, involving both generic and subgeneric factors. Firstly, I suggest that it was around the end of the 1950s that the exhaustion of those realist representational strategies that had been dominant in the pre-war academic novel took place. Secondly, I will argue that a similar, parallel process of exhaustion of realist literary conventions took place on the larger literary platform of the novel. The central argument of the chapter is that it is these two literary changes that effected the thematic-experimentalist transition within the development of the academic novel, and made it possible for the metafictional academic novel to emerge as the dominant form of the subgenre in the 1960s. My discussion of the emergence of literary postmodernism includes references to such theorists as Jerome Klinkowitz, Mortimer Proctor, Ian Carter, Adam Begley, Janice Rossen, John O. Lyons, Elaine Showalter, Kenneth Womack, Rubin Rabinovitz, Pamela Hansford Johnson, William Cooper, Raymond Williams, Stephen Spender, Paul West, C. P. Snow, William Cooper, Susan Sontag, Louis Rubin and Leslie Fiedler.

My objective in Chapter Four entitled ‘Aspects of the Metafictional Novel’ is to delineate those fundamental characteristics in which academic metafiction differs from their primarily realist predecessors. The theoretical discussion presented in Chapter Four necessarily includes the elucidation of the notion of self-consciousness in fiction, focusing on its aesthetic principles, its experimental direction and its interpretative capabilities. The title of the chapter is a reference to the fourfold taxonomy of my own design which I propose in order to arrange and classify the various manifestations of the metafictional academic novel. The theoretical observations and arguments that have contributed to my discussion of metafiction were made by such outstanding critics of self-conscious fiction as William H. Gass, John Barth, Robert Scholes, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, Gerard Prince, Hayden White, Susana Onega and Mark Currie.

Devoting one chapter to each of the four aspects of self-conscious fiction proposed in Chapter Four, Chapter Five to Eight contain the analyses of over fourteen representative instances of the metafictional academic novel. Chapter Five, entitled ‘Writerly Metafiction’, investigates metafictional academic novels which address literary issues related to the concept of the author. The three novels which are the central objects of investigation in Chapter Five are John Barth’s *Giles Goat-Boy* (1967), Ishmael Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1996) and

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<sup>5</sup> I also apply the term ‘thematic-postmodernist’ to refer to the thematic-experimental shift.

Pablo Urbányi's *The Nowhere Idea* (1982). Relying mostly on the critical writings of John Barth, W. K. Wimsatt, Monroe C. Beardsley, T. S. Eliot, Roland Barthes, Brian McHale, Gabriel Josipovici, Patricia Waugh and Jerome Klinkowitz, I identify and elucidate such theoretical concepts as authorial intrusion, authorial surrogacy, the death of the author, the notion of depersonalized literature and frame-breaking.

In Chapter Six, entitled 'Critical Fiction: Textual Metafiction in the Academic Novel', I turn my attention to academic novels which employ metafictional techniques in order to foreground the linguistic and textual nature of fiction. The textual academic metafictional novels that are included in the study are David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), Amanda Cross' *Providence* (1982) and Austin M. Wright's *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* (1999). The notions that fall within the scope of the analyses concern textual self-consciousness, intertextual embedding, critical fiction, metalanguage, textual pastiche, metafictional realism, and a differentiation between active and passive intertextual appropriations. My investigation of textual metafiction is based on vital critical observations by Mark Currie, Patricia Waugh, Louis Hjelmslev, Elaine Showalter, Judith Gies, Robert Ellis Hosmer Jr. and Galen Strawson.

Chapter Seven, entitled 'Readerly Metafiction', deals with novels which foreground the traditionally implicit participation of the reader during the process of assigning meaning to fiction. The five academic novels that I use for my discussion of readerly metafiction are Joanne Dobson's *The Raven and the Nightingale* (1999), James Hynes' *Publish and Perish* (1997), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and Austin M. Wright's *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors*. Based on the theoretical contribution of Mark Currie, Steven Connor, Gerard Genette, David Lodge, Patricia Waugh, Chapter Seven investigates such metafictional notions as readerly surrogacy, the fictional reproduction of the reader and the relevance of the *mise en abyme*<sup>6</sup> pattern in metafiction. My investigation of readerly metafiction academic novels also contains observations concerning extended treatments of self-conscious writing.

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<sup>6</sup> The French phrase *mise en abyme* – which, translated into English, means 'placing into infinity' or 'placing into the abyss' – was coined by the French writer André Gide. Originating from the terminology of heraldry, the phrase describes the visual experience of an image which contains its smaller duplicate in itself with the whole sequence repeated infinitely (just like one's own image while standing between two mirrors). In physics the same notion is called a fractal. Perhaps the proto-*mise en abyme* novel, that is, the most representative novel based on the narrative application of the *mise en abyme* effect – e.g. narratives which contain themselves – is André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925) (English title: *The Counterfeiters* (1927)). As a piece of literary terminology, *mise en abyme* is common currency in postmodernist literary criticism. For a detailed explanation and further examples see Waugh's *Metafiction*, McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Mark Currie's *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), or David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing*.



Chapter Eight, entitled ‘Non-fictional Metafiction’<sup>7</sup>, basically elucidates the deconstructionist notion of metafiction. My investigation of non-fictional metafiction aims at demonstrating how post-structuralist theory has managed to subvert and upturn the Gassian, unproblematic notion of metafiction. As will be demonstrated, non-fictional metafiction is premised on the approach that it is not fiction which tries to emulate reality, but – quite opposing the conventional logic of metafiction – it is reality which is structured according to the principles of fiction. Malcolm Bradbury’s *The History Man* (1975), Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992) and A. S. Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* (1990) are used to demonstrate some of those narrative techniques by means of which the thesis of non-fictional metafiction can be made explicit for the reader. The analyses of the three novels are supported by the theoretical contribution of Patricia Waugh and Mark Currie. The chapter also includes the criticism of the deconstructionist notion of non-fictional metafiction with specific regard to the relativity of readerly perception it entails.

Chapter Nine, entitled ‘Two Readings of David Lodge’s *Small World*’, is intended as a practical demonstration of how the theory of metafiction can extend the already existing referential meanings of postmodern academic novels. The chapter is made up of two analyses of David Lodge’s *Small World* (1984). The former, entitled ‘Literary Theory at the Crossroads: A Referential Reading of David Lodge’s *Small World*’ is premised on the traditional mimetic view of literature and focuses on elucidating how Lodge’s novel informs its readers on the nature of contemporary literary theory, and the reception of deconstructionism in the literary scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The latter analysis, entitled ‘Textual Metafiction in David Lodge’s *Small World*’, concentrates on the various instances of textual metafiction that the novel exhibits. As will be demonstrated, the self-conscious nature of Lodge’s novel resides in its conscious reworking of the narrative conventions of the romance.

Chapter Ten, entitled ‘Conclusion and Speculations’, provides the explication of the various theses that I have succeeded in establishing during my research concerning the nature of the metafictional academic novel. Also, Chapter Ten contains all the relevant observations that I have discovered with regard to the relationship of academic fiction and the notion of metafiction. As will be argued, the metafictional academic novel, although in a more subdued form, has inherited the experimental impetus of modernism proper, and in the closing part of the dissertation I formulate my argument concerning the future potential of self-conscious writing.

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<sup>7</sup> Here I wish to thank Ferenc Takács for suggesting me the nomenclature ‘non-fictional metafiction’.

The studies and bibliography that constitute the present investigation are formatted and annotated according to the rules and preferences formulated in the complete style guide of The Modern Humanities Research Association.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the stylistic conventions laid out by the MHRA, please visit <http://www.mhra.org.uk/>.

# I. What Is an Academic Novel?\*

In some ways the term [campus fiction] annoys; whether Joseph Conrad relished being called an author of “sea-novels” I cannot recall, but few of us who are not instinctively popular or market writers like to have our novels labelled by their settings.

Malcolm Bradbury, ‘Campus Fictions’<sup>9</sup>

## 1.1. Nomenclature

Although the title of the present dissertation employs the term ‘academic novel’ to refer to novels about higher education, the existence of such alternative terminologies as university novel, campus novel, college novel and scholastic novel should also be acknowledged. There are slight differences concerning the origins and applicability of these critical labels. The phrase ‘scholastic novel’ was introduced in an anonymously written article entitled ‘School and College Life: Its Romance and Reality’<sup>10</sup> in 1861, and apart from its single appearance in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* it has not been applied again. Somewhat later, it was Mark Pattison who first used the term ‘university novel’ in 1875 in his article entitled ‘A Chapter of University History’<sup>11</sup>. Since then the term has gained common currency first in Britain and later on an international scale. As David Lodge – the renowned critic and writer of academic novels – rightly observes in his recent booklet on the subgenre entitled *Scenes of Academic Life* (2005),

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The academic novel, although in a considerably moderate extent, also has a Hungarian tradition. The earliest precursor of the Hungarian ‘egyetemi regény’ documents the world of the eminent Eötvös Collegium, numbering such novels and short stories among its ranks as Mihály Babits’ *Halálfiái* (1927), Margit Kaffka’s ‘Új típusok’ (1910) and Gyula Juhász’ ‘Négyessy-órak’ (in *A Tékozló fiú* (1995)). The few post-war fictional renderings of the Hungarian higher education include portrayals of undergraduate life, e.g. László Bóka’s *Karfiol Tamás* (1962), Béla Tóth’s *Mi, janiácsok* (1965), Károly Szalay’s *Szorgalmas éveink* (1985), István Turczy’s *Mennyei egyetem* (1987); and academic *Professorromane*, represented by Mária Bíró’s *Vivant professores* (1986) and Aladár Sarbu’s *Egyetem: Csúfondáros regény* (1995) which was written in the true spirit of the English academic satire. Followers of the postmodern academic novel have not emerged in Hungary so far. One notable exception is Géza Kállay whose academic short stories in *Melyik Erasmus-kávéházban?* (2004) and *Semmi vérjel* (2009) evidently display the characteristics of Anglo-American postmodern university fiction.

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, ‘Campus Fictions’, in *University Fiction*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Anon., ‘School and College Life: Its Romance and Reality’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* LXXXIX (1861), pp. 131-148.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Pattison, ‘A Chapter of University History’, *MacMillan’s Magazine* 32 (1875), pp. 237-246., p. 238.

'campus' was of course originally an American usage (of the Latin word for 'field'), and the campus novel was also an American invention. Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), a satirical story of political and personal intrigues among the faculty at a liberal arts college, has the claim to be the first of its kind.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the terms 'campus novel' and 'college novel' both emerged in the USA and are traditionally used to refer to American novels of higher education. Yet, in spite of the fact that in *Scenes of Academic Life* David Lodge employs the former, American critics – including such pioneering figures as R. C. Boys<sup>13</sup>, F. I. Carpenter<sup>14</sup>, John O. Lyons<sup>15</sup> and B. de Mott<sup>16</sup> – have generally preferred to employ the latter term. The critical label 'academic novel' appeared in the post-war critical lexis and is perhaps the most common denominator of both English and American novels about the lives of those who inhabit the world of higher education. By now the differences that initially existed between the various labels have greatly eroded and in today's critical practice the terms 'academic novel', 'university novel' and 'campus novel' are used in a general sense. In the present investigation I also apply the terms 'academic novel', 'university novel' and 'campus novel' to refer to both English and American novels about the world of higher education.

It should also be clarified that in practice most reviewers and commentators label academic fiction as a genre. To be precise, however, the academic novel is a subgenre and apart from some occasional excerpts in which I retained a different descriptor, I am going to use the adequate, latter term.

## **1.2. The difficulties of defining academic fiction**

### ***1.2.1. The stereotypical notion of the academic novel***

The common assumption that prevails about academic fiction is that it is a label which refers to a well-definable body of literature. That this is unfortunately not exactly the case becomes clear from the fact that the various common sources of descriptions and definitions –

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<sup>12</sup> David Lodge, *Scenes of Academic Life* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Boys, 'The American College in Fiction', *College English* 7 (1946), pp. 379-387.

<sup>14</sup> F. I. Carpenter, 'Fiction and the American College', *American Quarterly* 12 (1960), pp. 445-456.

<sup>15</sup> John O. Lyons, *The College Novel in America* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962)

<sup>16</sup> B. de Mott, 'How to Write a College Novel', *Hudson Review* 15 (1962) pp. 121-128.

for instance, book reviews, newspaper articles, dictionaries, bibliographies, companions and encyclopaedias – provide slightly or at times significantly different notions of what an academic novel actually is. If one looked up the term ‘campus novel’ in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* or *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, one would find the following definitions.

**campus novel:** A novel which has a university campus as its setting. The majority have been written by those who were or are academics. Notable instances are: *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) by Randall Jarrell; *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Kingsley Amis; *The War Between the Tates* (1974) by Alison Lurie; *Changing Places* (1975) by David Lodge; and *The History Man* (1975) by Malcolm Bradbury.<sup>17</sup>

**campus novel:** A novel set on a university campus; mostly written by novelists who are also (temporarily or permanently) academics, and notable instances include Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), D. Lodge’s *Changing Places* (1975), and Bradbury’s *The History Man* (1975).<sup>18</sup>

John E. Kramer Jr. in his *The American College Novel*<sup>19</sup> formulates his definition of the college novel as

a full-length work of fiction that incorporates an American institution of higher education as a crucial part of its total setting and includes among its principal characters graduate or undergraduate students, faculty members, administrators, and/or other college or university personnel.<sup>20</sup>

If one looked up the same term in *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English*, one would discover that the campus novel is ‘a term describing a particular genre of novels, usually comic or satirical which have a university setting and academics as principal characters’<sup>21</sup>. Chris Baldick in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* also draws his definition along the same lines.

[A campus novel is a] novel, usually comic or satirical, in which the action is set within the enclosed world of a university (or similar seat of learning) and highlights the follies of academic life. Many novels have presented nostalgic evocations of college days, but the campus novel in the usual modern sense dates

<sup>17</sup> J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Margaret Drabble (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

<sup>19</sup> John E. Kramer, *The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004)

<sup>20</sup> Kramer, p. v.

<sup>21</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English*, ed. by Jenny Stringer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)

from the 1950s: Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) began a significant tradition in modern fiction including John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), and Robertson Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1982).<sup>22</sup>

If one read Sanford Pinsker's description of the campus novel, one would find something that bears little resemblance to what is stated in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* or *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

The academic novel might best be described as a fun-house mirror held up to the nature of our colleges and universities, one that, for all its grotesquerie, pack a good deal of truth within its pages. Caricature is the great leveller, a way of pulling down the vanities of those we fear – whether it be the scientist cackling over his beaker, the psychiatrist loonier than his patient, or the absentminded professor.<sup>23</sup>

Hazard Adams in *The Academic Tribes*<sup>24</sup> also proceeds along the same lines.

The academic novel, usually written by a professor of English, is most often a symbolic act of revenge against a world that has turned out to be different from what has been advertised. Morris Bishop's *Widening Stain* is a good-natured farce – a *roman à clef* having to do with murder in the (barely disguised) old Cornell library. Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* is perhaps the best-known satirical novel of the genre.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that the above-quoted definitions are far from being identical, and if I went on with the enumeration of further definitions, I would end up gathering not one, but a finite set of narrative conventions that would provide a rough outline of what campus novels can be like. The descriptions would outline the brand of heroes campus novels typically feature, i.e. mostly university teachers, student and university personnel; they would outline the typical setting of campus novels, i.e. a university campus; and they would outline one dominant representational mode campus novel writers may employ, i.e. satirical. Further additions of descriptions and definitions from articles, book reviews, dictionaries and encyclopaedias would confirm my observation that this list of conventions constitutes the most widespread ideas – let us call it the stereotypical notion of the subgenre – concerning what an academic

<sup>22</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* Oxford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 260.

<sup>23</sup> Sanford Pinsker, 'Postmodernist Theory and the Academic Novel's Latest Turn', *Sewanee Review*, 111.1 (2003), pp. 183-91. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=10046970&site=ehost-live>> [accessed September 28 2006, EBSCO Academic Search Premier database], pp. 183-184.

<sup>24</sup> Hazard Adams, *The Academic Tribes* (New York: Liveright, 1976)

<sup>25</sup> Adams, p. 37.

novel is. But on closer inspection it turns out that these ideas on the academic novel provide a false impression of assurance: the stereotypical notion of the academic novel operates with descriptive tendencies rather than certainties; that is, an academic novel is *likely* to have a university campus setting, an academic novel *may or may not* be satirical, an academic novel is *likely* to have been written by an academic, etc. Consequently, the above-identified narrative coordinates should be interpreted in terms of likelihoods. It is this probability factor, this imprecision owing to which the stereotypical notion of the academic novel is not applied for the purposes of serious scholarly investigations.

Attempts to define what an academic novel is have been also undertaken by specialists of the subgenre. The works of such scholars of academic fiction as Mortimer Proctor, John O. Lyons, Ian Carter, Janice Rossen and Wolfgang Weiss, although little known for the general public, offer most of the approaches and observations which I have considered in the process of formulating my own working definition of the subgenre. By consulting the representative studies of this group of scholars, I am also going to point out the two basic inadequacies of the stereotypical notion of the academic novel: the erroneous convictions that setting and satire can be used as adequate descriptors of academic fiction.

### **1.2.2. Setting**

One of the most common assumptions concerning academic novels is that their action always takes place in or around a university campus. Those definitions which attempt to single out academic novels based on whether they are set in or around a university campus, nevertheless, should be treated with reservations. The inadequacy of setting-based definitions arises from the fact that there are a number of novels the campus setting of which is incidental – e.g. a love story that is set in Oxford, or a detective novel that takes place at Harvard, etc.; not to mention that there are a number of commonly acclaimed academic novels which do not take place in or around a university campus<sup>26</sup>.

Ian Carter in his extensive investigation of British academic fiction entitled *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*<sup>27</sup> argues that ‘architecture is never simply there, the physical backdrop to events.’<sup>28</sup> The point that Carter makes throughout his study is that in academic fiction a

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of academic novels without a campus setting would be Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992), Tom Shape’s *Wilt* (1976), Pablo Urbanyi’s *The Nowhere Idea* (1982), Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962).

<sup>27</sup> Ian Carter, *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post War Years* (London: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>28</sup> Carter, p. 40.

campus setting, much beyond merely providing a background to fictitious events, should be organically related to academe. In Carter's reading the campus stands for higher education itself, and in a university novel the 'university is not the setting but the subject of the fiction'<sup>29</sup>. The fact that the university *may be* the setting, but that it definitely *should be* the subject matter of an academic novel is a relationship which few critics have recognized and discussed. For Mortimer Proctor, nevertheless, this relationship was so obvious that he did not even consider it necessary to spell it out in the form of a definition in his pioneering study entitled *The English University Novel*<sup>30</sup>. For Proctor setting was irrelevant. The difficulty that he was trying to resolve lay in trying to determine the minimum amount of higher educational *content* that a novel should feature in order to qualify as an academic novel. Proctor formulates this problem as follows.

It is not always easy to say what is and what is not a university novel. The reason lies in the tendency of the subject matter to slip entirely out of sight. [...] The problem, therefore, of defining a university novel is part quantitative, in that it must be concerned with the extent to which the author's ingenuity and tenacity have succeeded in making the university theme predominate. And the fact that not all authors could do so without interruption not so much obscures the genre as gives to it one of its dominant characteristics.<sup>31</sup>

Proctor included in his study such novels as William Winwood Reade's *Liberty Hall, Oxon* (1860), Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) and Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) 'as easily discernible "university" novels in that their whole concern is with undergraduate life'<sup>32</sup>, and dropped many books the academic content of which did not amount to the standards he saw appropriate. While identifying and collecting academic novels, Proctor decided upon including even those novels in his study

whose qualifications might seem questionable in terms purely of the amount of university subject matter they contain. Yet these could hardly be omitted. They are a part of university fiction in that they either pronounce significantly upon university education, or serve to fill out the pattern of development of the university theme in fiction, or actually influence (as did Thackeray's *Pendennis*) the growth of the genre itself.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carter, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Mortimer R. Proctor, *The English University Novel* (New York: Arno Press, 1977)

<sup>31</sup> Proctor, pp. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Proctor, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Proctor, p. 3.



It is this process of estimating a novel's importance and influence which enabled Proctor to investigate even romances<sup>34</sup>, detective novels<sup>35</sup> and, for example, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Although Proctor points out that 'for Waugh the Oxford setting remains only a setting, which exists chiefly to set the stage for subsequent and somewhat tortured study of neurosis induced by family and church'<sup>36</sup>, he discusses the novel for its 'vivid and witty evocation of the familiar aesthetic motif' of the cult of Oxford.<sup>37</sup> Janice Rossen – some thirty-six years after the publication of Proctor's *The English University Novel* – uses surprisingly similar arguments in her study entitled *The University in Modern Fiction*<sup>38</sup>. While examining power relations in academic novels, Rossen recognizes that in order to single out proper university novels for her investigation she needs to look not for setting, but for thematic involvement. Rossen admits having included novels in her study which cannot strictly speaking be classified as university novels on the basis of their campus setting<sup>39</sup>. Two such novels would be Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907). Rossen argues that both novels

are set at Oxford and Cambridge respectively for only a portion of each book [...] still, the influence of the University continues to resonate for the heroes, and these novels reflect something of their authors' views of the University as an institution and the role it plays in educating their heroes as artists.<sup>40</sup>

John O. Lyons is another specialist of academic fiction who has recognized that a university novel should not necessarily be set on a campus in order to offer considerable thematic engagement into the world of higher education. Lyons formulated his notion of academic fiction in *The College Novel in America* as follows.

I consider a novel of academic life one in which higher education is treated with seriousness and the main characters are students or professors. This eliminates from consideration juveniles and mysteries. There are a number of works for girls which strive to teach them how young ladies are expected to behave at college. There are also the companion works for boys which are less restrained in their description of high jinks, and are mainly concerned with the education received from the big game, at the very end of which and over astounding odds the hero

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<sup>34</sup> Proctor, pp. 118-120.

<sup>35</sup> Proctor, pp. 177-181.

<sup>36</sup> Proctor, p. 175.

<sup>37</sup> Proctor, p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> Janice Rossen, *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (New York: St. Martin's Press: 1993)

<sup>39</sup> Rossen, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Rossen, p. 7.

scores the winning touchdown. [...] Another category which can be eliminated on grounds of frivolity is the comic novel of academic life. They merely exaggerate and revel in the pat conventions which plague the serious novels.<sup>41</sup>

Lyons – just like, Proctor, Rossen and Carter – identifies academic novels not on the basis of location, but on the basis of their involvement in matters of higher education. The list of exclusions in his above-quoted definition confines his notion of the academic novel within the thematic scope of academe, protecting it from thematic deviations.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the argument that I have presented so far is that the campus setting of academic novels is the *consequence* rather than the precondition of a kind of literary communication through which both authors and readers can access the theme of higher education. As far as the criteria for identifying academic novels are concerned, physical setting cannot be considered a sole factor responsible for turning a novel into a campus novel. In this respect – as Proctor, Lyons, Carter and Rossen have concluded – there must be a shift from the spatial to the thematic.

### **1.2.3. Satire**

The insistence that an academic novel must have a campus setting, as has been demonstrated, is not the only stereotypical property of the subgenre. Charles Knight, Emeritus professor at the University of Massachusetts, in his essay entitled ‘Satire and the Academic Novel’ sees satirical campus novels as direct derivatives of the Aristophanic drama.<sup>42</sup> Knight, nevertheless, makes a distinction between academic novels and satirical academic novels, a distinction that is rarely maintained. That academic novels are basically satirical has already been stated, among others, by Chris Baldick, Sanford Pinsker and Hazard Adams in the definitions quoted at the beginning of the chapter. As a matter of fact, the satirical impulse of campus novels is so much considered an indispensable component of the subgenre by some critics that instead of the generally used labels of academic novel (i.e. university novel, campus novel or college novel) they employ the term ‘academic satire’ in a general sense. No doubt, many academic novels play out situations with a satirical edge, yet, a considerable proportion of campus novels are far from achieving their allure by exaggeration, or the

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<sup>41</sup> Lyons, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Knight, ‘Satire and the Academic Novel’, *The Literary Encyclopedia* <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/topics.php?rec=true&UID=1549>> [Accessed February 19 2006] (para. 1 of 11)

satirical treatment of higher education. Interestingly, none of the evolutionary phases of the university novel that Mortimer Proctor set up in *The English University Novel*<sup>43</sup> are described as basically satiric. But Proctor's investigation ended at the very beginning of the 1950s which is a date that coincides with the beginning of a new trend in the development of the academic novel, a phase with an overwhelming abundance of academic satires.

After the publication of Proctor's study very few critics have dealt with the academic novels of the pre-1950s, but all the more attention has been paid to the period after it. This may explain why contemporary critical discourse sees the academic novel as an overwhelmingly satirical subgenre. According to Elaine Showalter, 'the genre has arisen and flourished only since about 1950'<sup>44</sup>. In *Scenes of Academic Life* David Lodge commits himself to the same idea.<sup>45</sup> The equation of academic fiction with its post-1950s satirical phase, however, can inarguably be considered as a kind of critical amnesia<sup>46</sup> which not only does reinforce a factual mistake concerning the origins of the subgenre<sup>47</sup>, but also attributes an aesthetic property (i.e. satire) to a group of novels which is by no means representative. The popularity of this stereotypical notion concerning the academic novel has resulted in a well-documented critical automatism. Hazard Adams' following observation on the reception of his own academic novel needs little commentary.

A serious novel with an academic setting is likely to be treated as satire in spite of itself. In my own *Horses of Instruction* (1968) there is a satirical attitude, but it is expressed by one of the narrators and occasionally by another. I felt that this attitude was appropriate to those characters but not necessary to the novel as a whole, but reviewers tended to see only the satirical.<sup>48</sup>

Joyce Carol Oates' *The Hungry Ghosts: Seven Allusive Comedies* (1974) was also immediately tagged as an academic satire. In order to counter the critical label attached to her novel, Oates wrote a letter of protest to *The New York Times Book Review*: 'In writing about the academic and literary world, I wanted only to illustrate from the inside, so to speak, how

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<sup>43</sup> The stages of development that Proctor distinguishes are: 'an initial stage of crudeness and vulgarity', 'a middle period in which humor and the doctrines of university reform were strangely mingled' and the final stage of 'serious and mature statement of the very nature of university education' (Proctor, p. vii.).

<sup>44</sup> Showalter, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Lodge, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> As Proctor argues in *The English University Novel*, '[the critic] must, as well, try for a time to ignore the fact that the university novel is so distinctly a nineteenth-century phenomenon. An overwhelming proportion of all such novels [i.e. Oxbridge novels] was written during the reign of Victoria, almost none before; and by the end of the century so many had been produced that they clearly represent one of the major literary fads of the period' (Proctor, p. 12.).

<sup>47</sup> Mortimer Proctor has already demonstrated that historically it is the Oxford novel that we should be looking at first (Proctor, p. 4.).

<sup>48</sup> Adams, p. 37.

ambition, lust for fame and prestige, and egotism, can rule the lives of presumable intelligent people<sup>49</sup>. A much earlier, similar instance is Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) which was also too hastily labelled as satire. In order to express his disagreement with the classification of his novel, Beerbohm pointedly declared that he had no intention of parodying anything, and certainly not the excesses the world of academe.<sup>50</sup> As it turns out, in all three cases critics have a major share in reinforcing literary stereotypes.

In his comprehensive study of the academic novel entitled *Der anglo-amerikanische Universitätsroman: Eine historische Skizze* (1994)<sup>51</sup>, Wolfgang Weiss argues that, being academics themselves, commentators of the academic novel are susceptible to identifying the fictionalized treatments of academe as satires, caricatures of their own profession.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps it is owing to their personal involvement – or due to an impression that there is a collective concern, a common interest at stake when higher education becomes the subject matter for fiction – that critics become oversensitive to issues rendered in academic novels and perceive secondary or even tertiary comments tremendously magnified. The academic novel, from this perspective, is rather unfortunately exposed to receiving underserved and often lay criticism of the judgemental, combative and valorizing kinds. To demonstrate my point let me quote how Kimberly Rae Connor sees the relationship between satire and the academic novel in her introduction to a recent study on the subgenre entitled *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre* (2007)<sup>53</sup>.

Increasingly we see that academic novels set up academe as a kind of sitting duck, as the target of all that is wrong with society rather than as an example of what society should or could be promoting. The absurdity and hyperbole characteristic of satire have become inflated, in many cases, to the pitch of a mean-spirited and cynical rant. Prejudices are confirmed, stereotypes performed, and caricature rules the narratives in their descriptions of academic creeds and rituals. Whether it is the authors or the readers who are driving the direction in academic satire is unclear; but both seem curious about and suspicious of the cabalistic, closed-door life the university seems to represent. What should be a transparent world of open intellectual inquiry becomes opaque, and what could foster lively intellectual exchange devolves into petty bickering. Community collapses as constituencies like faculty, administration, and students are set upon each other in conflict and competition rather than in cooperation and collegiality. Absent community life,

<sup>49</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, Letter, *New York Times Book Review*, 22 Sept. 1974: 43.

<sup>50</sup> Proctor, p. 133.

<sup>51</sup> Weiss, Wolfgang, *Der anglo-amerikanische Universitätsroman: Eine historische Skizze* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994)

<sup>52</sup> Weiss, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. by Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007)

individuals likewise suffer fractured identities, diminished egos, and devalued roles in public life.<sup>54</sup>

One is likely to need a breath of fresh air after reading such a collection of fulminatory statements, and I may be right by saying that the uninitiated reader, after having read this short paragraph, would certainly think twice before daring to read an academic novel. As a matter of fact, I do not see the implied 'we' who regard academic novels as infernally distorted mirrors held up to academe, neither do I agree with Connor's observations about the subgenre. The excerpt, I believe, is designed to make an emotional impact on the reader by subjective observation rather than to secure a scholarly argument. Certainly, none of the studies published in the book support Connor's initial statements, and the bibliography entitled 'Twentieth-Century Works of Academic Fiction'<sup>55</sup> at the end of the book contains academic novels that mostly provoke laughter rather than despair.

Connor's introductory words, I propose, were intended to establish the satiric nature of academic fiction. In order to secure this fundamental take-off point of investigating academic fiction, Connor had sent out questionnaires to the ten most representative novelists of academic satire.<sup>56</sup> The responses to the queries were analysed mostly to see whether authors of academic fiction saw their fiction as essentially satiric. David Lodge and A. S. Byatt did not reply. Three American novelists wrote brief dismissals. Joyce Carole Oates wrote that

apart from my stories in *THE HUNGRY GHOSTS*, and intermittently in my novels *THE UNHOLY LOVERS* and *NEMESIS* (under "Rosamond Smith"), I haven't anything more to say about the academic world except that it is no more naturally satirical than any other.<sup>57</sup>

Philip Roth's reply is that his books should speak for themselves.<sup>58</sup> Richard Russo's answer reads as follows.

People think of *Straight Man* as my academic novel, but I never thought of it in those terms. [...] I always thought of the resulting novel as being more about middle age than the academy. [...] While the book was clearly influenced by the

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<sup>54</sup> Kimberly Rae Connor, 'Stumbling Through the Groves', in *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. by Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. by Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 147-148.

<sup>56</sup> The ten names were chosen from a short-list of fifty twentieth-century writers of academic satire which had been compiled by Connor and her research team in advance.

<sup>57</sup> Connor, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Connor, p. 7.

wonderful *Lucky Jim* (as well as other academic satires), it always seemed thematically closer to a couple of non-satiric novels also set in the academy.<sup>59</sup>

Jane Smiley admitted her lack of familiarity with the subgenre but regarded her most famous academic novel, *Moo* (1995), humorous rather than cynical. As it becomes clear from the responses, the authors of the supposedly most eminently satiric academic novels find little, if any, satire in their portrayals of higher education. Apparently, that none of the interviewees responded in the way that would support Connor's presupposition entails considerable significance as regards how wrongly critics may judge the nature of academic fiction.<sup>60</sup> Many academic novels can be equipped with satiric interpretations; nevertheless, it should be admitted that emphasis is not on the 'many' but on the 'can'. As has already been mentioned, satire is not an absolute aesthetic quality and personal involvement in higher education is likely to make readers more sensitive to perceiving satire in academic novels, especially when one wishes to write a scholarly paper on them. From the point of view of the definitional problems of academic fiction, let us conclude that satire is an inadequate attribute for the purposes of identifying university novels.

#### **1.2.4. Working definition**

Outside the scope of the stereotypical notion of the campus novel a number of other, minor convictions concerning the nature of the subgenre exist. The list of ideas could continue, but their diminishing focus and narrowing applicability would eventually make them slip out of the category of the definition and make them be part of a collection of minor observations that do not necessarily have to be dealt with here. As has been demonstrated, the two basic stereotypical notions concerning academic novels can easily misinform readers and critics alike concerning the nature of the subgenre. Within the scope of the stereotypical notion of the academic novel, firstly, it has been a frequent error to suppose that the proportion of its campus setting is what regulates whether a work of fiction should be

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<sup>59</sup> Connor, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> I would venture several tentative conclusions here as to why Connor's questionnaire failed. If those novelists who are regarded as the most representative authors of academic satire do not consider their novels satirical, perhaps critics maintain erroneous convictions concerning the true nature of academic satires. The fact that the works of the interviewed authors had been chosen from fifty carefully selected satiric novels, implies that the selective criteria that the research group employed had been inadequate even to select the *most* prominent academic satires. Going even further, it should perhaps be admitted that the second half of the twentieth century cannot, after all, be considered *the age* of the satirical campus novel.

considered an academic novel or not; secondly, satire has been frequently – and mistakenly – considered endemic to the subgenre.

The need for clarifying the definitional criteria of the academic novel is understandable because the number of novels that are identified as academic novels on the apparently erroneous stereotypical notions of the subgenre is high. One typical example of such a subgeneric misplacement is Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) which became tagged as an academic novel in spite of itself. The protagonist of the novel, Jack Gladney, works at College-on-the-Hill as head of the Hitler Studies Department and teaches a course on 'Advanced Nazism'. The novel, however, instead of engaging into any aspects of the fictional college it portrays, is more like a philosophical inquiry probing into the depth of such fundamental issues as death, truth and existence through the lens of contemporary American culture. Rich in existential discussions that find their source in everyday trivialities, the novel discusses no relevant academic issues in any lengths whatsoever. Some critics, besides Showalter, nevertheless, have labelled *White Noise* an academic novel. DeLillo, attributing the obvious error to the assessor, firmly denied any connection: 'This isn't a campus novel, and it's not a satire on college life. [...] I don't think this was an issue at all...this is just a comment on the kind of super-specialization that has entered our culture in the last 15 years or so.'<sup>61</sup>

In accordance with such specialists of the subgenre as Mortimer Proctor, John O. Lyons, Ian Carter, Janice Rossen and Wolfgang Weiss, I am of the opinion that the underlying precondition of every academic novel is that it should primarily be related to the world of higher education. The definition that I have formulated for the purposes of the present study certainly reflects this conviction.

I consider an academic novel a work of fiction the primary thematic concern of which is closely related to the world of higher education. Therefore, campus novels feature university teachers/students and other employees of higher education, and most frequently, though not necessarily, universities as their main settings. Some of the themes that academic novels frequently deal with are teaching, studying, the life of university teachers and students, research, academic disciplines, educational politics and pedagogical issues.

That university novels usually feature academics and students, that they are usually set in a university campus, that they may be satirical are all the consequences, rather than the prerequisites, of the genre's thematic orientation.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Ray Suarez on NPR Book Club of the Air (August 4, 1994)  
<<http://perival.com/delillo/technoise.html>> [accessed June 09 2006]

Certainly, the degree of a novel's thematic involvement into the world of academe is a matter of subjective assessment. This problem of subjectivity has been addressed earlier in this chapter. There, it was Mortimer Proctor and Janice Rossen who, quite arbitrarily, determined the minimum thematic presence of higher education in a novel in order to qualify it as academic fiction.<sup>62</sup> The task of determining such a thematic threshold is not simple, as one of the most typical characteristics of the campus novel is exactly that it combines a non-academic with an academic theme. The proportioning of the academic and the non-academic, nonetheless, can be astoundingly variable. In between Tom Sharpe's *Wilt* (1976), which appears to possess very feeble connections with the academe, and David Lodge's *Small World* (1988), the academic content of which at certain points makes hardly any sense for the uninitiated reader, we can find a very rich selection of novels. And indeed, a continuum with 'academic' and 'non-academic' at its most extreme poles is what seems appropriate for determining the 'campus-novelness' of certain narratives.

Defining the proportion of the academic and non-academic content of a university novel has become especially difficult in the case of post-war novels. There is a general critical consensus about the fact that after the 1940s the academic novel began to display an apparent thematic opening-up, a marked tendency to engage into such extra-educational matters as larger social, political and cultural issues. Indeed, the academic novel of the pre-1950s is perceptibly more cloistered and insulated in a thematic sense; i.e. the prime preoccupation of the novelist largely remains within the thematic scope of higher education. This thematic opening-up is what Malcolm Bradbury observes in *No, Not Bloomsbury*<sup>63</sup> by pointing out that the sentimental academic *Bildungsroman* that 'told tales of moral, social and religious education in the world of Oxbridge'<sup>64</sup> is fundamentally different from its post-war descendant which is 'much less concerned with nostalgia or social recollection, more with intellectual and social change'<sup>65</sup>.<sup>66</sup> Albert Gelpi in his comment on post-war academic satires in the foreword of *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre* argues along the same lines as Bradbury.

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<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, cases of judging a novel's academe-related content too excessive also occur. For instance, although I found the amount of literary theory and literary history quite satisfactory in Anita Brookner's *Providence* (1991), in his *TLS* review Galen Strawson criticized the novel for its 'sense of over-academic endeavour' (Galen Strawson, 'The Elegance of Control', *Times Literary Supplement* (May 28, 1982), p. 579.).

<sup>63</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1987)

<sup>64</sup> Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 330.

<sup>65</sup> Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 331.

<sup>66</sup> In fact, Bradbury perceives the gap between two forms of the subgenre so large that he even proposes a tentative terminological distinction by denoting the former 'university novel' and the latter 'campus novel' (Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 331.).



Academic fiction, far from being a specialized genre, has become the vehicle for dealing with the crucial social, economic, philosophical, and moral issues of contemporary life – and characteristically, submitting them to an analysis intensified by an additional level of critical awareness.<sup>67</sup>

Steven Connor in his research of post-war English fiction entitled *The English Novel in History 1950-1995*<sup>68</sup> perceives this tendency in the subgenre so marked that he included numerous academic novels in his study as eminent examples of the condition of England novel form.<sup>69</sup>

The more journalistically conceived *Professorromane*<sup>70</sup> of the post-war era proved to fit well Showalter's historical perspective, who proposes that the academic novel – just like the novel in general – is a belated form of social criticism.<sup>71</sup> This belatedness, Showalter argues, is roughly a decade (though after the discussion of the 1970s this delay seems to vanish from her arguments), and the analyses that make up *Faculty Towers* illustrate the accuracy with which individual novels reflect the general cultural, social and political milieu of the decade preceding their publications. In a sense, Showalter places special emphasis on the fact that the academic novel of the post-1950s abandons the monastic withdrawal of its predecessors and becomes contextualized in a wider cultural, social and political framework. In Showalter's interpretation the *Professorromane* of the 1950s showed how the post-war generation of the 1940s exerted a disruptive effect on the pre-war upper classes which, as David Lodge puts it, still commanded the social and cultural high ground<sup>72</sup>; how the books that came out in the 1960s looked back to the more placid decade of the 1950s<sup>73</sup>; how the academic novel of the 1970s began to explore the political turmoil of the 1960s<sup>74</sup>; how faithfully the 1980s gave rise to university novels that reflected on the emergence of literary theory and women's studies in the 1970s<sup>75</sup>; how in the 1990s' academic fiction political correctness, culture wars and the

<sup>67</sup> Albert Gelpi, *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. by Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p. ii.

<sup>68</sup> Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 69-82.

<sup>69</sup> The condition of England novel is traditionally a Victorian form of the novel depicting the industrial and economic conditions of the country.

<sup>70</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century the undergraduate as the central character in academic fiction had largely been replaced by the university professor. The tendency did not pass unnoticed and in 1980 Richard G. Caram coined the term *Professorroman* to refer to the kind of academic novel that provides fictional accounts about the lives of university faculty (Richard G. Caram, *The Secular Priests: A Study of the College Professor as Hero in Selected American Fiction, 1955-1977* (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1980)).

<sup>71</sup> Showalter, p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> Showalter, pp. 17-18.

<sup>73</sup> Showalter, p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> Showalter, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> Showalter, p. 84.

tragedies of tenure became central topics<sup>76</sup>; and how the novels of academic life written in the first decade of the twenty-first century reflect on the issue of sexual harassment<sup>77</sup>.

To return to the problem of assessing the academic content of a university novel, it should be pointed out that subjectivity in defining the degree to which a novel belongs to the subgenre of academic fiction is permissible. It is for these subjective reasons, for example, that Elaine Showalter sees Philip Roth's *The Professor of Desire* (1977) and *The Ghost Writer* (1979) as 'quasi-academic novels' in which, according to Showalter, Roth used 'the campus setting and faculty figures to explore questions of Jewish literary identity.'<sup>78</sup> Clearly, this element of subjectivity cannot be eradicated entirely from the process of classifying academic novels; and, quite naturally, I also have my own ideas of how much thematic presence I expect from a novel in order to include in the present investigation.

### 1.3. The academic novel: fact or fiction?

The academic novel, as a literary subgenre, is comprised of both fact and fiction. On the one hand, as Mortimer Proctor points out, 'university novels have always had to a large extent the quality of the documentary about them'<sup>79</sup>. The university novel's preoccupation with the phenomenological world, of course, is a natural disposition considering its generic parentage. The novel – and traditionally it is the realist novel that we mean by the term –, based on Robert Scholes' definition, is 'rooted in the conflict of the individual and society'<sup>80</sup> and therefore is fundamentally mimetic in the sense that it imitates human behaviour in an attempt to seek to represent reality.<sup>81</sup> The qualifier 'academic' in the term 'academic novel' denotes a thematic restriction, which means that the academic novel seeks to represent the behaviouristically observable reality of those individuals and communities that live and work within the world of higher education. As was concluded in my definition of the academic novel, the fact component of campus fiction is generally furnished by all those narrative elements (e.g. characters, settings, plot, action, ideas, etc.) that enable individual novels to address issues concerning higher education, be it related to teaching, studying, customs and

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<sup>76</sup> Showalter, p. 107.

<sup>77</sup> Showalter, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> Showalter, pp. 81-82.

<sup>79</sup> Proctor, p. 187.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 101.

<sup>81</sup> Scholes, p. 109.

codes, pedagogical issues, educational politics, history of education, ethical issues, academic freedom, academic competition, academic disciplines, etc.

On the other hand, the fiction component (i.e. authorial invention) within the academic novel is equally present. A great deal of what normally constitutes university novels is, strictly speaking, not true: the academic community – both faculty and undergraduates – is reduced to a small, and mostly not at all likeable set of literary stereotypes; poetic justice often takes control of the logical course of events dictated by the realities of higher education; academic life, *per se*, is frequently portrayed in terms of its worst or idealized in terms of its best; fictional teachers and undergraduates are often equipped with heroic qualities which enable them to carry out supernatural acts; at times the fictional higher education is completely unrecognizable even for those who have considerable first-hand experience, etc.

As far as the fictional-factual nature of academic fiction is concerned, I find Janice Rossen's statement especially valid. As Rossen formulates it in *The University in Modern Fiction*, academic novels 'are social documents, but they are also fiction: private fantasies writ large across cultural norms, expectations and values'<sup>82</sup>. The relevance of these, perhaps all too obvious observations is that readers can expect university novels to operate outside the boundaries granted by the realities of academe; boundaries which can be broadened sometimes just minutely, sometimes considerably or at times almost infinitely depending on the proportion of fact and authorial invention within a novel. Certain university novels are completely true to life in their portrayal of academe. It is such an explicit realism that Mortimer Proctor celebrates below in William Winwood Reade's *Liberty Hall, Oxon* (1860).

A successful attempt to give a detailed and yet unexaggerated picture [...] is to be found in a thoroughgoing effort at reform by William Winwood Reade [...] Reade noted that he was "writing a drama, and not a burlesque; I try to paint scenes of truth and life, and not to etch mere caricature of humour and exaggerations." He did not avoid caricature altogether, but he did create a plausible university atmosphere in which the daily routine of early chapel, breakfast in rooms, study and lectures, afternoons on the river, dinner in Hall, gossip in the quad, and evenings of strong tea and hard work has a matter-of-factness which is welcome after the madcap drunkenness, the poisonings, horsewhippings, and rioting, in novels that show less restraint.<sup>83</sup>

In other academic novels the portrayed academic environment is recognizable except for the fact that the portrayals involve poetic invention, exaggerations and distortions of reality. An example of this would be the so-called 'negative tradition' in academic fiction – i.e. the

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<sup>82</sup> Rossen, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Proctor, p. 100.

tradition of the fictional abuse and negative stereotyping of the learned. Richard Sheppard in his investigation of character portrayal in academic fiction<sup>84</sup> points out that the so-called 'negative tradition' is comprised of novels which entail a more-or-less balanced interplay of deviation from and conformity with the realities of higher education.

I mean to suggest that the fictional vilification of the learned should not be seen as an objective transcription of reality [...] The negative tradition was always at best a series of comic exaggerations and at worst a series of malicious distortions which say as much about the fantasy of the narrator as the reality of the narrated, and in the post-*Lucky Jim* era it is no different. After 1954, university teachers and students will find grotesque and extreme caricatures, not accurate descriptions of themselves in films, plays and novels dealing with universities and their denizens. We all know professors who are a bit like Amis' Welch [in Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954)] or lecturers on the make who are a bit like Bradbury's Kirk [in Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975)] or lost research students who are a bit like Sharpe's Zipser [in Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue* (1974)]. But the humour in the description lies as much in difference as in similarity...<sup>85</sup>

This 'partly recognizable' type of university novel often exploits the dormant possibilities inherent in the social, political, educational and psychological determinants of the real academe. What is often involved in these novels is an element of testing, probing and experimenting, as if the author was bent on exploring higher education in a 'what would happen if...' situation.

Academic satires and academic romances would also belong to the 'partly recognizable' category. The reason why the discussion of academic romances requires extra attention here is because their difference from academic novels is vital in accounting for the relatively high degree of the unlikely and the clearly fantastic that they exhibit. The difference between the academic romance and the academic novel is basically that of the romance and the novel, one of the most famous expressions of which was produced by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables: A Romance* (1851).

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Sheppard, 'From Narragonia to Elysium: Some Preliminary Reflections on the Fictional Image of the Academic' in *University Fiction*, ed. by David Bevan (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 1990)

<sup>85</sup> Sheppard, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables: A Romance* (New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. vii.

It is not a coincidence that the very same quote is used as a motto in two outstanding academic romances: in A. S. Byatt's Booker Prize winner *Possession: A Romance* (1990) and in David Lodge's bestselling *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984). Both books are normally discussed as novels, yet, Byatt and Lodge employ the conventions of the romance to license themselves an extended use of the imaginary, to deviate from reality. In academic romances the reader should expect the imaginary to have a definitively marked presence. At first glance, the romance seems unable to engage into those real academic issues that the novel is so appropriate to address. This inappropriateness of the romance, however, is only ostensible. In spite of its extended imaginary content, and the fact that romances traditionally abandon the documentary mode of representation which is characteristic of novels<sup>87</sup>, the romance has proved to be a suitable medium to render issues related to higher education through verisimilitude, resemblance, reference and allusion.

Finally, there are those novels that despite completely subverting the realities of higher education, manage to address issues related to it. Richard Powers' academic sci-fi entitled *Galatea 2.2* (1996), or the late British astronomer Fred Hoyle's sci-fi academic novel *Ossian's Ride* (1959), for instance, are examples in which the mysterious, the supernatural, the scientific and the academic constitute a curious mixture. Postmodern, experimental academic fiction (including the novels I am going to investigate in later chapters) often belongs to this last 'academic fantasies' category by their frequent, total disregard for documenting or reflecting reality in its traditional literary forms<sup>88</sup>. Such novels would be Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) the protagonist of which believes to be the exiled monarch of a distant country called Zembla; Pablo Urbanyi's *The Nowhere Idea* (1981) which turns out to be the strange mixture of a mock scholarly study and pure fantasizing; or Richard Russo's *Straight Man* (1997) the protagonist of which discovers that with the help of his magic finger he can control his fellow academicians.

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<sup>87</sup> More on the relationship between the thematic foregrounding and its corresponding narrative conventions of the novel can be read later on in Chapter Two entitled 'Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism'.

<sup>88</sup> The basic assumptions behind this mimetic mode of writing (e.g. eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English realist fiction) is the existence of an ordered reality that is empirically graspable by the positivist mind. The novelist, in order to render the objective facts of this ordered reality, as Patricia Waugh argues in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), however, is required to make use of a specific set of literary modes of expression. The list that Waugh provides includes a well-made plot, chronological sequence of events, the authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters 'do' and what they 'are' and the usual connection between 'surface' details and the 'deep', 'scientific laws' of existence (Waugh, p. 43.).

I believe the categories of the ‘true to life’, the ‘partly recognizable’ and ‘academic fantasies’ appropriately illustrate the varying degrees of fact-fiction composition of academic novels. Yet, the categories are not absolute and the placement of certain novels would necessarily be open to debate. What becomes obvious from the tripartite taxonomy above, however, is that authorial invention has a decidedly important role in academic fiction. What constitutes the central thesis of the following chapter is based on the observation that in spite of the fact that authorial invention, exaggerations and distortions are organic parts of academic fiction, the critical reception of the subgenre exhibits an overwhelming uniformity in treating individual works as more-or-less faithful representations of reality. This critical mindset has determined both the methods of analysing and evaluating academic novels. The aim of Chapter Two entitled ‘Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism’ is to explore the ways in which this predominantly realist approach has extracted values and meanings from academic novels.

## II. Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism

In an era before there were handbooks, self-help guides, or advice columns for graduate students and junior faculty in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, novels taught me how a proper professor should speak, behave, dress, think, write, love, succeed, or fail.

Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers*, p. 2.

I had not yet grasped the spaces that exist between fictions and fact, image and reality, nor how the territory taken by fiction becomes mythicised, timeless, and both truer and less true than – but never as true as – the real thing.

Malcolm Bradbury, 'Campus Fictions'<sup>89</sup>

### 2.1. Modes of referential criticism

Referential criticism – as a critical response to fiction – is predicated on the mimetic view of literature, i.e. a work of fiction reflects our experiential world. Referential criticism is the most widespread, standard response to academic novels. Critics and commentators of academic fiction, I propose, employ four principal modes/approaches to address the realist relevance of individual works.

The first of the four is the individual documentary view<sup>90</sup>, which is based on the premise that the individual experience of fictional university teachers and undergraduates depicted in academic novels is real, mostly of autobiographical nature. The second, so-called generalizing move<sup>91</sup>, is based on extending the experiential material of individual characters in order to formulate generalizing statements concerning larger social units and classes. The third interpretative strategy basically views academic fiction as novels of ideas. In a typical type three critical commentary, also called as the conceptualizing reading, the experiential material of the characters is considered to be the carrier of ethical, social, psychological or educational notions and concepts. The fourth perspective is the so-called historicizing move<sup>92</sup>, by the help of which critics have been able to reflect on the development of higher education by linking

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<sup>89</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, 'Campus Fictions', in *University Fiction*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 49.

<sup>90</sup> I am also going to refer to this as the type one critical move.

<sup>91</sup> I am also going to refer to this as the type two critical move.

<sup>92</sup> I am also going to refer to this as the type four critical move.

succeeding literary portraits found in academic novels. The four types of critical moves that I have differentiated here provide useful categories to illustrate the basic ways in which academic fiction is seen as a form of literary realism. The individual, the generalizing, the conceptualizing and the historicizing perspectives, as will be demonstrated, are commonly used together in various combinations for the production of meanings rooted in the phenomenological world.

### **2.1.1. Type I: The academic novel as a documentary of individual experience**

The fundamental set off point of every realist critical approach is that academic fiction is the transcription of actual individual experience. Most campus novels can be divided into two absolute categories on the basis of whether they focus on the experience of university faculty members or on the experience of undergraduates. Therefore, faculty-centred academic novels – also known as *Professorromane* – are generally regarded to be documentary-like transcriptions of the individual experience of flesh-and-blood university teachers, while student-centred academic novels are generally regarded to be documentary-like transcriptions of real undergraduate experience of flesh-and-blood university students. In both cases critical commentaries, regardless of how much authorial imagination distorts or exaggerates the fictional portrayals, focus on the authenticity of the images and concerns that academic novels transmit on the world of higher education through the eyes of either the university teacher or the undergraduate.

As transcriptions of individual experience, student-centred university novels and *Professorromane* are often conceived as autobiographies or *romans à clef*. According to Harry T. Moore, the reason why university novels are either student-centred or faculty-centred is because academic fiction is fundamentally autobiographical and novelists forge their fictional material from first-hand experience of either being or having been a university student or a university teacher.<sup>93</sup> As John O. Lyons rightly observes in 1962, ‘more than half of the novels of academic life are thinly disguised accounts of the author’s experiences as an undergraduate’<sup>94</sup>. As Lyons’ statement implies, it is first and foremost student-centred novels in the case of which the autobiographical impetus has an exceptionally strong interpretative value: most of these novels are published soon after their authors’ graduation; they are set in thinly disguised universities attended by their authors; and many of the characters they feature

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<sup>93</sup> Lyons, p. vi.

<sup>94</sup> Lyons, p. 68.



are obviously recognizable for the initiated. As Malcolm Bradbury points out, these novels 'would allow alumnae in their later years to lift the book and remember dear old Professor X, and how it was all like that'<sup>95</sup>.

Just like student-centred university novels are based on the first-hand experience of ex-undergraduates, *Professorromane* are mostly written by practicing university teachers. It is perhaps also an autobiographical reference that in most *Professorromane* the author's professional field would duplicate in the profession of their fictional protagonists; for example, the central characters of the novelist and literary critic David Lodge in *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988) are mainly teachers of English literature; the same is true in the case of the literary scholar A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990); and the fictional protagonist in the late economist John Kenneth Galbraith's *A Tenured Professor* (1990) is an economist as well. Compared to student-centred university novels, however, *Professorromane* are generally less the autobiographical kind of fiction, mostly perhaps because the experience of working at a university department less readily lends itself to the kind of nostalgic reminiscing undergraduates often engage into concerning their own sojourn in their respective alma maters.<sup>96</sup> The *roman à clef* impulse, nevertheless, is patently present in *Professorromane*: faculty-centred academic novels frequently feature universities where their authors have worked; they may record momentous events that took place in their respective professional fields; and they often feature real colleagues, critics and fellow-teachers in a slightly disguised form. Perhaps the most well-known of those fictional characters that are based on real professors is Morris Zapp, a pleasure-loving, top-class, Jewish literary critic from David Lodge's *Changing Places*, *Small World* and *Nice Work*; Zapp was admittedly fashioned after the famous literary critic Stanley Fish.<sup>97</sup>

The biographical and autobiographical relevance of many an academic novel is likely to have contributed to viewing *non*-biographically/autobiographically inspired university novels as transcriptions of real experience. Whether it is so, can only be speculated. Nevertheless, it remains true that the general critical practice is to project the biographical impetus into every academic novel and, in a sense, ignore the fact that representations are 'contaminated' by authorial imagination, exaggerations and distortions. Apparently, the critical reception of the university novel rarely limits its scope exclusively to the individual for two reasons. Firstly,

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<sup>95</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 333.

<sup>96</sup> More on the difference of student-centred academic novels and *Professorromane* is to be found in the discussion of the historicizing perspective.

<sup>97</sup> Showalter, pp. 79-81.

focus on the autobiographical or *roman à clef* aspects of university novels does not allow critics to investigate much beyond identifying and verifying the accuracy of portrayals and fictional renderings of actual events (this problem will also return in the generalizing critical perspective). Secondly, the individual is considered to be too narrow a social segment for critics, who generally aim at establishing meanings that concern larger social units – e.g. women, men, races, groups of people, etc. – or educational, historical, psychological, etc. issues of collective nature. Although the individual experience of university teachers and undergraduates in academic fiction has been of little interest for critics *by itself*, it is frequently the point of departure of realist critiques.

### **2.1.2. Type II: Documentaries with a generalizing perspective**

A common variation of the type one approach to interpreting academic novels is the so-called generalizing perspective. Interpreting post-war academic novels from a generalizing perspective has been a highly popular and productive critical strain. A typical type two analysis is based on two premises: firstly, the identification of fictional professors and undergraduates as real professors and undergraduates, and therefore, the substitution of fictional experience for real experience (i.e. a type one critical move); secondly, the identification of individual portrayals as epitomes of the academic teaching profession or undergraduate communities. The generalizing approach is not an exclusive interpretative tool of the critic. Ordinary readers of academic novels also frequently perceive fictional portrayals of individual characters as embodiments of either the ‘typical’ university student or the ‘typical’ university teacher. To illustrate the potential of the generalizing approach, I have collected three examples. In the following excerpt Mortimer Proctor recalls an anecdote in which three of the most famous student-centred university novels of the nineteenth century are recommended for the French critic and historian Hippolyte Adolphe Taine as the best works of fiction documenting the lives of undergraduates in Oxford and Cambridge *per se*.

When Taine visited England, he was told that if he wished to know what English university life was like he should read *Pendennis*<sup>98</sup>, *Verdant Green*<sup>99</sup>, and *Tom Brown at Oxford*<sup>100</sup>, which together must have given him an interesting impression indeed; he accepted quite literally the passage just quoted [i.e. quotes

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<sup>98</sup> *Pendennis* (1849-1850) by William Makepeace Thackeray

<sup>99</sup> *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green* (1854-1857) by Reverend Edward Bradley

<sup>100</sup> *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) by Thomas Hughes

from the three novels], at any rate, and expressed his amazement at the luxury of undergraduate existence.<sup>101</sup>

This is how Malcolm Bradbury in 1987 recalls his own readings of academic *Bildungsromane* as a soon to be undergraduate.

In the early 1950s, a very innocent young man, I went off to a small redbrick university called University College, Leicester, today a big redbrick university called the University of Leicester. [...] I had little idea of expectation of the strange world I was entering, and little confidence in my right to be there. Even so, I had had some glimpses of what to expect, and these came from what can be called university novels.<sup>102</sup>

*Professorromane* have also often been conceived by professional and lay readers as documentary accounts concerning the state of affairs and problems of the academic teaching profession, as such. It is especially spectacular how prospective university teachers would take the documentary relevance of academic novels for granted and delight in the prescriptive value of the fictional material that informs them on issues of manner, dress code, language use or special terminology related to higher education. This is how Elaine Showalter in 2005 thinks back to her own readings of *Professorromane* as a then soon-to-be university teacher.

I found these stories entertaining, inspiring, and instructive. In the 1960s, as a first-generation college graduate, I took an immigrant's passionate ethnographic interest in their details of academic manners. They filled a novice's need to fit into a culture, and I found answers, of a sort, to many of my questions and even to questions I hadn't formed. [...] novels taught me how a proper professor should speak, behave, dress, think, write, love, succeed, or fail.<sup>103</sup>

The examples eminently illustrate the prescriptive documentary potential of the generalizing approach to university fiction: the heroes of individual novels are perceived to stand for 'undergraduate existence' *per se* by Taine; the freshman Bradbury believes that it is genuine undergraduate experience that he has encountered in his readings of academic novels; and the commencing university teacher, Elaine Showalter, discerns a complete guide to the teaching profession in her readings of *Professorromane*.

Type one and type two interpretative perspectives are frequently integrated into conceptualizing and historicizing pieces of criticism. The critical perspective that academic novels are documentations of either individual or collective experience of those who inhabit higher education *in itself*, however, provides a relatively small working space for the critic.

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<sup>101</sup> Proctor, p. 107.

<sup>102</sup> Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 329.

<sup>103</sup> Showalter, p. 2.

Already in 1957 Mortimer Proctor in *The English University Novel* lamented that without a graspable, broader thematic orientation academic novels would remain aimless documentaries with little to be said about them apart from conceding how accurate their portrayals were.<sup>104</sup> Proctor himself found little to say about the academic novels the chief merit of which was their descriptive accuracy. Proctor, nevertheless, found a host of university novels which enabled him to provide a new interpretative paradigm, the so-called conceptualizing perspective.

### **2.1.3. Type III: The conceptualizing perspective<sup>105</sup>**

The conceptualizing approach to interpreting academic novels basically views the work of art as a novel of ideas (as opposed to the autobiography, *roman à clef*, memoir, documentary, etc.). Conceptualizing is a fundamentally realist interpretative tool in the sense that it emphasizes ideological contents which are conceived and applied in the time and space of our experiential reality. In the following, I will discuss those thematic/ideological perspectives that have been the most influential and fruitful in interpreting academic fiction. As will be demonstrated, the ideological stances of liberal humanism, issues of power and authority, pedagogy and ethics – as they are all valid social concerns – necessarily overlap in many respects.

#### Liberal humanism

Mortimer Proctor located several university novels – e.g. Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913-1914), Ivor Brown's *Years of Plenty* (1915), Michael Sadleir's *Hyssop* (1915), Gerald Hopkins' *A City in the Foreground* (1921) and Beverly Nichols' *Patchwork* (1921) – which he analyzed by means of ethical philosophy and 19<sup>th</sup>-century educational theories. The resulting analyses were innovative compared to their predecessors: instead of focusing on documentary value, they illuminated the ways in which academic novels entered the debate of such Victorian educational thinkers as John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Henry Huxley and Herbert Spencer over vital questions concerning society and higher education. The key issues that Proctor saw addressed were: 'What is the value of the university? What is its role in the fate of humanity? What are the values that university

<sup>104</sup> Proctor, p. 190.

<sup>105</sup> I am also going to use the terms 'thematic' and 'ideological' to refer to the type three critical approach.

education should promote?'. University fiction, Proctor asserts, entered the debate on the liberal side somewhat belatedly, but it *did* make the point ultimately that liberal education produces a good man, a gentleman, 'possessed of the freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom'<sup>106</sup>, the central attributes of intellectual excellence.

Proctor's recourse to ideology as an interpretative paradigm to produce criticism was of precedent value as far as the reception of the academic novel is concerned. What Proctor managed to put his finger on was not only the investigation of a grand theme in university novels. He essentially identified the shift from documentation to thematization in academic fiction. The thematic shift was, nevertheless, rendered possible by a kind of university fiction the authors of which laid more emphasis on incorporating ideas and concepts into their novels compared to their predecessors. The same way as *The English University Novel* viewed academic novels as carriers of the liberal humanist notion of higher education, many other critiques soon followed suit in providing interpretations based on, for example, educational, feminist, racial, political, pedagogical, Marxist, literary, sociological, philosophical, psychological, economic, etc. ideologies.

#### Liberal humanism revisited

It was not until the 1990s, thirty-three years after the publication of Proctor's *The English University Novel* (1957), that Ian Carter in *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post War Years* (1990) rediscovered Proctor's idea and established it again: 'the shift from mimesis to metaphor [i.e. documentation to conceptualization (or thematization)] opens up useful territory'<sup>107</sup> in understanding campus novels. Carter's enthusiastic words from his 1990 study of the British academic novel clearly demonstrate how strong Proctor's influence actually had been.

Proctor had grounded his account of nineteenth-century university fiction in the liberal educational philosophy of J.H. Newman and Matthew Arnold. [...] Peter Widdowson (1984) used Arnold to pin down the fictional and critical practice of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge. In my view he overstates his case [...] but Arnold's ideas do give us a key for opening up British university fiction's dominant discourse.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Proctor, p. 194.

<sup>107</sup> Carter, p. 20.

<sup>108</sup> Carter, p. 20.

Carter's study of British post-war university fiction, nevertheless, is an interesting piece of meta-critical writing. There is a story behind the publication of Carter's *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*. Carter – being a sociologist himself – after reading Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975) was enraged by the fact that most critics thought that Bradbury's portrayal of sociology and sociologists was accurate. Carter himself thought that the whole issue was absurd.

Bradbury works from outside sociology, constructing a wholly unconvincing picture of the sociologist as social engineer, cynically and expertly manipulating others to his own predetermined ends. That some reviewers and readers took him to be providing a convincing description of the discipline shows how outrageously and complacently ignorant the British scribbling classes are about social science. In the United States, where social scientific ideas are much more widely disseminated and sociology is treated as just another discipline, no author could escape censure for such slackness.<sup>109</sup>

His disappointment eventually spurred Carter to investigate English university fiction, the result of which, apparently, became the first book-length study devoted to prove just how fallacious the images of higher education promulgated by university novels were. What makes Carter's study especially relevant here, however, is that in an attempt to disprove the realist nature of university fiction that had been established by *other* critics over and over again, he located the source of his own interpretations in the cultural concept of liberal humanism (which is also rooted in reality). Carter picks up the investigation of the English university novel where Mortimer Proctor ended his, and analyses post-war university novels published between 1945 and 1988. Proctor's conclusion was that English university fiction culminated in the expression of a liberal humanist education. Carter's thesis is that post-war university fiction is a conscious sustenance and vindication of that ideal. Carter insists that the post-war university novel withstood radical changes that took place in the real academe for over four decades:<sup>110</sup> it preserved the fictional overrepresentation of Oxford and Cambridge; it preserved an image of social closure; it preserved a hierarchical perspective according to which Oxford and Cambridge are superior to all other universities; it preserved an overrepresentation of the humanities.<sup>111</sup> Carter argues that compared to reality, the fictional image of English higher education is absolutely false. The reason why this image prevails, Carter proposes, is that it serves to sustain and celebrate the 'English aristocratic culture

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<sup>109</sup> Carter, pp. 210-211.

<sup>110</sup> Carter refers to the radical expansion and the consequent painful contraction of British higher education.

<sup>111</sup> Carter, p. 217.

rooted in once-monastic Oxford and Cambridge'<sup>112</sup>. It is argued that this culture concept is based on a mixture of humanistic principles and national pride which has been part of English culture since Matthew Arnold and has been handed down by such figures as T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams. As for the interpretation of a specific academic novel, Carter argues, for example, that it is the debate over the legitimacy of a higher education based on the humanistic principles in a utilitarian society that is restated in David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988). According to Carter, the problem of synthesizing humanism and utilitarianism defeated Dickens, Carlyle, Arnold and Lodge as well. The novel ends with each category in their separate boxes, no solution is offered.<sup>113</sup>

### Power and authority

Janice Rossen in her monograph entitled *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (1993) identifies the university novel as a literary carrier of the concept of power struggle. Rossen's point of departure is that the real academe wields significant power due to its cloistered nature and social-political status, and those who possess power positions in academe exercise their authority in the forms of the rites of inclusion, exclusion and marginalization. The interpretations that *The University in Modern Fiction* offers focus on how academic novels dramatize the ways in which authority is exercised in academe. From this perspective, academic novels model academe with an emphasis on its hierarchical nature and the power struggles that emerge between those who are related to it. In order to highlight and elucidate the power issues academic novels transmit, it becomes unavoidable for Rossen, firstly, to treat fictional characters as literary devices that authentically represent real people, secondly, to view their experience comparable with those of real people. Rossen systematically pursues a type three critical agenda by identifying well-known manifestations of power struggle between insiders and outsiders (i.e. those who are already in the university system and those who wish to gain admittance), between undergraduates, between faculty members, and between academics in general both on a domestic and international scale.

The novels that become central to *The University in Modern Fiction* typically feature characters who suffer the injustices of the hierarchical system of higher education, while novels are seen as individual case studies of repression, marginalization and exclusion. The case studies of the individual experience of fictional characters, however, are used as

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<sup>112</sup> Carter, p. 217.

<sup>113</sup> Carter, p. 256.

springboards to address complex issues. The critical process therefore necessarily involves generalizations that are characteristic of the type two critical strategy I distinguished above. Thus the repressed, marginalized or excluded character comes to stand for classes of people, and the experience of the individual becomes analogous with that of the class. Let me demonstrate the interplay of the type one, type two and type three critical moves. In the second chapter of *The University in Modern Fiction*, entitled ‘Resistance: Women at Oxbridge’<sup>114</sup>, Rossen focuses on the fictional portrayal of women academics in Oxford and Cambridge. Despite the fact that the title offers a relatively large scope, Rossen mainly focuses on Dorothy L. Sayers’ *Gaudy Night* (1935), in which a poison pen – apparently a male scholar – is sending malevolent letters to the female dons of the fictional Shrewsbury College with the intention of undermining their professional reputation. In order to draw general conclusions, Rossen necessarily employs a type one and a type two critical move in her analyses: not only are fictional women characters regarded as real women teachers, they are seen as representatives of all women academics. Thus the individual case based on individual experience becomes a matter of collective interest. The injuries that are hurled against the faculty members in the letters are contextualized in the historically well-documented animosity to women’s admittance to universities. Rossen references scholarly material to illuminate that what the fictional women dons in *Gaudy Night* experience is the ‘extreme consciousness of the long-standing prejudice against women and learning’<sup>115</sup>. Rossen argues that the concern on behalf of the women faculty members to preserve a moral high ground in the novel is that of ‘their real life predecessors some two centuries earlier, the eighteenth-century Bluestockings’<sup>116</sup> – a group of mid-eighteenth-century women who met regularly to discuss literature. Borrowing Rossen’s quote from Sylvia Myers’ study on eighteenth-century culture<sup>117</sup>, the Bluestockings, just like Sayers’ women academics, ‘took excessive care to stress their social respectability in order to forestall criticism of their intellectual pursuits’<sup>118</sup>. Rossen concludes that the long-standing male bias concerning women’s unfitness to learn masks the masculine fear of learned women, the masculine fear of losing a privileged position in the groves of academe. *Gaudy Night*, Rossen asserts,

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<sup>114</sup> Rossen, pp. 32-54.

<sup>115</sup> Rossen, p. 36.

<sup>116</sup> Rossen, p. 36.

<sup>117</sup> Sylvia Myers, ‘Learning, Virtue and the Term ‘Bluestocking’’, in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, vol. 15. (1985), p. 281.

<sup>118</sup> Rossen, p. 36.



‘emphasizes the residual resistance to women in the University and the continuing war which academic women wage to keep territory which they have already won’<sup>119</sup>.

Rossen continues to apply type two and type three critical moves throughout her study in different contexts. In Chapter Three, ‘Marginalization: Men of the Lower Classes’<sup>120</sup>, Rossen interprets Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim* (1954) as a literary expression of class consciousness and disillusionment in higher education of the British middle, and lower-middle classes. Jude Fawley, the protagonist in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is grasped in a similar frame of mind. Fawley is a stonemason who is refused access to college education. Rossen extends Fawley’s negative experience, who thus comes to epitomize lower-class men in general. The extension of the individual experience to a collective one is also instrumental in attaching a conceptual load to the novel and Rossen concludes her interpretation of *Jude the Obscure* by referring to it as ‘the first major novel to explore class issues in the context of the privilege conferred by institution in University life’<sup>121</sup>. Framed by an all-round power struggle so characteristic of higher education, Rossen argues, the conceptual dimension of the novel becomes the notion of exclusion.

### Pedagogical concepts

Historically the novel has been a crusading instrument. Swift, Fielding, and Dickens illustrate the way in which novelists have ridiculed the follies or flayed the sins of men. The novel of academic life is in this tradition, for it often has an argument to make. It is usually a pedagogical one, although it may also be an argument for racial or class tolerance or academic freedom.<sup>122</sup>

As John O. Lyons’ words illustrate, the pedagogical aspect is an unalienable component of academic fiction. The interpretative practice of focusing on pedagogical issues that are represented and discussed in academic fiction also belongs to the conceptualizing perspective. Practitioners of this kind of criticism normally discern two basic types of the pedagogical/educational novels based on whether the university novel under discussion is student-centred or faculty-centred. Academic novels that portray the experience of undergraduates constitute a special variety of the pedagogical novel, the so-called academic *Bildungsroman*. The qualifier ‘academic’ is relevant from the point of view that traditionally the heroes of the novels of formation rarely go to university. The majority of these student-

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<sup>119</sup> Rossen, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup> Rossen, pp. 56-91.

<sup>121</sup> Rossen, pp. 20-21.

<sup>122</sup> Lyons, p. xviii.

centred academic novels are somewhat nostalgic evocations of undergraduate life foregrounding the formative years of young individuals whose *Bildung*<sup>123</sup> is conceptualized in the specific educational framework provided by universities. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English academic novels<sup>124</sup>, and the American college novel written between 1920s and 1950s<sup>125</sup> are typically of this kind. The *Bildung* aspect of these novels has been of considerable interest only for a few critics. Mortimer Proctor, for example, in *The English University Novel* has many commending words about those Victorian academic *Bildungsromane* that managed to transmit Oxford's natural character forming effect.<sup>126</sup> John O. Lyons in *The American College Novel* devotes a chapter to discussing academic *Bildungsromane* only to conclude that they generally lack the educational scope – i.e. the *Bildung* – they are supposed to represent; as Lyons puts it: 'In the usual college novel the hero is rarely altered in any essential way by an idea or experience.'<sup>127</sup>

Faculty-centred academic novels are different from academic *Bildungsromane* in fundamental ways: firstly, their heroes are characteristically adults and therefore normally no formation is presented in them in the *Bildungsroman* sense; secondly, they are capable of representing the educator's aspect in the pedagogical issues involved in university education. As Lyons correctly observes, writers of academic fiction 'dramatize the criticisms which they obviously wish to make of university education or [...] give either an emotional or a reasoned rebuttal to the practices they condemn'<sup>128</sup>.

Palotayné Lengváry Judit devoted a full study to investigating the pedagogical relevance of academic novels. In *Mesél az egyetemi regény*<sup>129</sup> (1996) Palotayné perceives academic novels as the literary carriers of pedagogical concepts. The general thesis of *Mesél az egyetemi regény* is that academic novels are aestheticized discussions capable of faithfully depicting pedagogical processes, their participants, pedagogical aims, means, methods and institutions; of rendering the internal and external conflicts of those involved; and of conveying efficiently how communicational channels work in all these processes.<sup>130</sup> Under the umbrella term of the pedagogical novel, student-centred academic novels are discussed as coming-of-age novels and *Bildungsromane*; while faculty-centred novels are treated as a special kind of *Professorromane* with a specifically pedagogical bend. In Palotayné's

<sup>123</sup> i.e. character formation, be it spiritual, psychological, moral or social

<sup>124</sup> Proctor, pp. 150-182.

<sup>125</sup> Lyons, pp. 79-104.

<sup>126</sup> Proctor, p. 154.

<sup>127</sup> Lyons, p. 104.

<sup>128</sup> Lyons, p. 140.

<sup>129</sup> Palotayné Lengváry Judit, *Mesél az egyetemi regény* (Nyíregyháza: Stúdium Kiadó, 1996)

<sup>130</sup> Palotayné, pp. 11-12.

assessment the literary merit of university novels is subordinated to their pedagogical relevance. Furthermore, it is proposed that academic fiction should rather be looked upon as the handmaid of the discipline of pedagogy. The value of academic novels, emphasizes the author in *Mesél az egyetemi regény*, resides in the fact that the medium of the novel enables the novelist – the educator, so to speak – to stage the participants of educational processes and to elucidate situations of pedagogical importance in a manner scholarly articles, papers, critical studies, doctoral dissertations and other scholarly media are unable to explore them. The pedagogical insight that academic novels possess, therefore, is a great asset for the development of the discipline of pedagogy. Palotayné concludes that teachers and students should read academic novels for their own edification: they should learn from them, follow the good examples and interpret the fictional failures of academic characters as cautionary tales that should be analyzed so that the present and future deficiencies of higher education could be remedied.<sup>131</sup> In Palotayné's interpretation, for example, Professor Treece in Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) and Kingsley Amis' Jim Dixon in *Lucky Jim* (1954) epitomize the ineffectual university teacher (note the type two critical move) and demonstrate how vital communications skills in higher education are.<sup>132</sup> Reading from the same perspective, Joyce Carol Oates' *Unholy Loves* (1979) offers a counter-example in Birgit Stott, who is sketched on the basis of the competent, tireless and efficient teacher<sup>133</sup>; Bradbury in *The History Man* (1975), according the Palotayné, criticises methodological innovations of the 1960s and 1970s and cautions the reader about the dangers of excessive use of audio-visual aids in teaching; Bradbury's novel also instructs us how to deliver a good lecture<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> Palotayné, pp. 86-87.

<sup>132</sup> Palotayné, pp. 56-57.

<sup>133</sup> Palotayné, p. 64.

<sup>134</sup> Palotayné, pp. 65-66.

## Ethical concepts

In his study entitled *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community*<sup>135</sup> (2002) Kenneth Womack conceptualizes his readings of post-war academic satires in the framework of ethical criticism. Womack implies that post-war academic fiction conveniently fits the novel of ideas category since ‘practitioners of Anglo-American university fiction utilize academic characters and institutional themes as a means for exploring [...] ethical and philosophical questions’<sup>136</sup>. Womack’s approach is realist in two important ways: firstly, he locates the origin of the brand of satire endemic to post-war academic fiction ‘in the disillusionment that marks the professorial lives of [real] academics in the twentieth century’<sup>137</sup>; secondly, ethical criticism – as an interpretative paradigm applied to academic fiction – focuses on *real* issues of cultural, moral, sexual, psychological nature and ‘concerns itself with the interpretations of personal values and their relevance to the larger, *living* [the italics are of the original author] human community’<sup>138</sup>. According to the ethical agenda proposed by the study, Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954) explores the problematic moral state of post-war academic life<sup>139</sup>; in *Pnin* (1957) Vladimir Nabokov ‘employs the novel as a forum for illustrating the capacity of academic characters to act with cruelty and emotional negligence in their dealings with their peers, and, in some instances, with their students’<sup>140</sup>; in *The Hungry Ghosts: Seven Allusive Comedies* (1974) Joyce Carol Oates ‘offers a collection of short stories that, when read as a thematic ensemble, provide a fascinating portrait of the academic self and its fragmented ethical construction’<sup>141</sup>; Ishmael Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1993) investigates the ethical dimension of the appearance of multiculturalism in academe<sup>142</sup>; and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Masterpiece Theatre: an Academic Melodrama* (1995) surveys the ethical considerations of canon revision.<sup>143</sup> No matter which academic satire Womack investigates, he finds bankrupt value systems and plenty of room for ethical improvement. Nevertheless, the closing tone of Womack’s study is optimistic by arguing that academic novels trigger a corrective moral response in the reader which caters for a general ethical edification. As Womack argues, academic novels, ‘by postulating a kind of antiethos

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<sup>135</sup> Kenneth Womack, *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002)

<sup>136</sup> Womack, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> Womack, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> Womack, p. 18.

<sup>139</sup> Womack, p. 27.

<sup>140</sup> Womack, pp. 43-44.

<sup>141</sup> Womack, p. 61.

<sup>142</sup> Womack, p. 110.

<sup>143</sup> Womack, p. 127.

[...] ultimately seek to enhance the culture and sustain the community through a more ethically driven system of higher education'<sup>144</sup>.

#### **2.1.4. Type IV: The historicizing perspective**

Historicizing perspectives, by nature, involve the investigation of novels written over a substantial period of time, and are constructed by the linkage of succeeding literary portrayals. They are generally applied to supporting critical statements that aim at surveying and describing the development of higher education. Mortimer Proctor's *The English University Novel* is one of the most outstanding historicizing critical works written on the academic novel. Proctor traces English literature from the Middle Ages up to the 1950s and investigates works of fiction and portrayals that include universities, teachers or students. Proctor, by adhering to the documentary principle of the referential reading of academic novels, proposes that each academic novel (including the subgenre's short and episodic pre-eighteenth-century precursors) portrays those conditions of English higher education that prevailed at the time of its writing; as he puts it, 'the majority of the novelists, excluding of course the few determined anachronists, wrote in the vein they felt to be warranted by the conditions of universities'<sup>145</sup>. In Proctor's interpretation each university novel that he surveys is a historical 'snapshot', and linked in a chronological order the entire history of English higher education is reconstructible from them.

It must be clear to the reader that the university novel, in the long course of its development, has been shaped more than anything else by the state of the English universities. As a literary genre, it has always reflected conditions within Oxford and Cambridge far more closely than it has followed any literary trends or movements. [...] Read in conjunction with any good history of Oxford or Cambridge, the novels [i.e. university novels] come off remarkably well, and even enjoy a kind of success at producing a cheerfully careless effect of verisimilitude.<sup>146</sup>

*The English University Novel* thus demonstrates that the English academic novel from its earliest precursor of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* up to the late 1950s is a more or less clear documentation of the development of universities and university education. Proctor

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<sup>144</sup> Womack, p. 22.

<sup>145</sup> Proctor, p. 187.

<sup>146</sup> Proctor, pp. 185-187.

reserves an especially commending critique concerning the documentary value of the nineteenth-century student-centred English university novel.

The English university novels, therefore, have a very considerable documentary value, recording as they do the story of the most critical century in the history of English universities [i.e. the nineteenth century]. More than that, they contain the record of much that is elsewhere unrecorded. The portrayals they offer of English university life in the nineteenth century is monumental in scope, and it fills out the picture of the universities in a way that no history could possibly do for it has re-created the world of the undergraduate. [...] And as is customarily true, it is the novelist, not the historian, who possesses this special insight.<sup>147</sup>

Inspired by the insights of the historical perspective, other critics have also resorted to periodizing the development of higher education on the basis of academic fiction: John O. Lyons' study entitled *The College Novel in America* (1962), as the critic Harry T. Moore points out in the book's preface, offers 'an attractive history of American academic life'<sup>148</sup>; and the German scholar, Wolfgang Weiss' *Der anglo-amerikanische Universitätsroman* investigates both English and American academic fiction based on Proctor's and Lyons' findings.<sup>149</sup> Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers* also chooses to investigate post-war Anglo-American faculty-centred academic novels from a historicizing perspective. Showalter's study is a chronological overview of the subgenre, devoting a separate chapter to the discussion of the university novels published in each decade starting from the 1950s.<sup>150</sup> Showalter ends her study by concluding that

over the past fifty years, the *Professorroman* has offered a full social history of the university, as well as a spiritual, political, and psychological guide to the profession. Each decade has foregrounded the scandal and headlines of higher education – class, political infighting, feminism, sexual harassment, political correctness.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Proctor, p. 189.

<sup>148</sup> Lyons, p. vi.

<sup>149</sup> One factor that may have contributed to enabling critics to link individual literary images and construct historicizing perspectives is the academic novel's curious uniformity in possessing a fixed chronological scope. This time factor varies depending on whether the novel focuses on the university experience of an undergraduate or the teaching experience of a faculty member: the former stretches over the several years generally required to complete one's higher education, the latter typically covers less than twelve months. As by the middle of the twentieth century the undergraduate as the traditional hero of the academic novel had largely been replaced by the university teacher, post-war *Professorromane* are especially marked by compressing their action into a regular academic cycle, i.e. an academic year.

<sup>150</sup> I wish to point out that Showalter's chronological classification – since it is founded on large-scale tendencies – may not be descriptive of – besides the majority of student-centred novels – a number of *Professorromane*.

<sup>151</sup> Showalter, p. 145.

The historicizing perspective has also been useful to assist critics in establishing basic correlations between the popularity of academic fiction and the importance of higher education in society at large. In his article entitled 'Fictions of Academe'<sup>152</sup>, literary critic George Watson also argues that the rise of the university novel after the 1950s can undoubtedly be attributed to the fact that universities were becoming important in the lives of many more people by playing a exceedingly significant part in the social changes and the formation of culture that was taking place at the time. Mortimer Proctor in *The English University Novel* points out that the effective and strong university reform movement of the Victorian period attracted considerable public attention and created a large body of university fiction – the so-called Oxford novel<sup>153</sup> – in its wake.<sup>154</sup> John O. Lyons observes that the significant growth in the production of college novels in America after World War I was a direct derivative of the dramatically rising number of post-war college enrolments and the lively public debate over the standards and content of university syllabi.<sup>155</sup> Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers* draws the readers' attention to the fact that post-war academic satire 'has arisen and flourished only since about 1950, when post-war universities – the so-called redbrick universities<sup>156</sup> – were growing rapidly, first to absorb the returning veterans, and then to take in a larger and larger percentage of the baby-booming population'.<sup>157</sup> The correlation between the increased production of university novels and the expanding higher education is prominently demonstrated by the increasing proportion of books featuring a non-Oxbridge campus setting.

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<sup>152</sup> George Watson, 'Fictions of Academe', *Encounter*, November 1978, pp. 42-46.

<sup>153</sup> Since most English pre-war university novels deal with the life of teachers and students in the two major ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England, the appropriate term to denote them should be the Oxbridge novel. Yet, Oxford is proportionally so much overrepresented among these novels that Proctor regarded the label 'Oxford novel' more suitable (Proctor, p. 4.).

<sup>154</sup> Proctor, p. 51.

<sup>155</sup> Lyons, p. 180.

<sup>156</sup> The term coined by Edgar Ellison Peers in the early 1940s originally referred to six British universities which were founded in industrial cities after 1851 and which achieved university status before World War II. The term originally encompassed the University of Birmingham, the University of Bristol, the University of Leeds, the University of Liverpool, the University of Manchester and the University of Sheffield.

<sup>157</sup> Showalter, p. 1.

## **2.2. Critical reception**

### **2.2.1. Inescapable mimesis**

In the majority of the critical works that I have referenced so far there is an evident tendency for assigning literary merit to works of fiction based on the degree of verifiability of the fictional representations they contain. In other words, an academic novel is either praised for the recognizability and accountability of its academe-related content, or condemned for the lack of it. Deviations from this fundamentally mimetic principle are normally not tolerated. The novels that fall into the categories of the ‘partly recognizable’ and ‘academic fantasies’, for example, have been basically subjected to two kinds of critical treatment: they are either exposed to unvaryingly negative criticism because of their non-conformity to the facts of higher education; or they are identified as satires and the distortions of reality they contain are endorsed as admissible violations of the mimetic principle arising from their satirical impulse.

As for the former critical response, Mortimer Proctor in *The English University Novel* (1957), for example, severely criticizes *all* university novels written by women novelists for their lack of descriptive authenticity: ‘the catalogue of these works is happily not large, but the point of view they reveal is unmistakable for its total disregard of reality’<sup>158</sup>, remarks Proctor somewhat acridly. Similarly, it is lack of representational fidelity that Elaine Showalter finds objectionable in university novels in general. In *Faculty Towers* she concludes that

contemporary academic fiction is too tame, substituting satire for tragedy, detective plots for the complex effects on a community of its internal catastrophes. I find this simplification of academic psychology most glaring in the sagas of sexual harassment that have dominated in recent years.<sup>159</sup>

The more-or-less fifty years between the publications of these two highly similar critical opinions suggest that the general attitude to evaluating academic novels has not changed much.

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<sup>158</sup> Proctor, p. 146.

<sup>159</sup> Showalter, pp. 146-147.



The critical insistence that post-war non-documentary academic novels are basically satires has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The identification and reception of academic satires is generally based on the premise that satire, by nature, is predicated upon its referential relationship with the experiential world. As Brian A. Connery puts it in 'Inside Jokes: Familiarity and Contempt in Academic Satire'<sup>160</sup>,

while the notion that fiction has any relation whatsoever to life is regarded in some critical circles as quaint, many of us academics who read university fiction are clearly driven to do so by a desire to explore in fictional worlds that which is already perhaps too much with us in daily life. [...] Satire [...] implicitly claims a relation to life even when ironically disclaiming its pointedness.<sup>161</sup>

I agree with Connery in that the labelling of an academic novel as 'satire' is meaningful only if its reader is familiar with the phenomenological world the work of fiction aims to render by satiric means. Put it simply, if a reader has no prior knowledge of and/or experience about the world of higher education, he/she will miss most of what makes the novel a satire.<sup>162</sup> Post-war academic fiction is mostly made up of *Professorromane*, and therefore the knowledge that is required to enjoy the full effect of their satiric aspect is the complex intellectual, social, educational and psychological environment which surrounds the university teaching profession. It is hardly surprising that this epistemological prerequisite is not granted for the general reading public; and it is an important observation that all those reviewers and literary critics who actually label various academic novels as satires – being or having been university teachers themselves – possess an acute sensitivity for perceiving satirical treatments of academe.

Another argument stipulating why literary critics generally insist on the satirical nature of the post-war academic novel was proposed by Wolfgang Weiss.<sup>163</sup> According to Weiss, most commentators of academic fiction are unable to maintain critical objectivity because the novels they investigate address exactly those concerns which exist in the world they live in.<sup>164</sup> The result of critical oversensitivity and impartiality is that the imaginary is apprehended as real; i.e. instead of dismissing the distorted portrayals of the real university as fiction (just like

<sup>160</sup> Brian A. Connery, 'Inside Jokes: Familiarity and contempt in Academic Satire', in *University Fiction*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 123-138.

<sup>161</sup> Connery, p. 123.

<sup>162</sup> Augmenting Connery's train of thought concerning satire, it should be pointed out that the aesthetic effect of satire may equally be perceived when the epistemological precondition of satire in the reader's mind is satisfied either by fictive information provided in the novel, or by a collection of stereotypes the truthfulness of which could easily be questioned – e.g. one may enjoy a satirical novel on Chinese culture in spite of the fact that he/she has never been to China or met Chinese people.

<sup>163</sup> Weiss' argument has already been discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>164</sup> Weiss, p. 2.

Mortimer Proctor did), the critic is impelled by his/her familiarity with the world of higher education to identify satire and re-channel the inauthentic representations into a mimetic frame of reference. Ian Carter's case with Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975) is, I believe, a spectacular illustration of the attitude under discussion.

The premise that satire is a mode of documenting reality is what has made it especially easy for critics to proceed in their literary analyses of academic satires in any of the four critical directions I have distinguished so far. John O. Lyons often applies a type one move; as he puts it, 'the novel of academic life is [...] often the product of the spleen of disgruntled professors or students. Such works contain charming satire or horrifying revelations and may also make shrewd comments on the educational process'<sup>165</sup>. Similarly to Lyons, Sanford Pinsker also sees a frustrated individual, a largely autobiographical agenda behind academic satires.<sup>166</sup> According to Pinsker there is no self-respecting lit professor who

hasn't thought – either out loud or in private – about knocking off a tale of the assorted troubles at his or her version of Eyesore U? After all, the formula seems simple enough: plant a sensitive young professor in a garden of academic vipers, add a fetching student here and a soused administrator there, and voila yet another novel about higher education on the ropes.<sup>167</sup>

Kenneth Womack concentrates on the conceptualizing reading of post-war university novels in *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community*. According to Womack's type three approach, there is an inherent ethical motivation in satire<sup>168</sup> and the academic novel

through its express desire to critique, by means of satire, [and by] the unethical sensibilities that it ascribes to university life, seems a particularly meaningful arena for testing ethical criticism's capacity to produce socially relevant literary interpretations.<sup>169</sup>

Elaine Showalter pursues a type two, generalizing approach and discerns the epitome of the struggling academic intelligentsia in the satirical portraits of university teachers; in her own words: 'perhaps we professors turn to satire because academic life has so much pain, so many lives wasted or destroyed'<sup>170</sup>. Albert Gelpi, as has already been pointed out, emphasizes the conceptualizing value of the subgenre when he writes that academic satire has become 'the

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<sup>165</sup> Lyons, p. xiii.

<sup>166</sup> Sanford Pinsker, 'Who Cares if Roger Ackroyd Gets Tenure?', *Partisan Review*, 66 (1999)

<sup>167</sup> Pinsker, p. 439.

<sup>168</sup> Womack, p. 7.

<sup>169</sup> Womack, p. 19.

<sup>170</sup> Showalter, p. 3.

vehicle for dealing with the crucial social, economic, philosophical, and moral issues of contemporary life'<sup>171</sup>. The scholarly papers that follow Gelpi's foreword<sup>172</sup> in *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre* (2007), as the co-author and co-editor Kimberly Rae Connor points out, search 'to interpret academic fiction as satire in its original sense: functioning as social criticism that gives readers an enlarged sense of life by using the microcosm of campus life to stand in for human dynamics characteristic of the broader world and social order'<sup>173</sup>.

### 2.2.2. Criticism of the mimetic approach

As has been demonstrated, the dominant critical approach to academic fiction has been primarily realist, and critics and reviewers have been mostly occupied with specifying and elucidating those parts and references in a university novel which are organically related to the academe of the phenomenological world. This fundamentally mimetic approach has proved to be a rich and diverse source for the interpretation of academic novels. Yet, its rough hundred and fifty-year-practice has also illustrated some important disadvantages.

Firstly, the practice of referential criticism mainly depends on the exactitude of the fictional rendering of the world of higher education. Should a novel fail to live up to reproducing what its assessor, highly subjectively, feels adequate, it is deemed unsuccessful; or frequently – and wrongfully – treated as a satire<sup>174</sup>. I believe that it is an essentially erroneous approach because, as I have already discussed it at the end of the previous chapter, a number of academic novels are simply not intended to be faithful renderings of the life of

<sup>171</sup> Gelpi, p. ii.

<sup>172</sup> Kimberly Rae Connor, 'Stumbling Through the Groves'; Cecile Cazort Zorach, 'Our Hitler? The Academic Novel, Revisionist History, and the American Campus'; Peter Sands, 'Towers of Ivory, Corridors of Linoleum: Utopia in Academic Novels'; Doryjane Birrer, 'From Campus Fiction to Metacritical Fiction: A.S. Byatt's Academic Novels'; Mark K. Fulk, 'Tracing the Phallic Imagination: Male Desire and Female Aggression in Philip Roth's Academic Novels'; Brooks Bottson, '"Teaching English Isn't the Clean Work it Used to Be": Satirizing the plight of Token Professionals in Richard Russo's *Straight Man*'; Mark Bosco, 'John L'Heureux's *The Handmaid of Desire*: Desiring the Good Academic Imagination'

<sup>173</sup> Kimberly Rae Connor, 'Stumbling Through the Groves', in *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies of an Emerging Genre*, ed. by Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 4-5.

<sup>174</sup> The demand of documentariness on those novelists of academic fiction who are otherwise content with their disposition to infuse some imagination into their novels is clearly tangible in the case of academic satires which generally offer representations that, on the one hand, have been recognizably inspired by the world of higher education, but, on the other hand, cannot completely be reconciled with the real experience of being a university teacher or student. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, what exacerbates the assessment of academic novels is that the presence of even a meagre amount of satirical impulse in them seems enough for critics to consider – quite wrongfully – the entire work of fiction as satiric.

this or that university community. The arbitrariness and inappropriateness of a mimetic claim on academic fiction becomes especially tangible after the 1960s when more and more experimental academic novels started to come out both in Britain and the USA.

My second objection is that the monopoly of the mimetic approach in criticism has automatized critical responses to academic novels at the expense of suppressing other viable interpretative paradigms. This point is going to be important again in connection with postmodern academic novels which, besides easily lending themselves to the various interpretative approaches of the mimetic principle, address issues which lie beyond the scope of literary mimesis. Also, the fact that a significant proportion of post-war academic fiction is labelled as academic satire in spite of the fact that the satirical impulse in them may not be virulently present, demonstrates that critics of academic fiction mostly choose to see only the subgenre's referential relevance.

The overt exclusiveness of the mimetic approach in the reception of the subgenre is understandable, because for a long while academic novels did not provide material for alternative interpretative strategies. Changes in this respect, however, took place around the 1950s and 1960s, an era commonly identified as the advent of literary postmodernism. From among the various experimental currents of literary postmodernism, it is the metafictional academic novel which emerged most powerfully. The metafictional academic novel does not only offer the conventional referential readings, but also a form of self-investigation, the scrutiny of the art of fiction itself. The following chapters of this study are aimed at applying a fresh set of critical tools to address and extract new meanings and values from academic novels.

### III. From Literary Realism to Postmodernism

The desire to play a game in reverse usually arises when the straight way of playing has become a bore [...] the rules of the game, which although arbitrary, had somehow become 'natural' to the players, now seem artificial, tyrannical and dead: the system does not allow for sufficient player freedom within it and must be discarded. Although only a system can replace a system, the interregnum may be experienced as total freedom. If fact, it is but the moment of a new deal.

Michael Beaujour, 'The Game of Poetics'

These facts of language [i.e. the centrality of language in constructing everyday reality] were not perceptible so long as literature pretended to be a transparent expression of either objective calendar time or of psychological subjectivity [...] as long as literature maintained a totalitarian ideology of the referent, or more commonly speaking, as long as literature was 'realistic'.

Roland Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?'

Newer and newer themes came, but it was the form which was most debilitating.

Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions*, p. 32.

Arranged chronologically, the development of the academic novel up to the present can be conceived of as the succession of two main representational modes: the realist or mimetic<sup>175</sup> and the experimental<sup>176</sup>. The dividing line between the two phases may be placed around the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s when a batch of experimental academic novels started to appear in England and the USA. These new novels, on the one hand, perceptively dealt with the world of higher education, on the other hand, ignored or subverted most of those realist literary conventions that had characterised student-centred university novels and *Professorromane* previously. Naturally, the two phases are not wholly homogeneous and earlier instances of the latter, and vice versa, may occur. This chapter is aimed at investigating the reasons, circumstances and contributing factors of the transition from realism to experimentalism in academic fiction. In the first of the two propositions that I am putting forward I will argue that the shift under discussion was the result of the exhaustion of those

<sup>175</sup> Realism is used here in its classical sense, denoting the conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realist literature.

<sup>176</sup> I will also refer to experimental academic novels as 'metafictional' or 'postmodern'.

realist representational strategies that had been dominant in the academic novel of the pre-1960s. In the second argument, I will further point out that the exhaustion of the realist representational mode of the academic novel around the 1960s coincided with the exhaustion of the realist representational forms of the novel in general. The former argument posits that the realist-experimentalist transition was basically an internal affair of exhaustion and rejuvenation within the subgenre, while the latter recontextualizes these changes on the larger literary landscape of the novel.

### 3.1. The exhaustion of realist representational techniques

In realist academic novels two basic representational modes are commonly employed: the documentary or mimetic, and the thematizing or metaphorical. The former mode had dominated academic fiction until around the end of the nineteenth century. It was Mortimer Proctor who in *The English University Novel* identified the first major departure of the academic novel from the documentary representational mode.<sup>177</sup> By what Ian Carter later refers to as the mimetic-metaphorical shift in *Ancient Culture of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-War Years*<sup>178</sup>, Proctor diagnosed changes which suggested that the documentary phase of the academic novel had lost its novelty and innovative potential, and was inevitably drawing to a close. For Proctor, the revitalizing thematic focus offered by the turn of the century (i.e. nineteenth-twentieth) academic novel was ethical philosophy and nineteenth-century educational theory.<sup>179</sup>

The documentation-thematization shift is a historical change in the development of the subgenre which was probably as much necessitated by a worn out literary mimesis as by a thematically inviting, developing higher education. Since the second half of the nineteenth century thematization has given the opportunity to novelists and critics alike to discuss social, cultural, educational, ethical and historical issues related to the world of higher education. The emergence of the ensuing thematic ensemble proved invigorating for the subgenre and university novels have prompted numerous serious discussions concerning academe among both scholars and non-professionals. The arguments fuelled by the prevailing concerns and the states of affairs of the establishment of higher education, nevertheless, gradually became

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<sup>177</sup> Proctor, p. 194.

<sup>178</sup> Carter, p. 20.

<sup>179</sup> A more detailed discussion on the documentary-metaphorical shift can be found in the previous chapter under the subtitles 'The Concept of Liberal Humanism' and 'The Concept of Liberal Humanism Revisited'.

more and more familiar. The gradual exhaustion of thematizing in academic fiction somehow exposed the fact that the themes, characters types, plot structures, narrative elements that had been instrumental in conveying either a mimetic or a thematic reflection on the real higher education – i.e. a fundamentally realist set of literary conventions – could not offer an original and engaging literary experience any more. In the following excerpt Mortimer Proctor argues along these lines when he comments on the development of the academic novel up until the end of the 1950s.

Many university novelists, unless they were either insensitive to monotony or singularly determined to strike new chords from the few old notes of conventional university fiction, must have been aware that they were forced to keep alive the old clichés primarily because in them lay the most obvious stuff of university fiction. It was a handicap most good novelists would scarcely have cared to face. And it must account for much of the mediocrity of the great majority of university novels.<sup>180</sup>

I cannot but agree with Proctor's suggestion that the academic novel is a highly conventionalized genre. In fact, I consider it is so much so, that simply by collecting the necessary building blocks from a virtual 'bank of campus novel conventions' one could literally write a university novel (a conventional university novel, of course). But if academic fiction is to correlate with reality, the permutations of those events and situations that have constituted either faculty or undergraduate experience are finite, and novelty can only be incorporated into literary representations of university life if changes in the realm of the real academe prompt new character types, new plot lines, new concepts for discussion or a new record to be added to its history. Therefore, it is the low number of the building blocks and the narrowness of their combinability that sooner or later enforce the charge of repetition and predictability against realist academic fiction. The factors that can potentially contribute to the quick exhaustibility of realist representational techniques conventionally applied in academic novels, however, are manifold and the process of exhaustion is complex.

Investigating academic fiction from the reader's point of view, it is generally maintained that the majority of the people who read academic novels are or have been related to higher education in one form or another.<sup>181</sup> I find that readers' familiarity with and awareness of the world of higher education can easily trigger a general recognizability and predictability regarding academic novels.

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<sup>180</sup> Proctor, p. 185.

<sup>181</sup> The emergence of the academic novel as an autonomous genre, likewise, is accredited to the growing number of the university-educated.

Investigating the subgenre from the creative point of view, firstly, it can be argued that the reason why the academic novel is constructed out of only a few building blocks can be explained by the fact that the world of higher education is a highly restricted territory for fiction. The thematic range that academe can offer can become remarkably narrow and specialized, so much so that some university novels make sense only for the initiated, for those insiders who have first-hand experience concerning particular institutions, individuals or themes that are represented in fiction. Also, the fictional portrayals of university teachers and students are generally regarded as exceedingly stereotypical. In fact, it can be argued that the world of academe *itself* is easily graspable in terms of stereotypes. It can only be speculated whether it is the specific environment of the university – its customs, rituals and codes of behaviour, etc. – that makes its inhabitants inherently easily identifiable, or it is the observer who reduces more complex behavioural patterns into stereotypes. The historical correlation between real and fictional teachers and students confirms that most probably both have been at work ever since Chaucer's clerkes of Oxenford. The stereotypical nature of character portrayal unfortunately further reduces the fictional space of the novelist and further intensifies repetition and monotony.

Thirdly, it is a frequent complaint that owing to the stereotypical nature of the characters who appear in academic fiction, action in individual novels becomes highly predictable. If, therefore, an insightful reader made an inventory of the main characters at the outset of a campus novel, he/she – unless a radical moral or psychological transformation frees characters from prescribed attributes – would easily be able to predict the plot of the novel. That this is not merely a possibility was already clear for Mortimer Proctor, who made the following observations in 1957 concerning student-centred academic novels.

The reader who has made his way through the long list of English university novels cannot fail to note the remarkable sameness their plots, and even individual fragments of action, exhibit. Doubtless there are events that can scarcely be omitted from any account of a man's college career. But those that are most useful for fiction have been recorded so frequently by novelists that it is possible to construct a composite plot which would, either in part or in its entirety, provide a synopsis for the majority of university novels.<sup>182</sup>

Thirty-three years after Proctor had his two-page-long plot summary<sup>183</sup> in *The English University Novel* published, Ian Carter, with apparent dissatisfaction, set up three possible compromise plots concerning academic fiction up until the late 1980s.

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<sup>182</sup> Proctor, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> Proctor, pp. 1-2.



I would pick up a novel newly discovered in library stack or decayed secondhand bookshop. It could belong to one of many genres: comedy of manners, thriller, whodunit, romance. After a couple of pages I would discover the awful truth. *I had read it before*. After a couple of years, I had read them all before. Despite their apparent diversity, almost all British university novels play modest variations on one of three linked stories: how an undergraduate at Oxford (usually) or Cambridge came to wisdom; how a don at Oxford (usually) or Cambridge was stabbed on the back physically or professionally, sometimes surviving to rule his college; and how rotten life was as student or teacher outside Oxford and Cambridge [...] Reading university novels became steadily easier, though steadily less interesting. It also became steadily more exasperating.<sup>184</sup>

Accumulating criticism concerning the repetitive, monotonous and predictable nature of academic fiction impelled numerous critics to go as far as heralding the exhaustion of the entire subgenre.<sup>185</sup> Yet, the reason why the academic novel is still persistently present on the literary scene, I believe, is that its authors have continually been making successful attempts to infuse the academic novel with new objects for documenting, new themes to discuss, new satirical targets to aim at within the space allotted by realism. Regrettably, the space allotted by the constraints of the realist academic novel is finite, and in the wake of exhausted documentary and thematizing possibilities comes literary devaluation.

### 3.2. The Emergence of the experimental academic novel

By the 1950s it must have been clear that if one was to achieve any success on the book market of academic fiction, one should innovate and consequently abandon, subvert or recontextualize the conventions of the pre-war academic novel. Exactly what was to be abandoned, subverted and recontextualized were those realist tools, techniques and narrative conventions that constituted a fundamentally mimetic mode of writing. This is a point, nevertheless, where novelists were bound to encounter considerable resistance from critics.<sup>186</sup>

One visible way novelists tried to rid themselves of the iron-grip of realism was the so-called disclaimer foreword technique. After the 1960s it has increasingly been customary for authors of university novels to reject the realist connection of their works by means of introductory disclaimers. Considering the air of realism that has always surrounded academic

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<sup>184</sup> Carter, p. 15.

<sup>185</sup> For example: Adam Begley, 'The Decline of the Campus Novel', *Lingua Franca*, 7 (1997)

<sup>186</sup> A more detailed discussion of critics' insistence on the realist nature of academic fiction is to be found in the previous chapter under the subtitle 'Evaluation'.

novels – e.g. the often all too conspicuously recognizable locations, characters and events –, it must have surely sounded surprising to deny their relatedness to reality. Yet, such authorial disclaimers as the one below by David Lodge frequently start academic novels.

Perhaps I should explain, for the benefit of readers who have not been here before, that Rummidge is an imaginary city, with imaginary universities and imaginary factories, inhabited by imaginary people, which occupies, for the purposes of fiction, the space where Birmingham is to be found on maps of the so-called real world.<sup>187</sup>

Critics, nevertheless, have been persistent in *not* taking such authorial disclaimers seriously and interpreted them as even more trenchant expressions of satire, irony and parody, which, as was pointed out in Chapter Two, is a strong indication that the imaginative cannot easily prevail in academic fiction. An excellent illustration of the fact that critics have most often been unable to contemplate authorial turning-aways from realism can be found in Janice Rossen's *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic*; no matter how pointedly Evelyn Waugh, Dorothy Sayers and Malcolm Bradbury protested in prefaces to their novels that their portrayals of academic life had been drawn entirely from imagination, Janice Rossen obstinately went on with the realist agenda in her analyses.<sup>188</sup> The disclaimer technique, together with the 'willing suspension of disbelief' idea that it was supposed to enforce, did not really manage to dispel the tunnel-vision of realism. Disclaimers of reality were quickly explained away as thoughtful safeguards that kept the identity of fellow academics and institutions concealed, and their original purpose was soon consigned to oblivion.

A more radical and effective solution to fight off the claim of realism on the academic novel was delivered by experimental fiction writing. Experimentation, by definition, involves the creation of new forms and new patterns, and unless this creative process ceases to operate, repetition, predictability and exhaustion cannot emerge. Experimentation, similarly to authorial disclaimers, entails a certain degree of turning away from realism. Experimental representational modes and narrative techniques can suspend that focus on reality that has been ingrained into the subgenre of academic fiction for so long: they can probe, conceal, subvert, and even negate reality. Unfortunately, very few critics have noticed how many novelists have contemplated, and actually successfully acted upon the premises of experimentation. Ian Carter was the first of them.

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<sup>187</sup> David Lodge, *Nice Work* (Penguin: London, 1989), p. 7.

<sup>188</sup> Rossen, pp. 9-10.

In *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-War Years* Carter, however shortly, considers the relationship between form, content and literary value concerning the academic fiction of the pre-1990s. ‘One reason why reading university novels came to be so boring was their obsession with content rather than form’<sup>189</sup>, Carter declares, by which he also manages to put his finger on the operational problem of realist academic fiction. Unfortunately Carter does not investigate the whys of the literary exhaustion he alludes to; the position that I outlined in the concluding part of the previous subchapter, however, proves most illuminating here. The argument, in a nutshell, proceeds as follows: the inspirational fountain-head of the realist university novel is the academe of the phenomenological world. But this world is so small and some of its aspects are so well-known to many that it is impossible to keep the literary products about it from resembling each-other. The more academic novels are written, the fewer unprecedented representational variations remain and the ambition with which the vast majority of novelists attempt to represent the world of academe in fiction – either by means of documenting or thematizing – only accelerates the process of exhaustion.

Carter’s overt suggestion is that writers of academic fiction should abandon their exclusive concern with realist content and urges them to experiment with new representational forms; ‘If universities are temples of thought, of conceit, then one would expect authors to delight in playing games with the manner in which they present their work’<sup>190</sup>, argues Carter for experimental writing. The reason, I believe, why many writers have neglected these games is identical with the reason why critics have neglected to look for them in academic novels. John O. Lyons already in 1962 had firm ideas about both aspects in relation to American academic novels.

A study of the novel of academic life in America must inevitably be concerned more with the history of the novel as a literary form and social document rather than with genius. Only a few such novels are by major authors, and a few other are what the movie people call “sleepers,” but the bulk of them have suffered one edition and then been consigned to the remainder piles. Many of the worst are interesting by reason of the particular axe the author has to grind, or simply because of their abysmal ineptness.<sup>191</sup>

Both Lyons and Carter maintain that apparent focus on content in academic fiction was the result of the fact that writers had simply been too unskilled to come up with formal

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<sup>189</sup> Carter, p. 16.

<sup>190</sup> Carter, p. 16.

<sup>191</sup> Lyons, p. viii.

innovation. Carter even suggests that ‘given the slight talent enjoyed by so many British university novelists, lack of formal ambition is to be applauded’<sup>192</sup>. A race of skilled writers would have definitely done the trick but Carter found only David Lodge worthy to be considered as a true technical innovator of the subgenre.<sup>193</sup> It is interesting how few experimental campus novels Carter managed to locate, especially because since the 1960s academic fiction has displayed an unprecedented wave of technical innovation in the realm of narrative practices.

What Carter, including others critics, had failed to notice was that in fact there were and had been a number of skilled and talented novelists whose experimental fiction was outstanding. As a matter of fact, it can be argued that academic fiction after the 1960s witnessed a literary awakening, and became conscious of its own status of being literature *in general*. One important contributing factor to this new-found self-consciousness must have definitely been the fact that more and more professors of English literature began to write academic fiction; i.e. people who were trained in literary history and literary theory and often knew quite a lot about the craft of writing fiction. Professors of English literature, therefore, enjoy a double advantage in producing academic novels: on the one hand, just like other novelists who have written about their own field, have an extensive thematic knowledge regarding the concerns of higher education; on the other hand, they know significantly more about *how* to shape their fictional material. In *Faculty Towers* Elaine Showalter (without assuming larger changes within the subgenre) briefly comments on the self-conscious nature of certain post-war novels written by professors of English: ‘When English professors write novels, they tend to write about what they know best: other people’s books. Even in some of the most celebrated and familiar academic satires, rewriting literary conventions is as important as mocking campus attitudes.’<sup>194</sup> What had really attracted Showalter’s attention were the many academic novels that had been inspired by Victorian novels: David Lodge’s *Nice Work* (1988), Showalter observes, reworks the industrial novel, particularly Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849), Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850), Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (1854) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855); Gail Godwin’s *The Odd Woman* (1974) is based on George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893); Joanne Dobson used

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<sup>192</sup> Carter, pp. 17.18.

<sup>193</sup> Carter congratulates on the way Lodge uses Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) to organize plot in *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965); the way structuralism serves the same purpose in *Changing Places* (1975); the self-reflective cinematographic ending of the same novel; the way *Small World* (1984) extends and inverts *Changing Places* and gives us the first British post-structuralist university novel, here Lodge’s organizing device is the notion of the quest. Carter, pp. 16-17.

<sup>194</sup> Showalter, p. 9.

her studies of the nineteenth century American women novelists to write her academic fiction; James Hynes' *Publish and Perish* (1997) rewrites and updates the Victorian horror tale; and A. S. Byatt creates her own archive of Victorian poetry *Possession: A Romance* (1990).<sup>195</sup>

What Kenneth Womack came to notice in *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community* was also the apparent and unprecedented versatility that began to unfold in postwar academic fiction: Galway Kinnell's 'The Deconstruction of Emily Dickinson' (1994) is written in verse; David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992) and Susan Miller's *Cross Country* (1977) are dramas; Michael Frayn's *The Trick of It* (1989) is an epistolary novel; Stephen Dobyns' 'A Happy Vacancy' (1994) is a farcical short story; A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) and John Updike's *Memories of the Ford Administration* (1993) run parallel texts; Alexander Theroux's *Darconville's Cat* (1981) features a wide range of genres; and David Lodge's relevant novels have already been mentioned.<sup>196</sup>

Apart from these brief sideways glances during which Ian Carter, Kenneth Womack and Elaine Showalter registered the existence of less conventional academic novels, the entire critical reception of the academic novel has remained oblivious if not ignorant of the fact that the subgenre in fact possesses a massive experimental current that has been developing since the 1950s. Surprisingly, it has not been contemplated that this newfound experimentalism is perhaps a subgeneric phenomenon. It is curious indeed how experimentation in academic fiction has remained unnoticed and novels have continued to be interpreted largely on the basis of their referential content. But referential criticism is unable to account for the fact that the quality of postmodern academic fiction shows evidently signs of improvement. I propose that the appearance of the experimental campus novel in such numbers was not accidental, but, as part of a broader movement, the result of a shift from thematization to experimentation in the practice of academic novel writing. The thematization-experimentation shift was implemented primarily by those novelists who had recognized the impending exhaustion of all those representational modes that accentuated the realist nature of literary accounts of academic life.

### **3.3. Realism, modernist, realism, postmodernism: Paradigm shifts in the novel**

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<sup>195</sup> Showalter, p. 9.

<sup>196</sup> Womack, pp. 177-178.

The train of thought I am about to develop here places the period of the 1950s and 1960s, together with the changes that were taking place within academic fiction at that time, into a broader literary context. After the Second World War the literary climate in England experienced significant changes. As Rubin Rabinovitz summarizes it in his excellent study entitled *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (1967)<sup>197</sup>, after the end of the 1940s ‘the English had begun, it seemed, to be more and more vehement in rejecting the experimental novelists of the 1910-1940 era’.<sup>198</sup> Among the number of arguments against modernist experimentation, one of the weightiest was that its esoteric and elitist nature simply repelled the ordinary reader. As Pamela Hansford Johnson (as the then would be wife of C. P. Snow) argued in 1949,

in the nineteenth century [the ordinary reader] was happy. Dickens wrote for him; and Trollope, and Thackeray, and George Eliot. [...] But today he is seriously worried. Reading some of the weekend columns, he finds himself urged to admire some work which, when he buys or borrows finds arid, unenjoyable, and not infrequently incomprehensible. [...] He then takes refuge, more often than not, in the detective story.<sup>199</sup>

The other frequent criticism levelled against modernist experimental fiction was the conviction that the modernist novel’s excessive preoccupation with the individual’s sensibility was detrimental to the novel *per se*. In William Cooper’s wording, the experimental novel concentrated too much on ‘Man-alone’ and took little interest whatsoever in ‘Man-in-Society’<sup>200</sup>. Snow condemned the experimental novel because he felt that the novel only breathed freely when it had its roots in society<sup>201</sup>, something that the modernist novel in England did not seem to offer.

An imaginary manifesto for the novel of the 1950s in England can be easily delineated on the basis of these objections: engagement in social issues, the reinstatement of the story and the plot (which were thought to have been totally eradicated by the modernist experimentalists), the reinstatement of the traditional concept of character, the use of realistic prose, the endorsement of a documentary style, etc. Considering these characteristics, it is

<sup>197</sup> Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967)

<sup>198</sup> Rabinovitz, p. vii.

<sup>199</sup> Pamela Hansford Johnson, ‘The Sickroom Hush over the English Novel’, *List*, 42:235 (Aug. 11, 1949) Qtd. in Rabinovitz, pp. 5-6.

<sup>200</sup> William Cooper, ‘Reflections on Some Aspects of the Experimental Novel’, in *International Literary Annual No. 2*, ed. by John Wain (London: John Calder, 1959), p. 29. Qtd. in Rabinovitz, pp. 6-7.

<sup>201</sup> Interview, *A Review of English Literature*, 3: 105 (July, 1962) Qtd. in Rabinovitz, p. 99.

understandable that in the wake of the declining literary modernism what started to dominate the English literary scene was a revived enthusiasm for the eighteenth-century, the Victorian and the Edwardian realist novel. Raymond Williams also noted that ‘the 1950s could be fairly characterized [...] as a period of return to older forms, and to specifically English forms’<sup>202</sup>. I find Williams’ observation especially perceptive that the reaction against the narrative methods of Virginia Woolf by the realist writers of the 1950s was as sharp as Woolf’s own campaign had been against the pre-war literary realism of Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells.<sup>203</sup> Stephen Spender in *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963)<sup>204</sup> also establishes a literary kinship between the pre- and post-modernist realist writers under the heading of ‘contemporaries’. Spender points out that the difference between moderns<sup>205</sup> and contemporaries<sup>206</sup> is that while the former deliberately set out ‘to invent a new literature as a result of their feeling that our age is in many respects unprecedented, and outside all the conventions of past literature and art’, the latter ‘at least partly aware of the claim that there is a modern situation [...] refuse to regard it as a problem special to art’<sup>207</sup>.

The movement nature of the shift in the literary taste of the 1950s was tangible in the wholesale endorsement of realist aesthetic principles and the anti-experimental critical attitude by such literary figures as Kingsley Amis, Angus Wilson, C. P. Snow, John Osborne, John Wain, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, William Cooper, J. B. Priestley, Pamela Hansford Johnson, Doris Lessing, David Storey, Honor Tracy and Keith Waterhouse.<sup>208</sup> The literary influences that greatly affected and/or inspired these writers can count among themselves such 18<sup>th</sup>-century, Victorian and Edwardian writers as Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, George Gissing, Anthony Trollope, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Samuel Butler, Emile Zola along with the key figures of Russian literary realism.<sup>209</sup>

In fact, writers of realist academic fiction are comparable to the new realists – as Paul West denotes the group of post-war writers enumerated above<sup>210</sup> – to a great extent. Firstly,

<sup>202</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘A Changing Social History of English Writing’, *Audience*, 8:76 (Winter, 1961) Qtd. in Rabinovitz, pp. 9-10.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963)

<sup>205</sup> I.e. the experimental artists in the first half of the 20th century.

<sup>206</sup> I.e. the writers who preceded the moderns (e.g. Wells, Shaw, Bennett), and those who followed them after the 1940s.

<sup>207</sup> Spender, p. 71.

Qtd. in Rabinovitz, p. 3.

<sup>208</sup> Some of these writers are also referred to as the ‘The Angry Young Men’ for their stringent social criticism they expressed in their novels.

<sup>209</sup> Rabinovitz, pp. 14-21.

<sup>210</sup> Paul West, *The Modern Novel* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 126, 141. Qtd. in Rabinovitz, p. 19.

both groups of writers wrote about the environment they themselves had lived in. Secondly, for both groups of writers the knowledge that their work would be subjected to the scrutiny of readers who were intimately acquainted with the environment they wrote about, helped to assure the documentary realism in their works.<sup>211</sup> Thirdly, both groups of writers were either hostile or indifferent to experimentalism in fiction. C. P. Snow – author of the acclaimed university novel *The Masters* (1951)<sup>212</sup> – and William Cooper – author of another popular campus novel of the era entitled *Scenes from Provincial Life* (1950) –, beyond sharing Pamela Hansford Johnson's ideas concerning high modernism, expressed downright hostility towards experimental fiction. In an essay Cooper wrote the following.

During the last years of the war a literary comrade-in-arms<sup>213</sup> and I, not prepared to wait for Time's ever-rolling stream to bear Experimental Writing away, made our own private plans to run it out of town as soon as we picked up our pens again – if you look at the work of the next generation of English novelists to come up after us, you'll observe that we didn't entirely lack success in our efforts. [...] We meant to write a different kind of novel from that of the thirties and we saw that the thirties novel, the Experimental Novel, had got to be brushed out of the way before we could get a proper hearing.<sup>214</sup>

Most traditionalist novelists and writers of university novels, however, were simply indifferent to experimentation. For the academic novel the drastic changes that were being registered on the English literary landscape around the turn of the twentieth century were of little significance. As has been pointed out, university fiction – practically unruffled by any literary movement – had been comfortably treading alongside the history of English higher education, mainly documenting and reporting on its prevailing conditions. That the academic novel had successfully ignored literary modernism is clear if we take into consideration that, firstly – recycling Stephen Spender's words –, novelists of university fiction had never considered regarding the theme of university education a problem special to art; secondly, no novelist of academic fiction can afford to turn his back on the organic social concern of the subgenre by definition. Numerous critics also argue that the avant-garde movement in the first half of the twentieth century happily coexisted with a number of different, if not antithetical literary currents. As Rubin Rabinovitz suggests, 'it may also be argued that the realistic style

<sup>211</sup> This latter statement, as far as its relevance to the new realists is concerned, was formulated by Rubin Rabinovitz; see Rabinovitz, p. 28.

<sup>212</sup> Snow's other novels featuring the protagonist/narrator Lewis Eliot – *Strangers and Brothers* (1940), *The Light and the Dark* (1947), *Time of Hope* (1949), *Homecoming* (1956) – are also considered to be academic novels.

<sup>213</sup> Most probably it is C. P. Snow whom Cooper had in mind.

<sup>214</sup> Cooper, p. 29.  
Qtd. in Rabinovitz, p. 6.



of the nineteenth century had never really died in England, especially in the fiction of writers like Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, or Graham Greene'<sup>215</sup>. In a sense, the academic novel followed the Waugh-Powell-Greene line throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Of course, the novels written by the neo-traditionalists differ from that of their pre-war predecessors in one important respect. Among the significant changes that the two World Wars brought about in England it is perhaps the partial breakdown of the class system and the consequent rise of the lower-class man that had the most penetrating effect on the novels of the 1950s. This change is well-observable in academic fiction too in the way the well-to-do and aristocratic university men in E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907), Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) were replaced by heroes with humbler origins in Philip Larkin's *Jill* (1946), John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Andrew Sinclair's *My Friend Judas* (1959).<sup>216</sup> The upper-class central, and lower-class peripheral character distribution of the pre-war academic novel was reversed after the World Wars; and hand in hand with the shifting centrality of character types, the aristocratic upper class was being treated in fiction with less and less of its former deference and respect. In the new type of university novel 'rather than being cowed by the social structure, the protagonists have enough self-confidence to satirize and to criticize it'<sup>217</sup>.

Yet, neither the transformations of post-war English society, nor the appearance of new protagonists, nor the marked use of satire were novelties in the long development of the academic novel. In fact, what was perceived to be a revival of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realism in the novel trend of the 1950s, was pretty much the routine affair for the academic novel. That the traditionalist literary atmosphere of the 1950s corresponded well to the time-honoured realism of the academic novel explains why the criticism levelled against both of them shows unmistakeable similarities: neither of the literary traditions was fruitful from a literary point of view, very few great novels emerged from these periods, there is a general lack of distinction concerning the two literary outputs and both lacked originality. As far as the neo-realists are concerned, their novels were unable to live up to the literary standards of the experimental literature they rejected. As far as the academic novel is concerned, it is the pre-1960s realist strain that would soon prove to be inferior compared to its experimental successor. The literary consensus that prevailed in the 1950s concerning the accepted and rejected novelistic patterns resulted in a highly rigid, formulaic literary output.

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<sup>215</sup> Rabinovitz, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> Rabinovitz, p. 22.

<sup>217</sup> Rabinovitz, p. 23.

With the only variable of thematic orientation, most members of the 'reaction against experiment' movement wrote the ideal type of the mid-century English novel. This, so-called consensus novel – which is conspicuously similar to the ordinary academic novel – was supposed to be ordinary life-like, chronologically ordered, politically non-committed; to be based on ordinary expectations; to be engaged in social and moral issues; to be made up of realistic prose which is non-allusive, non-mythical, non-symbolic, straightforward, documentary and even journalistic; to be written in a psychologically accessible, more or less middle-class conversational language; to be characterized by an evident lack of concern with style and form<sup>218</sup>, of any stream-of-consciousness inner narratives, of a highly individualistic style, multiple viewpoints, and so on.

The situation concerning American fiction and the American campus novel around the 1940s-1950s was fairly similar to the prevailing situation in England. As Jerome Klinkowitz argues in *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-contemporary American Fiction* (1980)<sup>219</sup>, after the modernist innovations of the 1920s a nearly fifty-year-period of apparent regression in experimentation was registered by critics in America.

Since the Twenties there have been variations in theme of course, but for the most part the American novel has been marked by a conservative stability of form. For nearly fifty years, when in other countries such exotic talents as Gide, Hesse, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Cortazar, Borges, and Gombrowitz flourished, American fiction rested content with novels of manners or of social politics.<sup>220</sup>

The fifty-year-realism Klinkowitz refers to, nevertheless, differs from the neo-traditionalism experienced after the 1940s in England in the sense that, firstly, it was not a more-or-less conscious return to an earlier realist tradition of the novel<sup>221</sup>; secondly, unlike in England, the renewed interest in realism in America was not instigated by a vehement reaction against experimentation. The USA had its own idiosyncratic social, political, cultural and also

<sup>218</sup> I.e. plain, unadorned style, a general distaste for an excess of rhetoric, no poetic or effusive effects, absence of syntactic and verbal innovations.

<sup>219</sup> Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-contemporary American Fiction* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1980)

<sup>220</sup> Klinkowitz, p. 2.

<sup>221</sup> It can also be argued that England had possessed deeply penetrating realist roots. As Rubinovitz also points out (Rubinovitz, p. 32.), the strength of realism in the English novel also resides in the fact that England had been the hotbed of the philosophical pillars of realism. Logical positivism [as the hotbed of literary realism], on the other hand, had strong English roots. To some extent the movement itself is based on Hume's insistence on empirical evidence in determining rational meaning, as well as Bertrand Russell's logical analysis of propositions. In the 1930s and 1940s, two well-known logical positivist philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer, taught at Cambridge and Oxford, respectively. Their thought, along with the less technical empiricism of G. E. Moore, influenced a number of novelists of this period, especially those who had attended Oxford or Cambridge while, or just after, these philosophers taught there. Some of these writers incorporated logical positivism into their fiction thematically.

geographical conditions that directed American fiction towards the decidedly realist post-1920s literary trends of proletarian literature, naturalism, literary journalism, pragmatist literature, war novels, holocaust fiction, black literature and Jewish literature.

As the major American college novels of the 1920s-1950s period – i.e. F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Percy Marks' first novel entitled *The Plastic Age* (1924)<sup>222</sup>, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), George Weller's *Not to Eat, Not for Love* (1933), Marian Grosberg's *The Cauliflower Heart* (1944), Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Stringfellow Barr's *Purely Academic* (1958) or Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* (1961) – demonstrate, not only did the subgenre of the academic novel – just like in England – remain undisturbed by literary modernism in the USA, it also suited the more-or-less realist-naturalist mode of expression which the American novel followed for decades after the 1920s.

The 1960s, however, marks a point of convergence for the English and American novels. By the 1960s a growing critical opposition had evolved and made its voice heard concerning its general dissatisfaction with the predominant conventions of literary realism both in England and the USA. More and more critics and a growing proportion of the general reading public had exceedingly become aware of the fact that what the realist novel around the end of the 1950s was capable of offering was a decidedly dull literary experience. Just how stifling this literary atmosphere had been for novelists in England is clear from Rabinovitz' observation below.

The English novel of the nineteen fifties has been, if anything, too “healthy”: too careful, too timid, too unwilling to step outside of neatly delineated boundaries. The system designed to frustrate a potential Marquis de Sade has helped to eliminate the possibility of a Gide or a Faulkner; it may be one of the reasons why Samuel Beckett makes his home in France.<sup>223</sup>

The American response to the literary output of the mid-century book market, as represented by such critics as Louis Rubin in ‘The Curious Death of the Novel: Or, What to Do about Tired Literary Critics’<sup>224</sup>, Leslie Fiedler in ‘Cross the Border, Close the Gap’<sup>225</sup>, Susan Sontag

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<sup>222</sup> The novel was partly intended as a literary antidote to Fitzgerald's academic novel which Marks regarded as an unrealistic undergraduate portrait.

<sup>223</sup> Rabinovitz, p. 82.

<sup>224</sup> Louis Rubin, ‘The Curious Death of the Novel: Or, What to Do about Tired Literary Critics’ in *The Curious Death of the Novel: Essays in American Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967)

<sup>225</sup> Leslie Fiedler, ‘Cross the Border, Close the Gap’, *Playboy* 16 (December, 1969)

in 'Against Interpretation'<sup>226</sup>, Norman Podhoretz in *Doings and Undoings* (1964)<sup>227</sup> and Stephen Koch, in his article 'Premature Speculations on the Perpetual Renaissance'<sup>228</sup>, was very similar in its tone of disappointment to the English one. As Stephen Koch puts it,

at the moment, our literature is idling in a period of hiatus: the few important writers of the earlier generations are dead, silent, or in decline, while the younger generation has not yet produced a writer of unmistakable importance or even of very great interest. [...] Even though there is a large body of new work, nothing thus far has been heard at the highest levels except an eerie silence.<sup>229</sup>

F. R. Karl in *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (1962) also argues that emphasizing the social content of a novel entails the danger of making the novel an arm of social criticism and the whole novel would consequently turn into social commentary.<sup>230</sup> And, indeed, it may be argued that there was a chance that the novel, *per se*, would retreat into the social novel. As has been noted, the academic novel was especially in a danger of that to happen.

Instead of demise, the 1960s brought a revival for both the English and the American novel. In England it was what could be termed as the 'reaction against 'the reaction against experiment'' movement, in America – as Jerome Klinkowitz identifies it – it was the so-called disruptive generation that responded to the exhausted conventions of literary realism. Both groups produced a fundamentally experimental fiction which was conceived in an artistic framework commonly referred to as literary postmodernism. American fiction more readily responded to those, mainly French, theoretical writings that served as the central pillars of postmodern fiction. In a sense, America first had postmodern theory, then the literary output corresponding to it. The transition to postmodernism in America was already felt in the 1950s with such figures as Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow and completed its development with such novelists as Donald Barthelme, Ronald Sukenick, William H. Gass, Jerzy Kosinski, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Richard Brautigan, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth and Robert Coover. Although with some exceptions, English novelists in general showed less willingness to leave traditional fictional patterns. Yet, despite the delayed endorsement of postmodernism, Britain could boast of such outstanding experimental novelists, among

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<sup>226</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964), pp. 3-14.

<sup>227</sup> Norman Podhoretz, *Doings and Undoings* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964)

<sup>228</sup> Stephen Koch, 'Premature Speculations on the Perpetual Renaissance' *Tri-Quarterly*, 10 (1967)

<sup>229</sup> Koch, p. 5.

<sup>230</sup> F. R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 154.

others, as William Golding, Nigel Dennis, Iris Murdoch, Lawrence Durrell, Muriel Spark, B. S. Johnson, Anthony Burgess and John Fowles.

It was partly parallel to, and partly in the wake of the innovations introduced by these novelists that the postmodern academic novel first emerged and started to develop in England and the USA. Since the 1960s writers of academic novels have displayed a marked tendency of presenting the world of academe by using experimental narrative devices. The transition from traditional realism to postmodernism and a continual interest in postmodern aesthetics since then can be obviously pinpointed in such academic novels as Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), John Barth's *The End of the Road* (1975), *Giles Goat Boy, or The Revised New Syllabus* (1966) and *Sabbatical* (1982), and, among others, in the works of such novelists as David Lodge, Malcolm Bradbury, Ishmael Reed, Christine Brook-Rose, Michael Franzen, Alexander Theroux, Pablo Urbanyi, Michael Frayn, Graham Swift, A. S. Byatt, James Hynes, Gail Godwin and many more.

In order to illuminate the nature of the innovative direction taken by many campus novel writers after the 1960s, I propose to compare and contrast modernist and postmodernist experimentation briefly. Literary modernism and postmodernism share a number of characteristics: both evolved in a period of political and artistic radicalism; both involve an element of wanting to baffle; both are aimed at creating an antithesis; both are predicated on a conscious search for stylistic alternatives that entail a high degree of distancing away from the conventions of literary realism; and most importantly of all, both are fundamentally of experimental nature. Postmodernist novelists inherited the disposition towards experiment comparable to such modernist writers' as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Yet, postmodernism is not a rehash of modernism. One of the key differences between the two is that the modernist artist found his/her alternative to conventional realism in the subjective sensibilities of the individual, while the postmodern artist did away with the concept of an all-inclusive, authoritative history and reality by simply considering them as subjective discourses. The second key difference is that while modernism, although somewhat revised, accepted the unity of reality and the self, postmodernism dismissed the concept of any such unity. Postmodernism, therefore, does not recognize reality, but a discourse of reality, and exerts its resistance to it by constructing anti-, or counter-discourses that would subvert, negate or exaggerate their discursive objects. Perhaps it is in the way that modernism is occupied with understanding the world through the subjective mind; and in the way that postmodernism is obsessed with sourcing all experience from discourses that the former is

seen as a fundamentally epistemologically and the latter as an ontologically oriented approach to life and art.

Reality, according to the postmodernist stance, is a complex entity that cannot be fully discerned and appropriated by the inquisitive epistemological techniques of realism, i.e. by logical positivism and empiricism. As Ian Carter puts it,

reality is multiple and contested, [...] we must abandon the common-sense assumption that novels reflect the real world: there is no uncomplicated real world to be reflected. Rather, fiction constructs accounts of the world which it then seeks to pass off as real. Accounts are interested statements, assertions that this is to be admired, that challenged: they are not simple descriptions.<sup>231</sup>

This is to say that what is commonly referred to as literary realism is no more representative of the experience people have of reality in the postmodern frame of mind. As Ronald Sukenick expressed in an interview, what was being challenged in the 1960s was the nature of realist fiction, *per se*.

One of the reasons people have lost faith in the novel is that they don't believe it tells the truth any more, which is another way of saying that they don't believe in the conventions of the novel. They pick up a novel and they know it's make believe.[...] People no longer believe in the novel as a medium that gets at the truth of their lives.<sup>232</sup>

These objections against the realist novel can be seen as the reversals of those protests that were levelled against modernist fiction: conventional novels had presented data, the facts of life but in terms of fraudulent ideals; conventional novels would make the reader believe as fact that life has leading characters, plots, morals to be pointed, lessons to be learned, and most of all beginnings, middles and ends.<sup>233</sup>

Insofar as literary modernism is defined as a reaction to nineteenth-century literary realism, and literary postmodernism as a reaction to a so-called neo-realist tradition, both literary movements respond, although in different modes, to the *same* literary state of affairs, i.e. realism. As opposed to modernism, however, postmodernism has managed to operate on an experimental basis – i.e. it has been able to 'make it new' – without being charged of being excessively elitist; of disproportionate withdrawal from society; of being totally

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<sup>231</sup> Carter, p. 9.

<sup>232</sup> Joe David Bellamy, 'Imagination as Perception: An Interview with Ronald Sukenick', *Chicago Review*, 23 (1972), p. 60. Reprinted in Joe David Bellamy, *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974)

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

incomprehensible for the ordinary reading public. If you like, postmodernism managed to recover the experimental appetite of modernism in a more reader-friendly, a more 'readable' form. The benefit of academic fiction from its postmodern turn is that, while maintaining its social focus, it cannot be charged with the well-known objections of formal negligence and repetition any more. This is, of course, not to state that all experimentation is successful, neither that the emergence of literary postmodernism implicates the ebbing away of realism either in fiction or in criticism. In fact, one of the advantages of postmodern literature is that it does away with the concept of ultimate meanings and, while remaining open to realist interpretations, offers a host of interpretative alternatives for the reader.

The literary response to the inadequacy of realist fiction in accounting for the reality of the postmodern human condition appears in such manifold forms as the French *nouveau roman*, the antinovel, metafiction, fabulation, the aleatory novel, surrealist fiction, superfiction, surfiction and magic realism. Some of these overlapping approaches may turn away from realism by allowing the imaginary<sup>234</sup> and the fantastic to prevail in fiction; some may disown every realist literary convention by aiming at producing a less readily graspable fiction; some may challenge the authoritative tone of realism by setting up alternative discourses against it; some may apply the exhaustion of realist fiction, *per se*, as a theme in order to create a new kind of fiction; and some may attempt to outdo realism in order to compete with the multiple omnipresence of media and the way too rapidly transforming reality.<sup>235</sup> I wish to point out that these approaches were not new in the 1950s; it was their unprecedented density and frequent application that impelled critics to assume the movement nature of experimental fiction. Although postmodern academic fiction features all of the enumerated literary responses, what has turned out to be a predominant characteristic of the experimental campus novel is its exceptionally high degree of metafictionality. The following chapters are devoted to the investigation of the products of the metafictional phase of the subgenre.

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<sup>234</sup> In order to forestall possible misunderstandings, I should point out that my general use of the word 'imaginary' is unrelated to how Wolfgang Iser defines it in his *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993).

<sup>235</sup> Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 336.

## IV. The Four Aspects of the Metafictional Novel

The novel, always inherently self-conscious, always, inherently provisional in its process of relativizing language through continuous assimilation of discourses, has now and again to stop and examine the process, to see where it is going, to find out what it is.

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 67.

Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafiction.

William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, p. 25.

### 4.1. Fiction which is conscious of being fiction

It was William H. Gass who first used the term 'metafiction' in the 1960s to describe recent fictions which were about fiction itself.<sup>236</sup> Since the 1960s the body of theory devoted to metafiction has slowly expanded with such major contributors as John Barth, Robert Scholes, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, Gerard Prince, Susana Onega, Hayden White and Mark Currie. By the 1970s the term 'metafiction' had solidified into signifying fiction with self-consciousness, self-awareness, self-knowledge and ironic self-distance, and was later successfully deconstructed into a wider preoccupation of language philosophy. The common denominator of the many observations that make up the body of metafictional theory, nevertheless, is their engagement into the notion of self-consciousness. Let us investigate, then, how self-consciousness can be the point of departure of metafiction as an aesthetic principle, as a literary movement, as a narrative theory and an interpretative paradigm.

#### 4.1.1. Metafiction: individual or collective enterprise

One of the established views concerning the nature of metafiction is that it normally emerges in a period of crisis and directionlessness in the evolution of the novel. The fact that the wholesale endorsement of the metafictional novel took place in the wake of the general

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<sup>236</sup> William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1971)



exhaustion of the basic conventions of the realist novel in the 1950s also supports this view. Although a lot less vigorously, it is still disputed whether metafiction *per se* is a degenerate, decadent phase prompted by exhausted literary conventions, or a revitalizing current which provides a fresh momentum for the novel. I believe, by now, it has become evident that the latter approach is appropriate: now, fifty years after the emergence of the large-scale interest in metafiction, the novel is still far from being dead and new metafictional novels are still plentiful.

There is evidence, however, that there had been numerous novels displaying excessive self-consciousness prior to the turn of the nineteenth century in periods of considerable stability in the development of the novel. Perhaps the most famous early occurrence of the English self-reflexive novel is regarded to be Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), but Dickens, Henry James, James Joyce and many others can also be numbered among the pre-postmodernist metafictionalists.

It is this latter observation which has impelled me to consider that the emergence of postmodern metafictional writing in the 1960s, and the earlier, isolated and scattered occurrences of self-conscious writing should be conceived in a different theoretical frame of mind.

### Metafiction and the exhaustion of the realist novel

John Barth's 1967 essay entitled 'The Literature of Exhaustion'<sup>237</sup> can be considered the key document for developing the aesthetic principles of the metafictional novel. In his paper Barth investigated contemporary fiction and diagnosed a situation in which novelists were facing the general 'used-upness' and exhaustion of those literary forms and possibilities that had been commonly associated with the realist novel.<sup>238</sup> What Barth concluded was that the time of the realist novel as a major art form was up and proposed that the adequate response to the exhaustion of the novel was the turning of the aesthetic ultimacies of the realist novel against themselves in order to make something new and valid. Put it in another way, the impossibility of making something new within the framework of the realist novel can be overcome by writing about the fact that it is impossible to make something new.<sup>239</sup> The resulting novel, the metafictional novel, consequently, is a type of fiction that heavily

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<sup>237</sup> John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 161-171. (Originally published in *Atlantic Monthly*, 220, 2, August (1967), pp. 29-34.)

<sup>238</sup> Barth, p. 29.

<sup>239</sup> John Barth, *Lost in The Funhouse* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), p. 77.

concentrates on itself, on its own conventions. The fundamentally self-conscious activity that is detectable in metafictional novels involves recourse to older stories and literary forms, to parodying established literary conventions, to deliberate distortions of existing forms of fiction; i.e. metafiction presents new fictional forms based on older ones. The birth of metafiction, therefore, is always preceded by awareness of what the exhausted possibilities of fictional production are, and a conscious or unconscious process of decision-making on behalf of the novelist as to how to invigorate/transform the old materials in order to make them fresh and new. New metafictional forms, it can be concluded, do not present a direct antithesis, but rather a reworking of realist literary conventions.

In 'The Literature of Exhaustion' Barth regards the emergence of postmodern metafiction as a movement, a collective endeavour of a number of novelists including – besides Barth himself – such figures as William H. Gass, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Ronald Sukenick, B. S. Johnson and John Fowles. This unprecedentedly marked interest in exploring the possibilities of metafictional techniques, besides Barth's argument of exhaustion, is also commonly explained by another theory which gains its explanatory potential from applying cultural studies and discourse analysis.

As has already been pointed out in the chapter entitled 'From Literary Realism to Postmodernism', the novel is generally regarded to be a literary form the principal function of which is to reflect on man in society. The long-standing stability of the realist tradition attests to the fact that the novelistic conventions employed by realist writers were indeed appropriate for transmitting larger social, political, etc. issues to the general reading public. This adequacy originates from the fact that the realist novel mirrored reality the way man generally made sense of it: by accepting the certainties of chronological ordering, beginnings and endings, the infallibility of empirical evidence, the existence of immutable organizing principles in life, etc.<sup>240</sup> The two major disruptions witnessed by the traditional realist worldview were both prompted in the twentieth century: the first by modernism and the second by postmodernism. Cultural theorists propose that both disruptions were necessitated by fundamental changes in the way man conceived of reality, of the world around him. The postmodern man – coming to his senses after the shock of the two world wars, the horrors of the holocaust, the threat of the atomic bomb; and realizing the influencing potential of mass media together with the high-speed development of technology – recognized a reality which no longer provided assurance concerning the infallibility of facts. Truth became relative, an illusion, and the verities of

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<sup>240</sup> Approached from the point of view of discourse analysis, the novelistic convention aimed at the rendering of human experience corresponded to the process of experiencing everyday reality outside the scope of fiction.

empiricism dissolved into scepticism. This new reality, so alien to the nineteenth-century convictions of traditional realism, repelled such notions as centrality, authority, univocality and divine omnipotence; as Robert Scholes formulates it in *Fabulation and Metafiction*, postmodernism is ‘modernism without authority’<sup>241</sup>. The ‘meta’ movement, therefore, is necessarily a general phenomenon. Also, as Patricia Waugh aptly remarks, ‘terms like ‘metapolitics’, ‘metarhetoric’ and ‘metatheatre’ are a reminder of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world.’<sup>242</sup> The literary response to the postmodern worldview is correspondingly multifarious, relative, semantically pluralist, often painfully sceptical if not downright pessimist, and highly self-conscious.

That the certainties of the realist worldview and the certainties suggested by the conventions of the realist novel did not apply to the postmodern world was exceedingly made clear by art. The postmodern novel – conceived in the intellectual framework of post-structuralist literary theory with such aesthetic manifestations as fabulation, the aleatory novel, the *nouveau roman*, the antinovel, surfiction<sup>243</sup>, superfiction and metafiction – is both a response to the postmodern condition and a reaction to the outmoded conventions of traditional realism. The reaction nature of these fictions, however, may greatly differ from one another. Metafiction, as opposed to the *nouveau roman* or the antinovel – which are both based on aesthetic principles rejecting or turning away from literary realism – incorporates the conventions of the traditional realist novel and exerts its resistance to it by setting up counter discourses involving exaggeration, recontextualization, subversion, distortion, and flaunting in highly self-conscious forms. Therefore, it is an essential condition of metafictional writing that the contested discourse of reality should remain visible and recognizable. The challenge that metafiction directs at realism, consequently, is delegated by the explicit manipulation of all those literary conventions – be it the literary conventions of biography, historical fiction, *Bildungsroman*, documentary, etc. – that represent an underlyingly positivist ethos. That metafiction is premised upon, and not evasive about the conventions of the realist novel is, I believe, a not sufficiently emphasized point. It was also this insight that William H. Gass must have had in mind when he pointed out that ‘many of the so-called anti-novels are really metafiction’<sup>244</sup>.

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<sup>241</sup> Scholes, p. 219.

<sup>242</sup> Waugh, p. 2.

<sup>243</sup> It was Raymond Federman who proposed the term ‘surfiction’ to designate a type of novel which does not represent life but presents the process of capturing and expressing it (Klinkowitz, p. 194.).

<sup>244</sup> Scholes, p. 105.

## Metafiction as a private enterprise

The novel, as Patricia Waugh observes in *Metafiction*, ‘has now and again to stop and examine the process, to see where it is going, to find out what it is’<sup>245</sup>. Although I agree with Waugh’s statement, the rhetorical thrust of her critical parlance should not delude the reader: the novel, *per se*, does not do anything; it does not go anywhere, neither does it stop to do this or that. The excerpt, nevertheless, is suggestive of three facts. Firstly, the anthropomorphism that is involved in the quote conceals that it is the novelist who now and again stops for the purposes of examining his/her art. Secondly, the act of movement that the trope describes implies that there is direction in the art of the novelist. Thirdly, finding out what one’s art is necessitates and presupposes awareness.

That a novelist should define and follow a certain direction in his/her art, and that he/she should consciously stop every now and then to assess, revise and change this direction, can – I suppose – undisputedly be considered as adequate, healthy and, yes, natural occupations. This revision, as suggested by my line of argument, does not necessarily have to be motivated either by the large-scale crisis of a dominant literary form, or by the similar self-revisions of other novelists: it can be an individual enterprise with no external causes. That a number of metafictional novels seem to ignore the conventions of literary realism and, compared to each other, respond to various *other* literary forms certainly seems to suggest that the cultural and literary explanations concerning the appearance of metafiction ought not to be considered as ultimate. The novelist’s natural disposition to experiment with the storehouse of literary devices under his/her command in idiosyncratic ways has always been a natural tendency since the birth of the novel. I maintain that such isolated occurrences of metafictional writing as Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* should not be associated with Barth’s literature of exhaustion: they are private metafictional experiments which may be completely unrelated to the human condition, to the epistemology of reality, to attempting to construct counter-discourses against realist discourses (metafiction may be based on other narrative forms).<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Waugh, p. 67.

<sup>246</sup> It should be noted that the experimental impetus in creating isolated instances of metafiction is present in large-scale applications of metafictional writing as well. What I wish to point out is that the theories of metafiction expounded under the title ‘Metafiction and the exhaustion of the realist novel’ should not be employed to account for the phenomenon of metafictional writing in general (a mistake which I have often encountered so far).

## 4.2. Metafiction as critical fiction

### 4.2.1. *Metafictional as an interpretative paradigm*

Whether motivated by a disposition to carry out private experiments, or by the will to revitalize larger, outmoded literary movements, metafiction shows acute awareness of the existence of other fictions. Since these other fictions are, so to speak, the springboards of the experiments that constitute new artistic expressions, metafiction, actually, reflects on itself. Quoting Patricia Waugh's befitting thoughts, 'the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction'<sup>247</sup>. This dual nature of the metafictional novel, this acute self-awareness and self-reflection is what is commonly identified as the critical function of metafiction: i.e. the metafictional novel has something to tell about itself, about fiction, about the art of fiction; the metafictional novel incorporates a critical discourse which is aimed at highlighting, elucidating or criticizing its own dimensions. By assimilating a critical function that is normally external to fiction, the metafictional novel is often seen as a borderline discourse between fiction and criticism, while the novelist who produces this two-fold fictional material acquires the role of the critic-writer. Sometimes the self-referential message of the metafictional novel is formulated in the form of direct commentary, sometimes this message is prompted by the uncommented presentations of narrative configurations<sup>248</sup> which impress us beyond measure, dislodge us from our immersion in the world of fiction by being intrusive, flaunting, confusing or shocking in a certain way.

The list of techniques that can potentially impose a metafictional message on the reader is long and individual variations are countless. The most common techniques to be found in the toolbox of the metafictional writer include: the presence of an author in his/her novel as a character; dialogues between characters and the author as a character; a story where the author is not a character but interacts with characters in explicit ways; the appearance of the author in the novel in person; the creation of illusion and the consequent unmasking of reality; a novel which anticipates readerly reaction; characters who express awareness that they are in a work of fiction; explicit cross-references established between works of fiction; the explicit retelling of an existing story from a different point of view; a novel in which a character is reading

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<sup>247</sup> Waugh, p. 6.

<sup>248</sup> These two approaches can also be differentiated as didactic and artistic manifestations of metafiction.

another existing novel; the use of footnotes as commentary on the novel; the existence of multiple embedded structures; aleatory techniques that allow the reader to decide upon the reading order of the novel; novels that address the conventions of novel writing; a novel about a writer engaged in writing a novel; a work of fiction incorporating another work of fiction; elaborate introductions to the novel; the use of marginalia; letters to publishers; the inclusion of the physical ‘scaffolding’ of the text, etc.

The theory of metafiction, beyond accounting for the various manifestations of the metafictional novel and elucidating their abstract implications, is also employed as an interpretative paradigm. One of the interesting characteristics of metafictional readings is that the body of literary theory supporting them is always turned into a message; i.e. a new meaning of a novel. As Jerome Klinkowitz puts it in *Literary Disruptions*, metafiction – as an interpretative paradigm – relocates ‘the determinants of race, moment, and milieu from the subject one is writing about to the writing itself, from topic to technique or from ethic to aesthetic’<sup>249</sup>. A typical metafictional interpretation would make the point that a novel is about the death of the realist novel, or about the death of the author as a creative cause of fiction, or about certain literary conventions of the novel.

#### **4.2.2. Aspects of self-consciousness**

So far, the various metafictional interpretations that can be associated with novels have not been collected and arranged into a comprehensive, yet practical system. It may be surprising to learn, but, in fact, today the theory of metafiction is rather moderate in extent and most of the fundamental observations concerning the nature of the metafictional novel are relatively short and impressively wide-ranging. Even the most comprehensive study of metafiction, Patricia Waugh’s *Metafiction* (1984), does not exceed 149 pages; and yet, its material about this unique literary phenomenon is divided into more than twenty-five sub-chapters.

The earliest attempt to arrange the various manifestations of the metafictional novel into a unifying system is to be credited to Robert Scholes, who in his 1970 article entitled ‘Metafiction’<sup>250</sup> attempts to link the Gassian notion of self-conscious fiction with Barth’s concept of exhaustion. Scholes differentiates between four types of fiction (fiction of ideas, of

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<sup>249</sup> Klinkowitz, pp. 7-8.

<sup>250</sup> Scholes, p. 106. (Originally published: Robert Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, *The Iowa Review*, 1 (1970), pp. 100-115.)

forms, of existence and of essence) plus four corresponding critical practices (structural, formal, behavioural, and philosophical); it is from these categories from which he concludes that metafiction

assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself. It may emphasize structural, formal, behavioral, or philosophical qualities, but most writers of metafiction are thoroughly aware of all these possibilities and are likely to have experimented with all of them.<sup>251</sup>

Unfortunately Scholes does not sharpen his concepts and does not demonstrate how his theory is to be applied to specific works of fiction. As Mark Currie points out, ‘Scholes relies on relational rather than absolute categories, and difficulties of determining the dominant aspect of any given metafiction can present real problems to the critic’<sup>252</sup>.

Since the publication of Scholes’ taxonomy not much progress has been made as far as the classification of the surprisingly numerous and versatile manifestations of the metafictional novel is concerned. It is still descriptions of tendencies, list of techniques, abstract treatise and interpretations of individual novels that make up critics’ contribution to the theory of metafiction. Also, the occasional lack of transparency in the application of the various theoretical items of metafiction arises from their partial applicability; i.e. certain groups of critical observations apply only to certain idiosyncratic manifestations of self-conscious writing.

For the discussion of the metafictional tendencies of an entire subgenre – i.e. the academic novel –, nevertheless, I felt the necessity of an all-encompassing theoretical framework with the help of which it becomes possible to assign critical observations to the appropriate manifestation of metafictional writing. It is for these reasons that I am proposing to investigate metafictional academic novels by means of the fourfold typology of my own design.<sup>253</sup> The categories that I introduce in my taxonomy – although they cover notions that are well-known for theorists – have not been applied in any way for the classification of the

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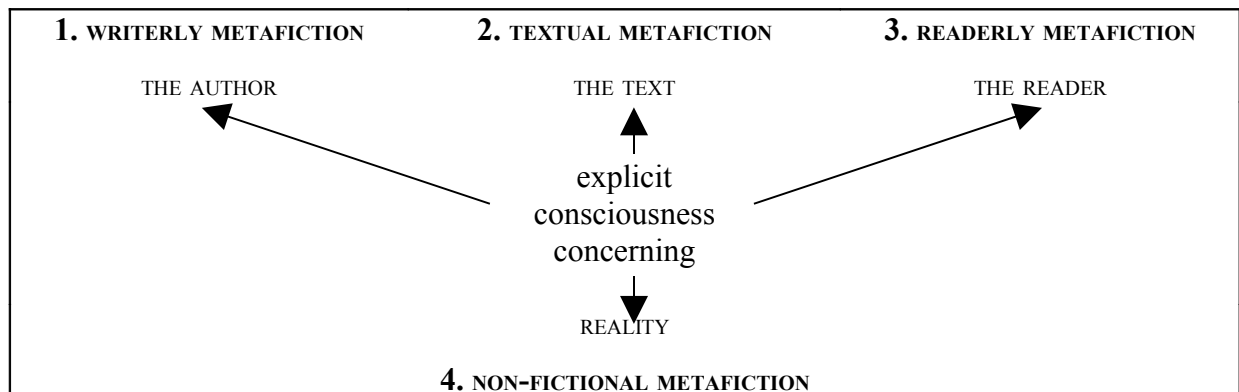
<sup>251</sup> Scholes, p. 114.

<sup>252</sup> Currie, p. 21.

<sup>253</sup> Mention ought to be made concerning the fact that the M. H. Abrams’ taxonomy of critical orientations expounded in the introductory chapter ‘Introduction: Orientation of Critical Theories’ (pp. 3-29) in his seminal study entitled *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953) has provided considerable inspiration in outlining my fourfold design found below and account for the various manifestations of self-conscious fiction. Although Abrams’ system deals primarily with defining the fundamental properties of analytical tools applied in the realm of literary theory, the directions of critical inquiry that both criticism and self-referential fiction are capable of demonstrating display, if not absolute, considerable kinship; (M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1953)).

metafictional novel so far. Also, the terms with which I designate the four basic types of metafiction are of my coinage and have not appeared in any of the relevant publications on the subject matter.

The four types of metafiction I set up in the chart below are differentiated on the basis of the aspect of ‘the art of fiction’ which the metafictional technique displays consciousness about.



Those metafictional novels that belong to the first category – i.e. writerly metafiction –, therefore, involve narrative devices which accentuate the authorial contribution to writing fiction and address such related issues as authorial control, authorial omniscience, literary creation, inspiration, the act of writing, etc. Textual metafiction contains narrative techniques which formulate and make explicit critical propositions concerning the textual constructedness of the novel. Textual metafiction may be concerned with how the novel is structured, what organizational patterns are employed in it, it may be concerned with the formal properties of fiction, with intertextual relationships, references to other texts, etc. Readerly metafiction involves literary devices that may accentuate, elucidate or comment on the normally implicit presence and role of the reader. The favourite themes of readerly metafiction are related to such issues as the consciousness of the reader, the interpretative role of the reader, the source of meaning, various interpretations that readers explicitly spell out in fiction, etc. Based mostly on the insights of deconstructionist literary theory, non-fictional metafiction subverts the conventional assumption concerning self-consciousness by recontextualizing it in a wider framework of language philosophy. Instead of reflecting on the ways in which fiction is fiction, non-fictional metafiction demonstrates how reality is constructed, structured and perceived as fiction. As the grouping of the various aspects of self-conscious fiction graphically indicates in the chart, writerly, textual and readerly metafictions differ from non-fictional metafiction in the sense that they all ignore the



experiential world in an attempt to explore the world of fiction in its own terms: its origin, its structure and its reception. For this reason, writerly, textual and readerly metafiction are also going to be referred to as fictional metafiction.<sup>254</sup>

A common operational mode of the metafiction that I have distinguished above is that they all make explicit what is normally hidden in the background in most fictional forms. Although the reader, the author, the structure of the work of fiction or the fictional nature of reality are all part and parcel of any novel, they are traditionally muted, suppressed or even deemed to be unwanted aspects in traditional forms of fiction. The various aesthetic effects that metafiction induces arise from the revealing, the concretizing and general foregrounding of these normally hidden aspects of the art of fiction. It is this impulse, the act of revealing something unseen or undetectable that inspired Russian formalist critics to call metafictional techniques ‘baring devices’; devices that lay bare, or reveal.<sup>255</sup>

It may be predicted that the novels belonging to the various metafictional categories would feature, respectively, novelists who write, formal analyses, readers who read and interpret or deconstructions of reality into fiction. Yet, it should be noted that some manifestations of metafiction may offer multiple memberships in the taxonomy. The adequate way of proceeding with the metafictional analysis in these cases, I propose, is to concentrate on the more accentuated aspect of metafictional self-consciousness detectable in the work of fiction. This move poses little difficulty for the critic, since the larger context in which a metafictional technique is embedded always operates as a disambiguating factor. In Austin M. Wright’s literature-oriented academic novel entitled *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors: A Critical Fiction* (1999)<sup>256</sup>, for example, we would find more than one, several-page-long interpretations of William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Although an explicit textual embedding or the reference to a work of fiction in another work of fiction constitute an instance of textual metafiction, it should be considered that the purpose of the longish literary analyses is to interpret, to reveal and elucidate layers of meaning in Faulkner’s novel – which

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<sup>254</sup> It should be noted that the terms ‘readerly metafiction’ and ‘writerly metafiction’ bear no relevance whatsoever to Roland Barthes’ terms translated into English as ‘readerly texts’ and ‘writerly texts’ (apparently, a more accurate translation of the original French phrases *texte lisible* and *texte scriptible* (both terms appeared first in Barthes’ *S/Z* (1970)) is ‘readable texts’ and ‘writeable texts’). Although at first sight most readers may assume a semantic analogy between Barthes’ and my terminologies, Barthes applies the phrase *texte lisible* to works of literature the reading and understanding of which requires the reader to assume a passive, receptive role in perceiving an already predetermined single reading; and employs the phrase *texte scriptible* to denote works of literature which require their readers to take an active and creative role in the creation of meaning. This brief explanation makes it clear that both Barthesian terms denote text types which generate a specific attitude, a certain involvement on behalf of the reader in the process of assigning meaning to a literary text.

<sup>255</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 153.

<sup>256</sup> Austin M. Wright, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* (Iowa City: University Press of Iowa, 1999)

is traditionally the role of the reader –, and therefore they are essentially manifestations of readerly metafiction.

### 4.3. Metafiction and the academic novel

Early occurrences of metafictional devices can also be found among the academic novels of the pre-1960s. In George Calderon's *The Adventures of Downy V. Green, Rhodes Scholar at Oxford* (1902), for example, the grandson of Mr. Verdant Green, the protagonist of Reverend Edward Bradley's *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green* (1854-57)<sup>257</sup>, returns to the university his grandfather had attended and attempts – unsuccessfully – to fit into the learned society of Oxford by careful readings of Bradley's own novel.<sup>258</sup> In Beverly Nichols' *Patchwork* (1921) it is the careful reading of Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913-1914)<sup>259</sup> which discourages the protagonist, a homecoming war veteran, from aspiring to enter the world of Oxbridge.

We already know from Mortimer Proctor, John O. Lyons and Ian Carter that formal experimentation was never a general concern for the novelists of academic fiction.<sup>260</sup> The large-scale experimentalism of the 1960s, nevertheless, exerted a lasting effect on the subgenre. Besides still addressing the staple social, educational, psychological, etc. concerns of its predecessors, the new academic novel turned into a medium of literary self-analysis and began to address the various thematic aspects of the art of fiction. The step forward in the evolution of the academic novel, this time, was not prompted by changes that had taken place in the system of higher education, but was propelled by a basic shift in the aesthetics of the academic novel: i.e. emphasis – not completely, yet significantly – shifted from content to form.

It must be pointed out that the newfound formal concern of the metafictional novel has been, to a large extent, produced and maintained by a new race of campus novelists, who often taught literary studies at universities. This circumstance is important because it makes it clear that the majority of those novelists who have written metafictional academic novels, firstly, are trained and skilled in matters of fiction writing; secondly, they must have obviously been influenced by those theoretical innovations in the domain of literary criticism

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<sup>257</sup> The book was written under the pseudonym of Cuthbert Bede.

<sup>258</sup> Proctor, p. 86.

<sup>259</sup> Proctor, p. 163.

<sup>260</sup> See chapter 'From Literary Realism to Postmodernism'.

that are commonly regarded as the foundations of postmodernist fiction. For the novelists of experimental academic fiction, therefore, it has been a natural – and, I dare say, possibly highly pleasurable – occupation to adapt their novels to the requirements of the postmodern age by conducting literary self-analyses.

In the subsequent chapters of the present dissertation I am going to investigate representative cases of the metafictional academic novel, devoting one chapter to each of the four aspects of self-conscious fiction. Arranged in the chapters entitled ‘Writerly Metafiction’, ‘Critical Fiction: Textual Metafiction in the Academic Novel’, ‘Readerly Metafiction’ and ‘Non-fictional Metafiction’, I will concentrate on elucidating the metafictional nature of such academic novels as John Barth’s *Giles Goat-Boy* (1967), Ishmael Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1996), Pablo Urbányi’s *The Nowhere Idea* (1982), David Lodge’s *Nice Work* (1988) and *Small World: A Romance* (1984), Amanda Cross’ *Providence* (1982), Austin M. Wright’s *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* (1999), Joanne Dobson’s *The Raven and the Nightingale* (1999), James Hynes’ *Publish and Perish* (1997), Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962), Malcolm Bradbury’s *The History Man* (1975), Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992) and A. S. Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* (1990). Some of the novels included in the list feature so numerous and variegated instances of metafiction that they have become the object of interest in more than one chapter.

## V. Writerly Metafiction

### 5.1. The Well of New Tammany College: The Question of Authorship in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*

Frankly, what we hope and risk in publishing *Giles Goat-Boy* is that the question of its authorship will be a literary and not a legal one.

John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*<sup>261</sup>

As Professor Stoll so adequately pointed out, a novel comes out of a head, not out of a hat.<sup>262</sup>

Péter Székely, *The Academic Novel in the Age of Postmodernity*, p. 84.

In his seminal essay entitled 'The Literature of Exhaustion' (1967) John Barth observes with some dissatisfaction a conspicuous tendency in contemporary art to eliminate

the most traditional notion of the artist: the Aristotelian conscious agent who achieves with technique and cunning the artistic effect; in other words, one endowed with uncommon talent, who has moreover developed and disciplined that endowment with virtuosity. It's an aristocratic notion on the face of it, which the democratic West seems eager to have done with it; not only the 'omniscient' author of older fiction, but the very idea of the controlling artist, has been condemned as politically reactionary, even fascist.<sup>263</sup>

It is the phrase 'conspicuous tendency' that Barth employs to identify that particular strain of post-structuralist literary criticism which not merely reasoned against the Aristotelian notion of the artist, but explicitly passed a death sentence on the concept of authorship, *per se*. That Barth did not share the critical convictions arguing for the authorial depersonalization of literature becomes evident from the same essay when he declares to believe that art is *done* by people, and when he expresses his preference for art 'that requires expertise and artistry as

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<sup>261</sup> John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy or, The Revised New Syllabus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 7.

<sup>262</sup> W. K. Wimsatt, Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, ed. by David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1975), p. 334.

<sup>263</sup> John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 162-163.

well as bright aesthetic ideas and/or inspiration'<sup>264</sup>. Barth's own opposition to the theoretical explaining away of the concept of the controlling author is apparent not only in his critical writings but also in his fiction.

Barth's academic novel entitled *Giles Goat-Boy or, The Revised New Syllabus* (1967) appeared simultaneously with his 'The Literature of Exhaustion' essay. The argument that I propose in this paper is that *Giles Goat-Boy* offers a metafictional interpretation which harmonizes with Barth's own critical convictions concerning the concept of the author. It is the explicit engagement of the novel in the issue of authorship which allows it to be classified as a case of writerly metafiction. Barth prefixes *Giles Goat-Boy* with a 'Publisher's Disclaimer'<sup>265</sup> and a 'Cover-Letter to the Editors and Publisher'<sup>266</sup> which are the parts that provide most of the novel's writerly metafictional content. The former, patently *not* written by any editor, while containing instances of readerly metafiction, succinctly recapitulates those aspects of writerly metafiction that the succeeding cover-letter addresses:

The professor and quondam novelist whose name appears on the title-page (*our* title-page, not the one following his prefatory letter) denies that the work is his, but 'suspects' it to be fictional [...] His own candidate for authorship is one Stoker Giles or Giles Stoker – whereabouts unknown, existence questionable – who appears to have claimed in turn 1) that he too was but a dedicated editor, the text proper having been written by a certain automatic computer, and 2) that excepting a few 'necessary basic artifices'\* the book is neither fable nor fictionalized history, but literal truth. And the computer, the mighty 'WESCAC' – does it not too disclaim authorship? It does.<sup>267</sup>

The metafictional issue that is mooted in the above excerpt concerns authorship and authorial identity. Authorship, of course, is something that we traditionally take for granted: conventionally a novel is written by the person identified on the title page, which, as a fact, is normally accentuated rather than denied. The possibility that a non-existent person or a machine wrote *Giles-Goat Boy* makes sense only as playful speculation; the explicit discussion of this possibility in the novel, however, is clearly a metafiction technique to consider the creational aspect of fiction. The three disclaimers of authorship, especially the baffling question-answer pair which ends the quote, generate a sense of metafiction-induced inappropriateness in the reader. 'Why do I need to read editorial notes and authorial letters

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<sup>264</sup> Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', p. 163.

<sup>265</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, pp. 7-14.

<sup>266</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, pp. 17-33.

\* The computer's assumption of a first-person narrative viewpoint, we are told, is one such 'basic artifice.' The reader will add others, perhaps challenging their 'necessity' as well.

<sup>267</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 7.

addressed to a publishing house?’ Why can’t I get to the story?’, we could ask with good reason. Yet, the assertion that it was not really the title page author who wrote the book we are intending to read may interest us. The disclaimers that aim at prompting the reader to consider how *Giles-Goat Boy* actually came to be, is shortly followed by the ‘Cover-Letter to the Editors and Publisher’, and in the letter a story unfolds which further stretches the issue of authorship, this time, by purely fictional means. For a better understanding of how Barth goes about serving his metafictional theme, a brief plot-summary of the letter is helpful.

Quite unconventionally, it is John Barth in person who appears in *Giles Goat-Boy* as the writer of the ‘Cover-Letter to the Editors and Publisher’. Barth identifies himself as J. B., a burnt-out novelist and university professor of creative writing, who intends the letter as an apology for his publisher, admitting his failure to deliver the novel he was contractually obliged to complete due to his conclusive writer’s block. *Giles Goat-Boy, or the Revised New Syllabus* – originally entitled *R. N. S. or The Revised New Syllabus of George Giles our Grand Tutor* –, Barth argues, is a surrogate text, a surrogate novel substituting for the one he was unable to write. John Barth, the author identified on the title page, claims, in a manner of speaking, merely to host the novel for the purposes of publication and to have contributed to it only as an editor. The real author, Barth insists, is a man named Giles Stoker, who came to ask for his help with the publication of the book while he – i.e. Barth – was in his university office, brooding over the loss of his muse.

The reader might have patiently followed the story so far with the expectation that he/she will soon reveal how this playful speculation about authorship ends. But as it turns out, Giles Stoker is the son of the protagonist of *Giles-Goat Boy* itself, and unless the novel is of biographical nature, there is a major contradiction in Barth’s story. Of course, the prefatory texts make it clear that their content is fraudulent: Giles Stoker turns out to be the fictional son of the fictional protagonist of the novel, and thus in no way is he accountable for having written the novel. The prefatory text is overt concerning Stoker’s existential status, who, in a self-referential gesture, points out his own immaterial nature by confessing: ‘I’m not from this campus [i.e. country] (you’ve guessed already). My alma mater is New Tammany College [the imaginary city where much of the action in the novel takes place] – you couldn’t have heard of it, it’s in a different university entirely [meaning universe]’<sup>268</sup>. The cover-letter, therefore, presents an improbable situation in which John Barth is asked to publish his own novel by someone who is the product of his own imagination.

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<sup>268</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 27.

Barth, however, also suggests that the fictional character named Giles Stoker is his younger self. This relationship is strongly insinuated in the text when J. B., Barth's own fictional surrogate author, ponders during his encounter with Stoker as follows.

I was taken aback by a number of things. Not simply his [i.e. Giles Stoker's] presumption – I rather admired that, it recalled an assurance I once had myself and could wish for again; indeed he was so like a certain old memory of myself, and yet so *foreign*, even wild I was put in mind of three dozen old stories wherein the hero meets his own reflection or is negotiated with by a personage from nether realms.<sup>269</sup>

The discussion between John Barth and Giles Stoker, therefore, can be grasped as Barth's own inner monologue conceived on the ontological plane of fantasy. In this light, Giles Stoker's imaginary visit to Barth can be interpreted as follows: the artistically infertile author is visited by the personification of his own creative self; and the act of Giles' handing over the manuscript to Barth stands for the traditional genesis of art, according to which it is the craft and imagination of the artist which brings about the work of art. It is this artist notion, the Aristotelian notion of the creative, controlling artist that Barth alluded to in his 'The Literature of Exhaustion' essay.

According to the interpretation that I have outlined, *Giles Goat-Boy* makes the point that artistic creation cannot take place without the artist and the imaginative capacity that resides in the author. Adjusting our senses to the ontological plane (time and place) of the narrative reproduced in the cover-letter, Stoker hands the so far unwritten *Giles-Goat Boy* to Barth, analogously to how inspiration and imagination yield the novelist's artistic product, i.e. fiction. The territory where this artistic exchange takes place is presented to be a mixture of the real – represented by the living novelist and university teacher John Barth – and the imaginary – represented by Giles Stoker. Likewise, the cover-letter is physically arranged in between the prefatory disclaimer – the content of which assumes the ontological plane of our everyday reality – and the novel – which, being an allegorical tale about a half-goat/half-man, assumes the ontological plane of imagination. The transitory nature of the cover-letter between fact and fiction is further reinforced by linguistic means: it introduces a world in which the university lingo is used in its conventional sense, along with new meanings allocated by the author for the purposes of fiction. This semantic plurality is maintained all through the novel: classmates will stand for people, university for universe, college for country, syllabus for Bible, Grand Tutor for Saviour (or Jesus), the Dean o Flunks for the Devil, semesters for years, etc. The ambiguity deriving from this semantic plurality, the way I

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<sup>269</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 22.

perceive it, gives way to playful entertainment rather than a burdensome reading experience. In the following excerpt it is the double meaning of the verb 'graduate' – i.e. to complete one's university studies vs. to become enlightened (in a quasi theological sense) – that occasions the following conversation piece between Giles Stoker and J. B.

I [J. B.] asked him whether he was a graduate student.

'Well, at least I'm a Graduate. [...] I wonder if you are.'

I think no one may accuse me of hauteur or superciliousness. [...] But the man was impudent! I supposed he was referring to the doctoral degree; very well, I'd abandoned my efforts in the line years since, when I eloped with the muse.<sup>270</sup>

As I have already implied, the artist type that emerges from the metafictional episodes embedded in *Giles-Goat Boy* coincides with the Aristotelian controlling artist which Barth furthers in his 'The Literature of Exhaustion' essay. The author concept that Barth thus summons up in both his critical and fictional texts stands for a notion that has had a wide acceptance in the European critical consciousness; after Aristotle it was to re-emerge and solidify later in the eighteenth century into what is commonly referred to as the romantic notion of the author, and is the author model of the realist novel tradition: the author who is identified as the sole source and originator of the literary artefact, the author who begets and controls the world of his creation, the so-called Author-God.

In 'The Literature of Exhaustion', however, Barth brings two existing artist models into conflict with each other: one that is fashioned after the romantic image of the poet, and the other that considers the artist *dead*. The notion of the death of the author is equally well-represented in *Giles Goat-Boy*. As will be demonstrated, Barth urges to reinforce his preference for the controlling artist model even in this particular novel. The question of why Barth might have felt the urge to take a stand regarding the question of authorship at that particular moment in time, may be answered by pointing out that a certain critical current in literary theory arguing for the depersonalization of literature was on a prominent rise around the publication of both *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) and 'The Literature of Exhaustion' (1967).

It was also in 1967 that Roland Barthes' essay 'The Death of the Author', perhaps the most influential piece of criticism concerning the propagation and the wholesale acceptance of the so-called 'death of the author' movement in deconstructionist literary criticism, was published. Nonetheless, the emergence of the critical current aiming to denounce the author as beggetter and controller of his/her fiction cannot be credited to Barthes. In his essay 'Tradition

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<sup>270</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 21.



and the Individual Talent' T. S. Eliot as early as 1919 proposed that the role of the author in the creation of literature was of catalytic rather than generative in nature. For a number of modernist novelists – counting among them such outstanding figures as Henry James, Gustave Flaubert, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos and James Joyce – it was a prime ambition to produce fiction which would show no sign of a manipulating artist in the background, which would remove all traces of authorial presence from the surface of the text. The most common strategies to produce ostensibly depersonalised texts included direct dialogue exchanges, free indirect speech, ekphrastic prose, first person singular narratives and interior monologues. In the wake of modernist depersonalized literature, much in agreement with Eliot's findings, the school of New Criticism – especially W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 1946 essay entitled 'The Intentional Fallacy' – fully anticipated such exceedingly sophisticated theoretical expositions aiming at the eradication of the author as Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' and Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' (1968).

This brief overview concerning the history of the perhaps not so ill-named 'death of the author movement' is intended to illuminate all those characteristics that can be discerned in Barth's fictional representation of depersonalized literature. Continuing our reading of J. B.'s cover-letter, Giles Stoker makes the admission that – similarly to Barth – he too is merely an editor of the manuscript which was produced by WESCAC, an intelligent mainframe computer.

This remarkable computer [narrates J. B.], I was told (a gadget called WESCAC) [...] on its own hook, or by some prior instruction, [...] volunteered [...] that there was in its Storage 'considerable original matter' read in fragmentarily by George Giles [the elder] himself in the years of his flourishing: taped lecture-notes, recorded conferences with protégés, and the like. Moreover, the machine declared itself able and ready [...] to assemble, collate, and edit this material, interpolate all verifiable data from other sources such as the memoirs then in hand, recompose the whole into a coherent narrative from the Grand Tutor's point of view, and 'read it out' in an elegant form on its automatic printers.<sup>271</sup>

I see a number of reasons why Barth's fictional master computer, WESCAC, may be seen as an adequate representation of the impersonal creative cause of the novel. First of all, WESCAC is an object, an inanimate entity which has no personality, no biases or opinions, and therefore it is capable of approximating the ideal concept of objective representation. WESCAC leaves no traces of an author behind in the narrative it creates because there is none; and, as the cover-letter suggests, it is capable of producing texts from already existing

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<sup>271</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, pp. 28-29.

ones. Just as Eliot proposed in his 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', WESCAC represents 'a continual extinction of personality'<sup>272</sup>; its 'emotion of art is impersonal'<sup>273</sup>; its own storage device is presented as a medium in which 'special, or varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations'<sup>274</sup>. In fact, WESCAC's storage device is an apt technological equivalent not of the romantic 'well' metaphor of the poet, but of the Eliotian 'receptacle' image of the artist – the novel is adequately divided into reels, rather than chapters. As Barthes would have it in 'The Death of the Author', the text that WESCAC prints out is made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent. The WESCAC-generated *Giles Goat-Boy* is no longer 'a line or words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of the original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'<sup>275</sup>.

The two prefatory parts of Barth's novel outline and contrast two genealogical alternatives for the creation of *Giles Goat-Boy*: the book-proffering authorial imagination, and WESCAC, the soulless automatic machine. Applying this scheme on a more universal plane, Barth's novel epitomizes two schools of thought concerning the genesis of fiction: one that is based on the romantic notion of art, and one that is based on the depersonalized concept of art. Barth, as he does in his critical writings, takes sides in the argument and, harmonizing with his conviction expounded in 'The Literature of Exhaustion', opts for the Aristotelian controlling artist in his fiction. It is J. B.'s following admission in the concluding part of the cover-letter that provides irrefutable evidence concerning Barth's choice: 'Acknowledge with me, then, the likelihood that *The Revised New Syllabus* is the work not of 'WESCAC' but of an obscure, erratic wizard whose *nom de plume*, at least, is *Stoker, Giles*'<sup>276</sup>. 'Who could be that erratic wizard with a pen-name like Giles Stoker?'<sup>277</sup>, poses J. B. the question to himself. It is this particular question – the author's own rhetorical question to himself – that prompts Barth to bring home his argument and suggest his identity with Giles Stoker. The conclusion that can be drawn from this equation is that the erratic wizard who can be regarded as the begetter of the novel – far from being dead – is none but Barth himself.

<sup>272</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Literary Criticism*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), p. 73.

<sup>273</sup> Eliot, p. 76.

<sup>274</sup> Eliot, p. 74.

<sup>275</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), p. 170.

<sup>276</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 32.

<sup>277</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 32.

What I wish to end my investigation of Barth's novel with is the distillation of a new layer of meaning from the writerly metafictional aspect of *Giles Goat-Boy*. The novel, confessedly, is a 'standard painful history of reformers and innovators'<sup>278</sup>, a heavily allegorical *Bildungsroman* about a half-man/half-goat. Yet, if the reader focuses on the metafictional framing of the *Bildungsroman*, a different idea begins to unfold. The alternative plot summary would go somewhat as follows. One day John Barth is brooding over his loss of inspiration and becomes utterly dissatisfied with how aimless and mundane his novels are.<sup>279</sup> As Barth formulates it in the novel,

to move folks about, to give them locales and dispositions, past histories and crossed paths – it bored me. I hadn't taste or gumption for it. Especially was I surfeited with *movement*, the without-which-not of story. One novel ago I'd hatched a plot as mattersome as any in the books, and drove a hundred characters through eight times that many pages of it; now the merest sophomore apprentice, how callow soever his art, outdid me in that particular.<sup>280</sup>

In the midst of his bitterness Barth realizes that it is the outworn conventions of the realist novel that cripple his art, and in order to revitalize his writings he needs to subvert the standards by recourse to the mythical, the absurd, the obscene, the imaginary and the theologically subversive. Barth transforms his epiphany into a narrative vision in which – while working on a novel he has lost his faith in – he is visited by Giles Stoker who hands over to him the manuscript of *Giles Goat-Boy*, a novel which is written in eighteenth-century eloquent realist prose and has merited critics' attention exactly for being subversive, mythical, absurd, obscene, imaginative and iconoclast. Of course, it is Barth's own departure from the well-trodden path of the realist novel that results in his completion of *Giles Goat-Boy*. The author, nevertheless, is clear about the uncommon nature of his new product and writes a letter of apology, only ostensibly addressed to his publisher, explaining to the reader that the original novel he wanted to submit, a novel of exhausted possibilities along the lines of traditional realist fiction, was of far more inferior quality. What Barth's novel ultimately proclaims is that the Author is still God of his fiction; he still controls, manipulates and, contrary to all the hearsay, is very much alive.

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<sup>278</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 28.

<sup>279</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>280</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 20.

## 5.2. The Intrusive Author in Ishmael Reed's *Japanese by Spring*

Metafiction novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction.

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 6.

Was the idea that West Africa would eventually become a global leader the only thing that attracted Ishmael Reed to Yoruba? [...] Maybe it was because of Derrida's 1968 message about the age of the death of the author. There was no perceivable role for the critic in Yoruba art.

Ishmael Reed: *Japanese by Spring*<sup>281</sup>

The term 'intrusive author' that I included in the title of the present essay is pregnant with vital implications from the standpoint of writerly metafiction. The qualifier 'intrusive' implies the existence of an 'inside' and an 'outside' in the relations of which the author is outside, external to something. Considering the existence of an 'inside' and 'outside' with the semantic overtones of the word 'intrusion', there is a tangible sense of belonging in the scheme; i.e. certain entities belong to the inside world, while others belong to the outside world. The word 'intrusive', moreover, signifies intrusion from the outside, entry that is unwanted or objectionable from the point of view of those who are 'inside'. This brief train of thought makes it clear that, as far as the phrase 'intrusive author' is concerned, authorial presence is seen as a contamination in the world of fiction. But why is the author outside? Who are the ones who are intruded upon by the author? What is the place that is intruded upon? And why does this entry pose a problem?

Applying these questions as inquiries of theoretical importance in the investigation of metafiction, I propose the following answers. The territory that is implied to be out of bounds for the author is none but the fictional world of his/her *own* creation. The ones who are implied to be intruded upon are the inhabitants of this fictional domain, commonly referred to as characters. Lastly, I propound that it is for reasons of a certain literary conservatism that authorial presence is problematized and suggested to be unwanted in the world of fiction.

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<sup>281</sup> Ishmael Reed, *Japanese by Spring* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 121-122.

Perhaps the phrase ‘literary conservatism’ requires further clarification here. Writerly metafiction – as has already been pointed out – concentrates on, accentuates and flaunts literary issues that concern authorship within fiction; e.g. the relationship between author and text, writing fiction; i.e. the authorial/creative aspect of the art of fiction. The exceedingly marked foregrounding of the author by means of metafictional techniques, nonetheless, is a postmodern development in the practice of Anglo-American fiction writing. Authorial presence in fiction, either in the form of direct commentary or personal participation has become an accepted and widespread notion only among the novels of the post-1950s. The term ‘intrusive author’, however, is reminiscent of a literary period in which the realm of fiction was tacitly regarded to be a forbidden territory for the author to enter<sup>282</sup>; it is reminiscent of those novelistic conventions according to which the creator/novelist remained isolated from his/her literary creation. Of course, the set of literary conventions that I have in mind is that of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition of the realist novel. It is the realist insistence that authorial presence is not desired in fiction which is lexically encapsulated in the title phrase of the present study. What can be concluded from my line of argument is that writerly metafiction of the kind that incorporates the image of the intrusive author must necessarily feed on two literary traditions. On the one hand, it must exhibit the attributes of the realist tradition; on the other hand, it necessitates the postmodern element of the ‘incompatible’ which would convey the notion of intrusion on traditional conventions in the form of readerly surprise, bafflement or confusion.

The inside/outside dichotomy that I have outlined concerning authorial intrusion, therefore, implies two distinct worlds, two distinct existential planes which are only unilaterally penetrable by the narrative techniques of writerly metafiction.<sup>283</sup> It is this order of being that effectively assists to translate the issue of authorial intrusion into a fundamentally ontological problem. Ishmael Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1996) – besides those interpretations that focus on racial and ethnic issues – can also be made use of for the purposes of exploring the ontological aspect of the notion of the intrusive author. After twenty-three pages of deep involvement with the fictional survey of the cultural and racial

<sup>282</sup> In his seminal critical work entitled *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) E. M. Forster lends an unmistakeably overt expression to his disapproval of excessive and flaunting authorial or narratorial presence in a work of fiction. Forster demonstrates specific disfavour towards a characteristically writerly type of metafiction (not incidentally with specific reference to André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (English title: *The Counterfeiters*)) when he claims that ‘the novelist who betrays too much interest in his own method can never be more than interesting’ (p. 83) and consequently declares that novelists ‘must be censured’ if they are caught at allowing the reader ‘to see how the figures hook up behind [the fabric of fiction]’ (p. 84.); (E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1974).

<sup>283</sup> Intrusion is only possible from the outside as fictional characters cannot make their presence in experiential reality. Of course, this is a conviction that post-structuralist literary theory successfully upturns.

implications of being black in the groves of academe, the narrator of *Japanese by Spring* unexpectedly confronts the reader with facts of a different kind.

Puttbutt had heard Ishmael Reed say on the radio that... [...] Ishmael Reed said somewhere that he agreed with Norman Mailer's assessment of *Ms.* magazine... [...] [Ishmael Reed] had been attacked by one of their black house feminists in the January 1991 issue. She said that Ishmael Reed was "the ringleader" of black men who were... [...] Ringleader Ishmael Reed has never called anybody a traitor to anybody's race.<sup>284</sup>

It can be argued that this narratorial gesture destroys the illusory reality of the fictional world which the novel has assumed throughout twenty-three pages. In its place, we are offered, if not *the* real world, at least *a* real world.

Although Reed gradually introduces himself into his novel – first by means of reference to himself, as above, later by means of direct commentary and personal presence –, the devices that he uses operate fundamentally as frame-breakers. Frame, in a narratological sense, signifies organizing constructions which host action and involvement in situations; an ontological level of a self-contained world – be it real or fictional. *Japanese by Spring* contains two frames: one is reserved for the world of fiction, and another hosts experiential reality. The two frames are exclusory in the sense that the ontological level of fiction is an illusory construction produced by a creative will which resides in the ontological level of reality. This configuration, as Patricia Waugh observes in *Metafiction*, generates a complex implicit interdependence of levels in the metafictional novel: 'the reader is presented with embedded strata which contradict the presupposition of the strata immediately above or below'<sup>285</sup>. Any type of collusion, merging or mixing of the two frames reveals the constructedness of the fiction world and breaks the illusion (hence the term 'frame-breaking'). Reed's breaking of the ontological frame of the fictive world of his novel, in effect, causes to collapse all those cognitive constructs in the reader that cater for sustaining – however illusory it is – the sense of the real that the literary text generates: i.e. once the author has resorted to a device of frame-breaking, the reader will probably not submit himself to the world of fiction again. The rupture that techniques of authorial intrusion leave in the discourse which is designed to sustain the illusory reality of the narrative, essentially, forces the reader to recognize the existence of the inside and outside ontological planes. The consequence of the sense of surprise or bafflement that the reader normally experiences while confronted with the fact of frame-breaking in the novel may be adequately described as a state of alertness

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<sup>284</sup> Reed, p. 24.

<sup>285</sup> Waugh, p. 50.

and/or awareness. Gabriel Josipovici in his *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (1971) writes on the effect of frame-breaking as follows:

First they [i.e. novelists] lull us into taking the ‘picture’ for ‘reality,’ strengthening our habitual tendencies, and then suddenly our attention is focused on the spectacles through which we are looking, and we are made to see that what we had taken for ‘reality’ was only the imposition of the frame.<sup>286</sup>

As Josipovici suggests, techniques of frame-breaking make the reader reassess his/her store of ontological levels discerned in the novel in order to arrive at a more adequate understanding of the novel. However, I wish to point out that the collapsing of the ontological plane of fiction, as opposed to what the quote above suggests, does not exclusively result in the reader’s examining of what is real or what is not. Let us term the readerly reaction that Josipovici describes as ontological jolt – or readerly awareness of the *ontological* configuration of the novel – and supplement it with another type of readerly reaction which can be encapsulated as readerly awareness of *authorial* presence.

I propose that one of the main factors that determine readerly response to frame-breaking – either of ontological jolt or authorial awareness – is the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between the ontological levels of fiction and author-represented reality.<sup>287</sup> The greater the ontological gap between the two frames is, the more dramatic the effect of frame-breaking becomes. In John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), for example, the ontological plane of the fictional world is constructed to imitate Victorian England, while the ontological plane of authorial reality revealed in the much discussed metafictional frame-breaking in chapter thirteen exposes late twentieth-century experience. The two worlds differ to a great extent, which explains why Fowles’ recourse to frame-breaking manages to maximize a sense of ontological jolt so effectively in the reader. In Reed’s novel, nevertheless, authorial intrusions present the contrast of two ontological planes which are not substantially dissimilar to each other; and, in effect, there is no ontological collapse of the kind that McHale or Josipovici describe. Reed’s novel is denotative enough to make the reader realize that the fictional events presented in the novel are more or less unmistakable transcriptions of the different manifestations of racial discrimination, and the bafflement that readers may experience over the initial cases of authorial intrusion gradually gives way to

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<sup>286</sup> Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 297.

<sup>287</sup> As the two outstanding sociologists Thomas Luckmann and Peter Ludwig Berger argue in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), for most people the everyday world is the only real world; ‘reality *par excellence*’; it is common sense; literary realism appears to be a continuation or extension of this ‘commonsense’ world which is primarily represented by the author in fiction (Waugh, p. 87.).

readerly awareness of authorial presence. The effect of frame-breaking, furthermore, also greatly depends on how soon, late, frequently or sustained it is applied. Reed in *Japanese by Spring* introduces his frame-braking techniques relatively early (on page twenty-five) and as the reader proceeds with the novel, the number of frame-breakings increases hand in hand with the length of their sustenance. First, there is only reference to Reed by fictional characters; second, Reed's opinions are quoted either by the narrator or by other characters; third, Reed appears in the novel in person and interacts with his own fictional characters; finally, Reed's own voice and presence becomes dominant in the novel. The outcome of Reed's extensive use of frame-breakings, again, is a quickened process in which the reader becomes accustomed to the presence of the intrusive author *without* being confused by the disrupted ontological frame of the novel; i.e. ontological jolt gives way to readerly awareness of authorial presence.

Investigating the whys of Reed's obtrusive self-advertisement throughout 202 pages, the following observations can be made. The prolonged authorial intrusions in *Japanese by Spring* foreground Ishmael Reed not as an artist (like Barth in *Giles Goat-Boy*) but as the source of human experience and social commentary presented in the novel. The book is basically devoid of metaphorical and allegorical connotations, philosophical contemplations and abstract conjectures. Authorial presence in *Japanese by Spring* serves the purpose of rendering authorial experience as directly as possible. Instead of the first person 'I', the narration employs a constant third person singular, proper noun reference to Reed. As the tissue of quotations demonstrates below, the ever recurring instances of the 'Reed's and the 'Ishmael Reed's literally hammer the message into the consciousness of the reader that each and every instance of authorial intrusion represents Ishmael Reed's own experience, an opinion of the author and activist, the commentary of the person identified on the title-page.

At the end of October, Ishmael Reed ran into Chappie Puttbutt [the protagonist of the novel] and his parents [...] Chappie greeted Reed warmly [...] They told Reed that [...] Reed, however, was beginning to see signs of trouble [...] Reed knew that [...] Reed's gloomy assessment of [...] Reed believed that racism was learned. [...] As a black male in the United States, Ishmael Reed could understand limitations. [...] Reed didn't know [...] Ishmael Reed had read novels about the media class and the blame-everything-on-black-greed class [...] Ishmael Reed told a Freiburg newspaper [...] The biggest crack dealer on Ishmael Reed's block wears a Malcolm X T-shirt. Ishmael Reed wrote an opinion about the verdict and the aftermath only to be told by the newspaper to which it was sent that the piece was "scattered."<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Reed, pp. 205-214.



I have already argued that Reed's application of the writerly metafictional technique of authorial intrusion serves the purpose of opening an uncommon communicational channel in the narrative, from which facts from the experiential world of the author are parachuted into the world of fiction. Instead of the fictional characters – the imaginary constructs of the author – it is the title-page author whose racial experience, political views, historical readings and personal opinions are explicitly offered. The increasing and ever longer authorial intrusions, however, elbow out the characters and fictional events from the pages of the novel and Reed literally takes over, monopolizes the domain traditionally reserved for his characters. By the end of the novel, numerous uninterrupted, several-page-long parts are to be found which are entirely dominated by Reed's own discourse. This authorial takeover, in fact, reverses the common assumption that in fiction the author breaks down his ideas, observations and opinions and translates them into the world of fiction by using characters as mouthpieces. Reed, it seems, deemed it unnecessary to employ his characters as carriers of his thoughts.

From the point of view of discourse analysis, Reed, in a sense, sets up a counter-discourse to the concept of the invisible author endemic in traditional literary realism. This discursive challenge is achieved by the author's gradual, but spectacular infiltration into fiction. Reed's appropriation of the fictional world of his novel strongly reminds me of McHale's so-called ontological flicker theory, according to which the successive shifts from the ontological plane of fiction to that of the author's and back and forth and back and forth, and so on and so forth, result in a so-called ontological flicker in the reader's consciousness.<sup>289</sup> In *Japanese by Spring*, however, McHale's ontological flicker flips over into a near-constant case of authorial frame-breaking, whereby the ontological plane of fiction recedes into the background of the narrative and the reader may, not so inappropriately, feel that Benjamin "Chappie" Puttbutt, as protagonist, has been replaced by his own creator.

The conclusion that can be distilled from Reed's use of writerly metafictional techniques in *Japanese by Spring* greatly complements the observations I made concerning John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*. Both texts, with little hesitation, broach the issue concerning the relationship between author and his/her creative product, the novel.<sup>290</sup> Yet, there is difference in their approaches. While the metafictional reading of Barth's novel accentuates the creative, the imaginative, the artistic and the craftsmanship aspect of authorship, the metafictional nature of Reed's book foregrounds the author as a source of documentary information, as a personal guarantee of what is printed in the novel is not the product of fantasizing but is the truth, the

<sup>289</sup> McHale, pp. 197-198.

<sup>290</sup> Barth's preference for metafiction is well-known. As Jerome Klinkowitz observes it, Reed is also a leading spokesman for the radical aesthetic of disruptivist postmodern fiction (Klinkowitz, p. 185.)

real stuff of life. This question of authenticity is especially relevant in the case of *Japanese by Spring* as its thematic focus of racial discrimination is the chief area of expertise for Ishmael Reed, both as a novelist and as a cultural activist. The novel in its entirety can be conceived as an imaginary revenge tale, an academic satire which is interspersed with Reed's detours concerning history, politics, the vicissitudes of Afro-Americans in the United States, and a great deal of other issues. By means of the innumerable authorial intrusions, Reed's *Japanese by Spring* acquires a sense of the documentary, the sense of factuality that an accurate personal diary may lend for the reader. Reed's insistence on referring to himself by the use of his own proper name suggests that it is the author himself – his biography, experience, views and opinions, etc. – who may provide an interpretational key to the novel. The whole idea, of course, runs counter to the often routinely used critical objection so famously formulated by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's in their 1946 essay entitled 'The Intentional Fallacy'. As opposed to T. S. Eliot's doctrines, to I. A. Richards's views, to the obsession of the American New Criticism with objective criticism, to Roland Barth, to Michel Foucault and the deconstructionist scepticism concerning the existence of the author, Reed – as the motto from *Japanese by Spring* at the beginning of this paper suggests – insists that his design and intentions *are* available and *should be* desired.

### 5.3. Authorial Surrogacy in Pablo Urbanyi's *The Nowhere Idea*

I am simply a modest chronicler who, as the reader is unfortunately aware, can also lie.

Pablo Urbanyi: *The Nowhere Idea*<sup>291</sup>

Pablo Urbanyi's *The Nowhere Idea* (1982) is the third and last case of writerly metafiction that I wish to investigate here. As opposed to Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* or Reed's *Japanese by Spring*, in *The Nowhere Idea* Urbanyi refrains from recourse to the writerly metafictional means of incorporating himself into the fictional world of his own creation. Consequently, there is no mention of 'Urbanyi', 'Pablo Urbanyi', 'P. U.', or any other kind of proper name reference in the novel to the title-page author. Instead, Urbanyi employs the technique of authorial surrogacy – i.e. a character who is employed in writing within a novel. Urbanyi's choice of technique constitutes a special instance of authorial surrogacy – a variety of the so-

<sup>291</sup> Pablo Urbanyi, *The Nowhere Idea*, trans. by Nigel Dennis (Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1982), pp. 152.

called self-begetting novel – as his fictional writer figure is engaged in the creation of the novel he is the participant of. Surrogate authorship of this kind, I wish to point out, is not the development of postmodern literature; travel novels, novels written in the form of diaries and the epistolary novel, for instance, are prime examples of authorial surrogates who are presented to be writing, not just any fictional story, but the very text the reader is holding in his/her hands. The quintessential attribute of this literary tradition is the *pretence* that the novel is being written by a character who, ontologically speaking, lives within the novel itself. Of course, surrogate authors may be involved in the creation of texts *other* than the one they are the participants of while still being metafictional in the sense of being able to reflect on issues related to authorship within fiction. Yet, those characters that are employed in the writing of the novel are a part of lend an even more acute sense of self-referentiality to the text which is especially endemic to writerly metafictional novels.

Urbanyi's surrogate author is a university teacher – with an unmistakably metafictional gesture – called 'Footnote', who in the preface of the book claims to be writing a scholarly investigation about the brutal fight and the following court case of two of his aging colleagues over the ownership of a revolutionary idea. Footnote, while both narrating and analyzing the events, levels devastating criticism at contemporary society and the academic world. Besides touching upon the disadvantages of the university credit system, financial cuts in higher education and the abysmal job situation of academics, the novel's most pointed academic issue concerns the ferocity of academic competition, and, according to Urbanyi, the pretentious and intellectually impotent scholarship that it produces. It seems feasible to suppose that as far as *The Nowhere Idea* is concerned, Urbanyi embarked on writing fiction out of annoyance with the general uselessness and pointlessness that he perceived about scholarship in the humanities. That half the novel takes place in the Spanish department of a university in Ottawa – Urbanyi also taught in the Spanish department of a university in Ottawa – suggests that Urbanyi's first-hand experience as a university teacher in Canada must have definitely contributed to what later became part of his novel. The thematic self-reference of Urbanyi's book is evident: it is an academic novel by a university teacher about another university teacher writing an academic novel.

The manifestation of Urbanyi's surrogate author, in fact, can be considered to be a case of frame-constructing. Urbanyi's authorial surrogacy establishes a Chinese box structure of a book within a book: i.e. within Pablo Urbanyi's *The Nowhere Idea* there is another book, an academic study written by an author called Footnote. Urbanyi's novel in the novel structure can be appropriately described with the French writer André Gide's term *mise en abyme* to

refer to this multiple textual embedding in literary works. It would have been most appropriate for Urbanyi to add a second title-page to his book with the corresponding author name and title. Since no link is established between the two discursive frames – i.e. no mediation takes place between the ontological planes of reality and fiction by the external author – the book's authorship, in a sense, is handed down from the real author to the surrogate author. Footnote presents his study from a constant first person singular perspective in which he is both a narrator and writer. The result of the fusion of these two roles is that the act of narration – i.e. the act of telling – always coincides with the act of writing; the authorial voice is omnipresent and always identical with the narratorial voice. It is the conventions of academic writing that Urbanyi mobilizes to assist Footnote's real-time telling-writing activity which, as a genre, is known for its foregrounding of the author-researcher 'I', the voice of a unique author-narrator synthesis. The foregrounding of the surrogate author cannot be missed in *The Nowhere Idea* as the text abounds in sentences beginning either with 'the author' or 'I', depending on whether Footnote chooses to refer to himself by using indirect or direct speech.

The shifting authorship from the real to the fictional author enables the reader to discern the novel's self-begetting nature. The term, besides confirming that the novel is presented to be the product of one of its characters, in fact, denies one of the most traditional assumptions concerning the art of fiction: the notion of there being an external, outside author who begets, creates or gives birth to his/her work of fiction. The term 'self-begetting' implicates the novel as a possessor of a self; it implicates that a novel can also be considered as a self-contained entity which requires no outside agent by which it could be brought into existence; i.e. the novel gives the impression of coming into existence of its own accord. The self-begetting novel, therefore, attempts to blur, if not downright do away with the distinction between external author and surrogate author.

I wish to point out that it is not the fact that *The Nowhere Idea* is a self-begetting narrative with a surrogate author that makes the novel metafictional. For that matter most epistolary novels and diaries could be considered as cases of writerly metafiction; my readings of deconstructionist literary analyses would certainly imply that. Rather, it is the book's high degree of self-consciousness and explicit self-investigation that makes it suitable for inclusion in the present study. The explicitness of self-reflexivity that *The Nowhere Idea* displays makes it obvious that the novel's metafictional aspect is not a matter of interpretation. It is during recurrent instances of ostentation and flaunting that Footnote asserts and foregrounds his authorial/creative status within the novel. The reader is bound to find a number of self-

referential parts similar to the one below in which Footnote is deeply engaged in reflecting on his own activity of writing.

When I had finished writing the last three lines which prompted me to write this footnote, my pen hovered motionless above the paper and I discovered to my surprise that without realizing it I had used the first person singular. The cars roll on and my pen remains where it is while I stop to think, and I see at once what had happened.<sup>292</sup>

The excerpt is also a case of how the surrogate author lays bare those aspects of authorship that are traditionally concealed in a novel: how a novelist proceeds with the writing of his novel, what grammatical conventions he/she utilizes for the purposes of fiction. It is also the frequent self-referential notes that continually remind the reader of the fact that the text that he/she is reading is a combined act of writing and narrating – which, in practice, caters for the impression that the novel is also about the process of its own birth. The text's acute awareness of the creative processes to which it owes its existence is an important metafictional trait of Urbanyi's novel. Footnote's constant presence, self-reference and, most importantly, claim of authorship of the book effectively suppresses Urbanyi as the creative cause of the novel.

There is one dominant aspect in *The Nowhere Idea* which makes it highly comparable to Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*: both novels can be interpreted as celebrations of authorial imagination. Barth's device is authorial intrusion, Urbanyi's choice is authorial surrogacy to channel the metafictional message. Appropriately to the conventions of writerly metafiction, the issue is overtly broached and discussed by the surrogate author in the introductory part of *The Nowhere Idea*. The point of departure of the metafictional argument is that objective linguistic representation of the phenomenological world is impossible. To prove the point, Urbanyi's surrogate author declares that even the language of science – a register which is commonly regarded to be the most objective means of linguistic representation – seems to impoverish the reality it seeks to describe.<sup>293</sup> Footnote, on the other hand, also insists on deploying his imaginative faculties in order to render the facts of experiential reality: 'The author of this study' can 'also be described as a chronicler, since his aim is to be objective'<sup>294</sup> but by loosening 'the reins of imagination, will not hesitate to use literary devices when necessary'<sup>295</sup>. Footnote's declaration can be taken as the metafictional manifesto of the novel.

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<sup>292</sup> Urbanyi, p. 83.

<sup>293</sup> Urbanyi, p. 4.

<sup>294</sup> Urbanyi, p. 3.

<sup>295</sup> Urbanyi, p. 4.

The basic question that the novel seeks to answer is how the author is to represent, comment on or define reality authentically. What Urbanyi proposes is a synthesis of the factual and the fictional. The metafictional inquiry in *The Nowhere Idea* is conducted in an adequately mixed discursive form as Footnote resorts to employing academic discourse as well as authorial invention. The resulting blend is a parodistic subversion. Urbanyi is unmistakably consistent in endorsing and in the same breath upsetting the conventions of academic writing he employs – be it a structural, lexical, grammatical, or a content related convention. Due to this stylistic disruption, the overall impression in the reader concerning the scholarly status of the novel is never convincing. The parody, nevertheless, should not distract the reader; the novel never relinquishes its claim to a quasi-scholarly status, nor does the surrogate author ever cease to insist on his role as a quasi-scholar. Correspondingly, *The Nowhere Idea* foregrounds the surrogate author both as a scholar and a creative writer in order to feature a linguistic repertoire which is partly academic discourse and partly fiction. In yet another metafictional gesture Urbanyi hastens to point out that his surrogate author is well aware of the fact that the two authorial roles are to be found complementarily in him. ‘Inside every professor there lurks a writer. Naturally, this also happens to be the other way round: inside every writer [...] there lurks a university professor, struggling to get out’<sup>296</sup>, explains Footnote by which he also identifies himself. The act of self-identification is both of Footnote’s and Urbanyi’s: Pablo Urbanyi, a university teacher and novelist is writing a book which is about a university teacher and novelist writing a book.

As far as its first half is concerned, the novel presents a more-or-less balanced interplay of the factual and the fictitious. In the second half, however, the proportion of fact and fiction is significantly shifted to the advantage of the latter. The proportional majority of the fictitious over the factual gradually crystallizes into the conclusion of Urbanyi’s metafictional message: for an adequate representation of the phenomenological world authorial imagination plays a more important role than the novelist’s ability to make statements that are based on the ideal of objective observation. This message also seems to be encapsulated in the title of the novel which – besides referring to the non-existent idea over the ownership of which the ageing professors had their disagreements – draws attention to the novel’s own status as fiction. The alternative interpretation of the novel’s title is based on the anagrammatic relationship between the word ‘nowhere’ and Erewhon, the name of the village where half the novel’s action takes place. Erewhon is an intertextually constructed ‘literatureland’ because, firstly, it

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<sup>296</sup> Urbanyi, p. 4.

is named after Samuel Butler's imaginary country in his utopian novel entitled *Erewhon*<sup>297</sup>; secondly, it is peopled by characters from other literary works by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens and William Faulkner. The literary appropriations are duly identified by the surrogate author,<sup>298</sup> which does not only lend a further dimension of self-consciousness to the novel, but also acquires the novel an additional semantic scope of fantasy and fictitious existence. The title, by containing the re-scrambling of the anagram Erewhon, can be paraphrased as 'my idea of a place that is nowhere' or 'my idea of a place that is called Nowhere'<sup>299</sup>, which doubly accentuates the imaginary status of the world the surrogate author presents, and therefore doubly foregrounds the constitutive role of authorial imagination in literature. Urbanyi's artistic conviction concerning the primacy of fantasy over fact in producing literary realism – besides the meanings of presence and absence generated by the title words – is even more directly reinforced in the title. Urbanyi's reference to Butler's novel can also be read as an acknowledgement of the fact that the purely fantastic – in Butler's case it is the world of utopia – can present viable social criticism; it can represent, reflect and comment on the phenomenological word in a relevant manner.

Although the whole of *The Nowhere Idea* is supplied with a heavy dose of imagination, those chapters that take place in Erewhon can be considered as the most pointed manifestations of authorial invention. The self-referential nature of this second part in the novel also finds a correspondingly intrusive expression. Besides Footnote's revelations concerning the various intertextual references in the novel, William Wilson's – the imaginary judge of the imaginary Erewhon court – own metafictional self-identification as an intertextual appropriation cannot pass unnoticed. 'I am merely the incarnation of the double of a character from a wonderful story by Poe'<sup>300</sup>, declares Wilson whose confession makes it clear that his own monological narrative concerning the rise and fall of Erewhon is also a product of authorial fantasy. Urbanyi makes use of Wilson's embedded narrative to further dwell on the importance of authorial imagination in literary realism. 'Is William Wilson's story real of fictional? Or both?'<sup>301</sup>, asks Footnote at the beginning of a chapter which turns out to be a thirteen-page-long literary analysis<sup>302</sup> to discuss the inseparability of fact and

<sup>297</sup> Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* was first published anonymously in 1872. Butler's title denotes a fictitious utopian country which is the Anglicized anagrammatic version of Sir Thomas More's coinage 'utopia'. More created the word 'utopia' from the Greek *ou* 'not' + *topos* 'place' to refer to the imaginary island in his identically entitled work of fiction. *Utopia* was published in 1516.

<sup>298</sup> Urbanyi, pp. 60., 95., 127.

<sup>299</sup> As opposed to its previous meaning, in this case the word 'Nowhere' is not an adverb but a proper noun that premodifies 'Idea'.

<sup>300</sup> Urbanyi, p. 138.

<sup>301</sup> Urbanyi, p. 123.

<sup>302</sup> Urbanyi, pp. 123-135.

fiction in the practice of novel writing. The fact that the surrogate author contemplates the role of his own imagination in creating his own narrative proves that *The Nowhere Idea* not only thematizes the role and treatment of imagination in fiction, but also meta-thematizes it.

And I [i.e. Urbanyi?] am gradually stopping too. I'm writing these lines in the pub I come to almost every night to remember past times. [...] My stomach feels empty. I order a sandwich and another beer, and while I'm waiting, I note down my plans for the future. [...] Bah, I don't fancy making plans just now. I'll wait for my beer and sandwich, wait until the world is ready to receive and understand my work. [...] The beer and the sandwich are on the table. [The end]<sup>303</sup>

The closing lines of the novel imply the exhaustion and the consequent breakdown of authorial surrogacy. The first person singular voice of the narrator is still present, but there is no sign of the intention to chronicle any more, neither can the reader perceive Footnote's sophistry as a quasi-scholar. The enervated tone, the banality of the scene and the visible change in the deportment of the narrator persona suggest the fall of the mask Urbanyi has worn in order to give birth to and sustain his surrogate author.

## 5.4. Conclusion

In the three cases of writerly metafiction that I have investigated in this chapter Barth, Reed and Urbanyi employ various techniques to assist the foregrounding of the concept of the author within fiction. Barth uses a prefatory technique of intrusion; Reed takes over the world of his fiction personally by means of frequent instances of authorial infiltration; and Urbanyi employs the technique of authorial surrogacy while he personally remains outside the world of fiction. In each case the resulting effect is the dramatization of issues related to the concept of the author. What is somewhat contradictory about the three novels is that while they are tagged by the much-abused term of 'postmodernist literature', they evoke a rather traditional concept: the romantic notion of the poet, the poet who is the unique source and origin of his fictional world, controller and God of his art. Irrespective of how radical or unconventional the techniques of writerly metafiction may be, the new layer of meaning they generate is essentially an old one. In *Literary Disruptions* Jerome Klinkowitz aptly observes that 'a figure in most of Barth's work is the writer seeking immortality'<sup>304</sup>. I believe, Klinkowitz' statement

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<sup>303</sup> Urbanyi, pp. 166-167.

<sup>304</sup> Klinkowitz, p. 8.



is applicable to all writerly metafictional novels including *Japanese by Spring* and *The Nowhere Idea*. Writerly metafiction, I suppose, is the paramount literary device in the author's quest for immortality. What follows from my analyses of the three novels is that, contrary to the deconstructionist theoretical insistence on the 'death of the author', the author remains to have an undisputedly central role in postmodern fiction.

## VI. Critical Fiction:

### Textual Metafiction in the Academic Novel

In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artefact out of the materials and so to treat the medium as an end.

William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*

When English professors write novels, they tend to write about what they know best: other people's books. Even in some of the most celebrated and familiar academic satires, rewriting literary conventions is as important as mocking campus attitudes.

Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers*, p. 9.

Textual self-consciousness is perhaps the most popular manifestation of metafictional writing among postmodern academic novels. The common denominator of textual metafictional novels is that they show awareness of their own linguistic constructedness, of their textual nature. The state of textual consciousness in metafictional novels is brought about either by explicit intertextuality or by self-analysis.<sup>305</sup>

The notion of metafictional intertextuality – i.e. the *conscious* and *explicit* reference to other works of fiction (or, in some cases, non-fiction) – can be classified into three degrees.<sup>306</sup> One, the metafictional novel contains explicit references to other works of fiction. Two, the metafictional novel contains shorter or longer parts, textual embeddings from other works of fiction which are identified, explored, analyzed or commented on in an explicit fashion. Three, the intertextual embeddings serve as either thematic or structural patterns for the appropriating metafictional novel, which is then explicitly revealed normally either by the characters of the novel or by authorial commentary.

The other frequently applied practice to generate textual self-consciousness is self-analysis; i.e. the metafictional novel does not contain intertextual references and/or

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<sup>305</sup> Mark Currie argues along the same lines when he declares that it is their *artificiality* that metafictional narratives signify by incorporating obtrusive references to traditional forms or by borrowing their thematic and structural principles from other narratives (Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 4).

<sup>306</sup> The notion of explicitness involves, for example, the identification of title, author, date of publication, page references, theme, plot, characters, etc.

embeddings, but carries out self-analysis, revealing its constitutive discourses, narrative patterns and literary conventions.

As Patricia Waugh astutely formulates it in *Metafiction*, the basic idiosyncrasy of the metafictional novels is that ‘the fictional *content* of the [metafictional] story is continually reflected by its *formal* existence as text, and the existence of that text [is continually reflected] within a world viewed in terms of ‘textuality’’.<sup>307</sup> Textual awareness in metafiction is actually an unproblematic notion: the work of fiction ‘tells’ the reader about itself. The acute self-consciousness that textual metafiction thus possesses is commonly regarded as its critical function/content. Mark Currie’s own definition of metafictionality is predicated on the insight that metafictional texts perform a critical function. Currie proposes that, as a consequence of the critical function that metafictional novels perform, metafiction should be seen as a borderline discourse which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject.<sup>308</sup> Due to its overt critical function, the metafictional novel has also acquired the labels of critical fiction or theoretical fiction.<sup>309</sup> From among the four manifestations of the metafictional novel I distinguished in Chapter Four, textual metafiction makes its inherent critical function most obtrusively explicit by readily incorporating texts from the domain of literary theory. The notion of critical fiction, I believe, is especially germane to those textual metafictions that have been developed within the subgeneric boundaries of the academic novel.

The combination of textual appropriation, plus consciousness, plus criticism in literature has proved an especially fruitful literary tool in the able hands of those writers of academic fiction who have emerged since the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>310</sup> Some of the relevant names here are David Lodge, Christine Brooke-Rose, A. S. Byatt and Amanda Cross and Austin M. Wright. All these novelists are invariably literary critics and/or university teachers of literature, which accounts for the critical depth with which their works reflect on specific works of literature or the art of writing, *per se*.<sup>311</sup> I have coined the term ‘literature-oriented university novel’ to identify that particular variety of academic fiction which most prominently engages into discussions of literary history, literary theory and specific literary

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<sup>307</sup> Waugh, p. 15.

<sup>308</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

<sup>309</sup> Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>310</sup> The concept of intertextuality, I wish to emphasize, is by no means interchangeable with the term ‘metafictionality’. Metafictional novels feature manifestations of intertextuality *together with* a conscious, and normally explicit reflection on the act of textual reference or borrowing. Intertextuality, *per se*, requires no such self-reflection by default.

<sup>311</sup> It is an interesting observation that the writers of literature-oriented campus novels *themselves* can be seen as the personifications of the kind of fiction they produce: the critic and creative writer merges in the person of the author, while criticism and fiction blends in the textual fabric of the novel.

works normally by staging an English department with a few professors of English literature as its protagonists. The proliferation of textual metafiction in academic novels after the 1960s is also deeply related to the fact that literary theory became one of the most central and innovative disciplines in the humanities. The postmodern developments of literary criticism play an undisputedly essential role in the increase of textual metafictional academic novels, especially concerning that strain of literature-oriented academic novels which deals with literary theory. Of course, there are degrees in the extent to which readers' attention can be attracted to the intertextual nature of a novel, therefore, marginal cases occur. Nevertheless, the academic novel has proved to be a suitable forum for discussing matters that are of interest for those who, either as professionals or as amateurs, like writing and reading about literature. Either seen as texts about texts, or literature about literature, literature-oriented academic fiction, as a sub-subgenre of the academic novel, perfectly fits Mark Currie's description of metafiction: it is 'a point of convergence where fiction and criticism assimilated each-other's insights, producing self-conscious energy on both sides'<sup>312</sup>.

### 6.1. A textual metafictional condition (of England novel)

David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988)<sup>313</sup> is perhaps one of the most popular textual metafiction among the academic novels of the 1980s. The various aspects of textual metafiction in *Nice Work* stem from the fact that it is a literature-oriented university novel. Robyn Penrose, the heroine of the novel, is a university teacher specialized in the English industrial novel and feminist literary theory. Traditionally for the protagonists of those academic novels that establish their links with the real academe through a specific branch of science or discipline, Robyn is constructed to be the medium of those scholarly issues that are related to the academic field she is the representative of: in her case, literature. Accordingly, Robyn is employed as a channel for conveying literary observations and for making critical statements about specific English novels. The literature-related discourse that Robyn thus produces – mainly inside, but also outside the university campus – constitutes those textual appropriations that are responsible for developing the metafictional characteristic of *Nice Work*.

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<sup>312</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

<sup>313</sup> David Lodge, *Nice Work* (London: Penguin, 1988)

The most notable manifestation of textual metafiction that can be found in the book is the fourteen-page-long lecture that Robyn delivers on the English industrial novel. The excerpt below is taken from that part.

‘In the 1840s and 1850s,’ says Robyn, ‘a number of novels were published in England which have a certain family resemblance. Raymond Williams has called them “Industrial Novels” because they dealt with social and economic problems arising out of the Industrial Revolution, and in some cases described the nature of factory work. In their own time they were often called “Condition of England Novels”, because they addressed themselves directly to the state of the nation. They are novels in which the main characters debate topical social and economic issues as well as fall in and out of love, marry and have children, pursue careers, make or lose their fortunes, and do all the other things characters do in more conventional novels. The Industrial Novel contributed a distinctive strain to English fiction which persists into the modern period – it can be traced in the work of Lawrence and Forster, for instance.’<sup>314</sup>

During her lecture Robyn engages into an in-depth discussion of a number of industrial novels: she illuminates the social and political background of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil; or, the Two Nations* (1845), Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849)<sup>315</sup>; draws attention to the antithetical nature of capitalist rationalism and imagination in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (1854); accentuates the social and psychological implications of the portrayals of women in industrial novels, with specific reference to *Hard Times* and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855); and references to all the above-enumerated novels in order to point out that none of their authors could offer viable solutions to the problems of industrial capitalism.<sup>316</sup> Robyn’s lecture on the Victorian industrial novel, and, later on in the novel, her seminar on Victorian poetry, are classical examples of what Louis Hjelmslev termed as ‘metalanguage’<sup>317</sup>. Metalanguage, although it was originally applied in linguistics, proves especially adequate a term to illuminate the process of conscious textual appropriation that textual metafiction frequently involve. According to Hjelmslev, metalanguage is a special kind of linguistic repertoire which ‘instead of referring to non-linguistic events, situations or objects in the world, refers to *another* language: it is a language which takes another language as its object’<sup>318</sup>. Translating Hjelmslev’s definition into Saussurean structuralist principles, the

<sup>314</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>315</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>316</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, p. 83.

<sup>317</sup> Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. by F. J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961)

<sup>318</sup> Waugh, p. 4.

notion of textual metafiction can be conceived as a type of language ‘that functions as a signifier to *another language*, and this other language thus becomes its signified’<sup>319</sup>. The literary discussions that *Nice Work* offers, in this sense, function as signifiers to specific Victorian literary works, which, in turn, become the *other languages*, the signified linguistic entities.

Right at the beginning of the novel, Robyn is appointed to participate in the Industry Year Shadow Scheme, which entails her weekly visitations at a local metallurgical firm (the scheme is later to be reversed and it is going to be managing director Vic Wilcox, Robyn’s exchange partner, who will attend Robyn’s seminars at the university). Robyn Penrose, of course, is not an expert of industry; it is only the industrial novel and feminist literary theory she has an undisputed knowledge about. It is this discrepancy which constitutes the main driving force in *Nice Work*. By means of its metafictional textual incorporations, *Nice Work* summons up nineteenth-century fictional images of English industry. Prompted by the shadow scheme, Lodge also creates a late twentieth-century realist rendering of English industry. The two representations are superimposed in *Nice Work* to create a stereoscopic image, a palimpsest of past and present fictions. Necessarily, the juxtaposition takes place in Robyn’s consciousness which the reader accesses only by means of Lodge’s mediation. The allure of *Nice Work*, I suppose, arises largely from those similarities and differences of past and present fictions which their metafictional dialogue reveals.

There are potent similarities between the fictional world of present-day Rummidge (to be more precise, the fictional Rummidge of the 1980s), and the fictional world to be found in Victorian industrial novels: both aim to portray life in an industrial society through the eyes of those who, more often than not, fall victim to, rather than benefit from it; and therefore both fictions have an essentially negative, critical take on the world of industrial capitalism. When, for example, Robyn faces the working conditions of the factory workers, or when she becomes aware of the technological aspect of metallurgy, or when she perceives the inferior position of women in the world of industry, she constantly likens her experience to the literary works she has read and taught so many times.<sup>320</sup>

In spite of the obvious analogies, there are some fundamental differences between the fictional world of Rummidge and the fictional world of Victorian industrialism. Comparably to similarities, differences are also expressed through Robyn’s consciousness. Robyn’s first

<sup>319</sup> Waugh, p. 4.

<sup>320</sup> References to non-industrial novels are also frequent; e.g. when appalled by the squalor she finds in the factory suburbs she gets lost in, Robyn is reminded of D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1921) and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (Lodge, p. 98.), or the factory furnace she visits recalls Dante’s ‘Inferno’ from *The Divine Comedy* (Lodge, p. 128).

visit to the factory furnace is one of the many episodes which is orchestrated to shock the protagonist into recognizing just how much her new experience of modern factory life differs from the world of industry rendered by Victorian novels. Frequently, these recognitions acquire an exceedingly comic output: for instance, during her first visit to the factory, Robyn becomes the object of ridicule when she inquires where the tall brick chimneys are – something which modern factories are no longer equipped with. Robyn's preconceived expectation to find tall brick chimneys with ribbons of smoke issuing from them, of course, stems from her readings of Dickens, Kingsley, Mrs Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte and Disraeli.

At some point, the reader is tempted to equate the inadequacy of Robyn's knowledge about the world of factories with the inadequacy of Victorian realist fiction to faithfully render the reality of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism; certainly, this seems to be a viable interpretation. Nevertheless, the recognitions and comic predicaments that Robyn experiences merely demonstrate that the images of industry that she has conceived from Victorian industrial novels are valid only as long as they are treated as specifically nineteenth-century experience. The mistake that Robyn makes, rather unawares, is that she applies a nineteenth-century experience in order to make sense of twentieth-century conditions. One of the metafictional messages that *Nice Work* delivers through the explicit dialogue of past and present fictions is that the documentary/descriptive aspect of the realist novel, by definition, is time-bound. In fact, this is something that Robyn *herself* is ultimately forced to concede.

So far, I have been dealing with that metafictional aspect of *Nice Work* which manifests itself through the consciousness of fictional characters. As has been demonstrated, although minor characters also show awareness of literary texts, it is generally the main protagonist – i.e. Robyn Penrose – whom Lodge employs to parachute instances of textual metafiction into his novel. The aspect of textual metafiction that I find more interesting in *Nice Work* is that it establishes itself as an industrial novel by imitating or subverting all those conventions of the Victorian condition of England novel which are laid bare during Robyn Penrose's lectures, literary discussions and analyses. For a clearer exposition, I wish to distinguish between two types of textual metafiction. Firstly, there are those cases which I have termed 'passive textual appropriations'. In such instances – applying Hjelmslev's and Saussure's theoretical concepts – the signified discourse exerts no influencing force on the signifying discourse. Secondly, there are the so-called 'active textual appropriations', in which case the signified text actively shapes and influences the signifying discourse. It is this latter type of textual metafiction which I wish to employ to describe how David Lodge makes use of Victorian novels and critical texts in order to shape his own novel.

*Nice Work* exhibits the conventions of two literary sub-genres. Firstly, *Nice Work* is an academic novel about a university teacher of English literature through whom the reader is allowed to peer into the world of an English department, literary scholarship, and a body of literature that is commonly referred to as condition of England novels. Secondly, *Nice Work* is a condition of England novel *itself* about a factory manager through whom the reader is allowed to glimpse into the world of metallurgy and industrial capitalism. Lodge continually alternates the two sub-genres throughout the novel, which surfaces in the shifting application of such literary conventions as character, setting, subject matter, plot line, ending, etc. There is, nevertheless, perceptible interaction between the two subgeneric components of the novel. Through Robyn's literary observations the reader learns how Victorian novelists rendered/represented the world of factories in their fiction, both in terms of content and point of view. This literary material, nonetheless, also provides the essential fabric of *Nice Work*'s industrial novel aspect. Robyn, for example, points out that Victorian writers of condition of England novels frequently discussed the political background of England's current industrial state of affairs in their fiction; so does Lodge illuminate the role of the Thatcher government in English industry of the 1980s. The harsh utilitarianism that Robyn sees depicted in Dickens' *Hard Times* returns in Vic Wilcox' uncompromising rationality in *Nice Work*. Robyn argues that many Victorian novelists submitted their fictional industry to a major crisis, so is Pringle's – which Vic Wilcox manages as a director – sold at the end of Lodge's novel. As for endings, Robyn observes the following.

Unable to contemplate a political solution to the social problems they describe in their fiction, the industrial novelists could only offer narrative solutions to the personal dilemmas of their characters. And these narrative solutions are invariably negative or evasive. In *Hard Times* the victimized worker Stephen Blackpool dies in the odour of sanctity. In *Mary Barton* the working-class heroine and her husband go off to the colonies to start a new life. Kingsley's Alton Locke emigrates after his disillusionment with Chartism, and dies shortly after. In *Sybil*, the humble heroine turns out to be an heiress and is able to marry her well-meaning aristocratic lover without compromising the class system, and a similar stroke of good fortune resolves the love stories in *Shirley* and *North and South*. Although the heroine of George Eliot's *Felix Holt* renounces her inheritance, it is only so that she can marry the man she loves. In short, all the Victorian novelists could offer as a solution to the problems of industrial capitalism were: a legacy, a marriage, emigration or death.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 82-83.



The excerpt, in a sense, forecasts and predetermines the outcome of *Nice Work*. The last chapter is the dramatic culmination of action on both the academic and the industrial strains of the novel: Robyn learns that the English Department at the University of Rummidge will not be able to keep her, not even as a temporary lecturer; and Vic Wilcox discovers that he has lost his job owing to an industrial merger. Robyn's only long-term alternative emerges when she is offered a job in the United States and Vic may manage to get by with the newfound collaboration of his family. The protagonists' rather bleak professional prospects and imminent financial ruin are analogous to the sense of crisis that Robyn discerns in the industrial novels she investigates. The climate of hopelessness that Lodge effects with pervasively realist references to both the recession in the British academic job market and the merciless capitalist law of supply and demand are comparable to the atmosphere that Robyn finds so penetrating in many condition of England novels. The last eleven pages of *Nice Work* offer a verbatim reproduction of what Robyn so succinctly formulates during her lecture concerning endings: Robyn lands with a windfall inheritance of more than one hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds from a long-forgotten Australian uncle. A substantial part of the legacy also helps Vic to start his business venture. Moreover, it turns out that Philip Swallow<sup>322</sup>, the head of the Rummidge English department, has managed to find the necessary financial means to keep Robyn at the University of Rummidge. Similarly to Dickens, Eliot, Kingsley, Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Bronte, Lodge avoids suggesting any political solution to the social problems he describes in his novel, and offers the evasive narrative solutions Robyn Penrose analyzed with great insight.

The one point in which *Nice Work* drastically deviates from the novels that Lodge quarries for narrative conventions concerns its portrayal of women. In the feminist readings that Lodge reproduces in his novel, Robyn heavily criticizes Victorian industrial novels for their invariable presentation of women as socially inferior to men. Robyn, it seems, is constructed to form a perfect antithesis to the Victorian model. Lodge modifies the image of the Victorian woman so often portrayed in condition of England novels and creates the militant, assertive, attractive, intelligent and – most importantly – feminist Robyn Penrose. In *Faculty Towers* Elaine Showalter – who is commonly regarded to be a notable feminist critic – ascertains the impressive nature of Lodge's achievement with a tinge of envy when she notes that 'ironically, the most detailed, convincing, and upbeat portrait of the feminist academic in the '80s comes from a novel by a man [i.e. David Lodge]'<sup>323</sup>. Lodge's departure from portraying

<sup>322</sup> It is another instance of textual metafiction that Philip Swallow is the protagonist of two of Lodge's earlier famous campus novels, *Changing Places* (1975) and *Small World* (1984).

<sup>323</sup> Showalter, p. 102.

his novel's protagonist according to Victorian conventions can be accounted for in the framework of textual metafiction. Robyn can be understood as the narrative projection of feminist literary criticism with which Lodge approaches not only Victorian industrial novels, but contemporary capitalism in *Nice Work*.

As has been demonstrated, *Nice Work* contains instances of both passive and active textual appropriations. What I have found most interesting about Lodge's use of the various metafictional techniques is that while passive appropriations are invariably rendered through the consciousnesses of fictional characters, active appropriations remain unseen, out of reach for the fictional world of the novel. Neither Robyn Penrose nor Vic Wilcox – nor any other character in *Nice Work* – realizes the conventionality of their actions, i.e. they never become conscious of the fact that they follow those narrative patterns of the Victorian industrial novel which they occasionally discuss. Furthermore, Robyn never shows awareness of the facts that she, as a character in a novel, is manipulated in order to lend the discourse she is a part of a contemporary feminist dimension. As opposed to passive ones, active textual appropriations are imposed from the outside of the fictional world, which, in a covert fashion, reveals the existence of the manipulating novelist in the background.

## 6.2. Guiding metafictionality

British novelist and art historian Anita Brookner's *Providence*<sup>324</sup> is another prime example of how literature-oriented academic novels may incorporate literary and critical texts by means of metafictional techniques. As Brookner's second novel, *Providence* was published in 1982 by which time she had already retired from full-time teaching and become a professional writer. Her first-hand experience as a university teacher undoubtedly contributed to the high degree of authenticity and versatility with which *Providence* introduces and focalizes academic life from the perspective of university seminars, staff meetings and inaugural lectures. *Providence*, however, goes beyond the mere fictional rendering of university life and establishes itself as a full-blooded metafictional academic novel by inviting the reader to familiarize him/herself with Romantic literature.

*Providence*, as a literature-oriented academic novel, is equipped with two major entry points into the world of literature. Firstly, through Kitty Maule's literature seminars the reader

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<sup>324</sup> Anita Brookner, *Providence* (London: Penguin, 1982)

can read, and read about Benjamin Constant's Romantic classic entitled *Adolphe*<sup>325</sup> (originally published in 1816 in London).<sup>326</sup> Secondly, the novel exhibits a deep interest in the Romantic Movement itself, which, being the protagonist's fictional research topic, manifests itself in Kitty Maul's interior monologues, seminars, informal conversations and debates. Similarly to David Lodge's Robyn Penrose from *Nice Work*, Kitty Maul is employed as a medium through which textual appropriations are channelled into the fictional world of the novel. Brookner's choice concerning writing about Romantic literature in her novel is, of course, not accidental. As a former teacher of art at Reading University and Cambridge University and a specialist of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French art at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, her preference for the French *chef-d'oeuvre* is more like the result of her own interest and expertise in the field. The title of her latest non-fiction *Romanticism and Its Discontents* (2000) is also suggestive of considerable dedication and depth with which Brookner has been occupied with the development and the underlying theoretical questions of Romantic literature.<sup>327</sup>

Although Brookner penetrates the world of academe with sharpness of observation, she refrains from passing any judgements on the institution of higher education. Her deliberate avoidance of a sarcastic tone suggests that *Providence* is not intended to be an academic satire. This prevailing stylistic quality of the novel may indicate that, in an effort to match the seriousness of *Adolphe*'s early nineteenth-century temper – which, quite clearly, lacks the tone of academic satires –, Brookner deliberately opted for a more pensive, restrained literary key.

During Miss Maule's seminars *Adolphe* is treated as an object of scholarly interest: the novel is discussed and interpreted with ample references to the relevant theoretical works concerning Romanticism and Classicism. Brookner skilfully balances the academic content of her novel: although she always remains far from engaging fully into the various dimensions of the Romantic Movement, *per se*, she does her utmost not to leave its literary potentials unexploited. An extended case of active textual appropriation gradually unfolds in the novel as the reader is concurrently allowed to learn more and more about both the private and professional dimensions of Kitty Maul's life. On the one hand, Kitty Maule is a single woman

<sup>325</sup> Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe*, trans. by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985)

<sup>326</sup> The educational aspect of *Providence* dwells greatly in the representative force of these lessons. Brookner draws her students deftly to match the diversity of attitude that is essential to establish a fertile ground for thought-provoking discussions, and by doing so, she also opens up a specific segment of literary studies.

<sup>327</sup> The circumstances of Brookner's novel are not exceptional at all considering the fact that most writers of academic fiction have been university teachers themselves and their campus novels nearly invariably reflect the specific academic interests of their authors.

of thirty, who is irremediably in love with Maurice Bishop, a handsome, bright and infinitely self-indulgent young professor of medieval history. On the other hand, she is an intelligent and exceptionally bright commencing scholar of the Romantic Tradition with a research appointment at an English provincial college. Both dimensions of the protagonist's life are established by discursive means. The former encompasses those descriptions of events, dialogues and interior monologues that constitute Miss Maul's extra academic affairs. The latter consists of quotes from *Adolphe*, literary analyses and theoretical comments related mainly to Romanticism. The private and the professional spheres of Kitty Maule's life engage in a dialogue maintained throughout the novel. The alternate chapters take the reader into deeper and deeper regions of either Miss Maul's private concerns or her academic field of expertise. The protagonist's thoughts continually oscillate between the realities of the world she inhabits and that of her Romantic preoccupation. Finally, not only do the trivialities of her life become saturated by the scholarly terminology and ideology related to the Romantic Tradition, she even implements the conclusions of her seminars to rationalize the discontent of her own relationship with Maurice. As Judith Gies astutely observes, Kitty Maul 'is dimly conscious that Romanticism may have something to do with the static condition of her own life'<sup>328</sup>. The metafictional textual appropriations forebodingly loom on the horizon throughout the novel, projecting the unhappy conclusion of Kitty Maul's affair with Maurice. Kitty's brief summary on *Adolphe* may as well be taken as a thematic guideline to *Providence*.

To Kitty's resolutely professional eye, *Adolphe* was mainly interesting for its conjunction of eighteenth-century classicism and Romantic melancholy. If she concentrated on this aspect of the story, she could overlook its terribly enfeebling message: that a man gets tired of a woman if she sacrifices everything for him, that such a woman will eventually die of her failure, and that the man will be poisoned by remorse for the rest of his life.<sup>329</sup>

As the literary discussions slowly infiltrate the novel, it becomes more and more apparent that Kitty Maul's emotional plight, her always sustained and renewed hope in attaining Maurice is greatly analogous with the literary allusion taken from *Adolphe*. Kitty's literature seminars reveal *Adolphe* and Ellenore's failed relationship well in advance, providing the reader with unmistakable clues concerning the plot of the appropriating discourse. The metafictional aspect of *Providence* greatly resides in the interpretative foresight that *Adolphe*

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<sup>328</sup> Judith Gies, 'An Anachronism in Love', *New York Times Book Review* (March 18, 1984) <<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/>> [accessed February 10 2006]

<sup>329</sup> Brookner, p. 25.

offers; the ultimate failure of Kitty's desire to attain Maurice cannot but steer the reader's understanding to a trodden path, to that of *Adolphe*. Similarly to Ellenore, Kitty tries too hard to win Maurice, who, in turn, never fully engages into their relationship; also, the protagonist, somewhat prophetically, points out during one of her seminars that 'romantic love [which is descriptive of her pending relationship with Maurice too] can lead to disastrous fidelities. Or indeed ultimately to chastity'<sup>330</sup>.

As Robert E. Hosmer Jr. rightly observes in his essay entitled 'Paradigm and Passage: The Fiction of Anita Brookner', the main theme of *Providence* is the alienation of a painfully sensitive woman.<sup>331</sup> Brookner utilizes Miss Maule's literature seminars to make the same point concerning *Adolphe*. Certainly, the reader cannot be expected to be familiar with the French novel, so Brookner lends her own critical intelligence in order to highlight the metafictional correspondence.<sup>332</sup>

'Does *Adolphe* succeed or fail as a novel?' [Kitty Maule asks during her last seminar]

'Oh, it succeeds,' Larter [a student] conceded. 'As an essay in alienation there is nothing like it until Camus.'

'And as a novel there is nothing like it ever again,' said Kitty'.<sup>333</sup>

The opening pages of *Providence* describe Miss Maul as a woman of discipline whose 'expression was always rigorously schooled and she was discreet in a way that would have been becoming in a nineteenth-century governess'<sup>334</sup>. Kitty's way of managing her love affair with Maurice has a correspondingly restrained expression for the external observer: while powerful emotions operate inside her, she displays total control.<sup>335</sup> Brookner makes the reader recognize that her heroine's disposition is identical to that for Constant's hero, i.e. emotional concealment is descriptive of both Kitty Maul and *Adolphe*. Brookner goes out of her way to word this point during one of the university seminar scenes when Kitty Maul declares: 'I am sorry to be so pedantic about words, but the potency of this particular story [i.e. *Adolphe*] comes from the juxtaposition of extremely dry language, and almost uncontrollable

<sup>330</sup> Brookner, p. 129.

<sup>331</sup> Robert Ellis Hosmer Jr., 'Paradigm and Passage: The Fiction of Anita Brookner', in *Contemporary British Women Writers: Narrative Strategies*, ed. by Robert Ellis Hosmer Jr. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 26-54 (p.26).

<sup>332</sup> The authorial guidance that is offered by Brookner proves a very useful tool for the reader to absorb embedded scholarly discourse with greater ease. Brookner, in a sense, produces an annotated analysis of *Adolphe*.

<sup>333</sup> Brookner, p. 131.

<sup>334</sup> Brookner, p. 31.

<sup>335</sup> Galen Strawson's article about *Providence*, entitled 'The Elegance of Control', is aimed at encompassing this behavioural aspect of the heroine.

sentiments'<sup>336</sup>. Miss Maul's comment on *Adolphe* aptly mirrors her inability to expose her own feelings for Maurice. In the final dramatic moment of the novel Kitty learns that the dinner party she had been anticipating so eagerly was not going to be the public confirmation of her relationship with Maurice, but the prelude to his and Miss Fairchild's – one of Kitty's students – wedding. Although Kitty is devastated inside, she responds in a strikingly impassive fashion by concluding to herself: 'I lacked the information, thought Kitty, trying to control her trembling hands [...] and there is the rest of the evening to be got through'<sup>337</sup>. 'The shock of Kitty's shock,' as Strawson puts it, 'reactivates previous episodes in the book'<sup>338</sup> and the observation that had been made about *Adolphe* during the seminars spring readily into our minds. The metafictional embeddings forecast both the failure of Kitty's hopes and her response to it; as she confidently points it out during an *Adolphe* seminar: 'Even if the despair is total, control remains. This is very elegant, very important'<sup>339</sup>.

There is a strong autobiographical dimension to the textual metafiction found in *Providence*. *Adolphe* is renowned as a classic of French autobiographical writing. In the epilogue of his 1958 translation, the Hungarian critic, writer and literary historian László Bóka provides a comprehensive account of those details of Constant's private life that appear under the fictional disguise of *Adolphe*<sup>340</sup>. This characteristic of the novel proves so important that even Kitty Maule does not miss to call her students' and our attention to it: 'We are dealing with a work of fiction, and simply want to make the point that in this period fiction, indeed all creative endeavour, becomes permeated with the author's own autobiography'<sup>341</sup>.<sup>342</sup>

The common thematic denominator of *Adolphe* and *Providence* proves to be the female soul which is defeated in all its efforts to find and maintain happiness. Brookner's preoccupation with the female soul is foregrounded by a contrast established through the study of literature. The thematic rhyme that Brookner found in the French literary canon

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<sup>336</sup> Brookner, p. 131.

<sup>337</sup> Brookner, p. 182.

<sup>338</sup> Galen Strawson, 'The elegance of control', *Times Literary Supplement* (May 28, 1982), p. 579.

<sup>339</sup> Brookner, p. 131.

<sup>340</sup> Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe*, trans. by László Bóka (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1958), p. 92.

<sup>341</sup> Brookner, p. 130.

<sup>342</sup> Brookner's novel also indicates such biographical affiliations considering the fact that Kitty Maule's academic field happens to be identical to her creator's. Anita Brookner's presence, however, is not restricted to the academic interest of her protagonist. The image of the lonely, alienated woman is an image that Brookner considers to be characteristic of her own life too. In a 1985 interview with John Haffenden Brookner declares: 'I feel I could go into the Guinness Book of Records as the world's loneliest, most miserable woman' (John Haffenden, 'Anita Brookner', *Novelist in Interview*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 57-85.). As a matter of fact, alienation and loneliness have become the hallmarks of Brookner fiction depicting 'desperately unhappy people, whose understanding of their unhappiness is chillingly accurate' (Ron Charles, 'Alone, all alone with Anita Brookner...again', *Christian Science Monitor* (January 27, 2000) <<http://www.csmonitor.com/>> [accessed January 17 2006]).

offers a variation on a theme that she exploited by techniques of textual metafiction. The account of Adolphe and Ellenore's highly impulsive, nevertheless unsuccessful love affair parallels Kitty Maule's failure in obtaining Maurice. One dominant difference between the two fictions is evident: while *Adolphe* ends with the death of the abandoned broken Ellenore, and Adolphe is left alone in bearing an insurmountable guilt, Kitty Maul may have another attempt to find happiness. Her concluding impression of 'having been sent right back to the beginning of a game'<sup>343</sup> indicates a more generous choice for the protagonist on Brookner's behalf.

The similarities between *Providence* and *Adolphe* that I have been discussing so far constitute – just like in the case of *Nice Work* – cases of active intertextual appropriations. The active nature of these appropriations stems from the fact that the references and quotations from *Adolphe* exert a shaping influence on the theme, plot and character deportment in *Providence*. The interesting difference between *Nice Work* and *Providence*, however, is that while in the case of the former Robyn Penrose remains unaware of the shaping influence of those works of fiction she discusses, Kitty Maul, although in retrospect, recognizes the analogies between Adolphe's and her own story.

### 6.3. Excessive textual metafictionality

A most extended example of theoretical fiction is Austin M. Wright's literature-oriented academic novel entitled *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors: A Critical Fiction* (1999)<sup>344</sup>. Wright's novel is especially interesting for the purposes of my investigation of textual metafiction because it represents a type of critical fiction in which fiction is massively overshadowed by the amount of theory it is paired up with.

In *Fabulation and Metafiction* Robert Scholes makes the following observation concerning the disproportionately large incorporation of theoretical discourse into fiction: 'when extended, metafiction must either lapse into a more fundamental mode of fiction or risk losing all fictional interest in order to maintain its intellectual perspectives'<sup>345</sup>. Out of the two alternatives that Scholes outlines, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* falls into the latter category as the fictional romance plot into which Wright manages to amass an incredible amount of literary theory proves unmistakeably feeble. The brief plot summary of

<sup>343</sup> Brookner, p. 182.

<sup>344</sup> Austin M. Wright, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* (Iowa City: University Press of Iowa, 1999)

<sup>345</sup> Scholes, p. 114.

the novel goes as follows: Charlie Mercer, the protagonist of the novel, is an untenured teacher of English literature. He is in love with Eve Birdsong, the daughter of the head of the English department. Eve, who is also an English undergraduate at her father's department, desperately wishes to become a literary critic but she is confused by the opposing critical attitudes of two of her most influential teachers: Professor Tuttle and Professor Jackson. Eve seeks Charlie's advice and asks him to help her choose between Tuttle's conservative formalism and Jackson's sceptical deconstructionist criticism. Based on Charlie's proposal, the department decides to organize a several-day-long round-table discussion the objective of which is to discuss William Faulkner's novel entitled *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Eve, as the appointed judge of the literary debate, would finally have to choose a winner, the teacher whose theory she finds the most compelling.

A significant portion of the metafictionality found in Wright's novel surfaces in its interest in Faulkner's novel. Yet, the novel's metafictional engagement in *As I Lay Dying* is not of textual nature. As will be demonstrated, the majority of the theoretical content found in *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* purports to elucidate various readings, various readerly interpretations from Faulkner's novel, and therefore qualify as instances of readerly metafiction. It is the novel's acute interest in making sense of fiction which allows it to be dealt with in Chapter Seven entitled 'Readerly Metafiction'. As opposed to David Lodge's *Nice Work* or Anita Brookner's *Providence*, however, the textual self-consciousness of *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* does not stem from illuminating how the novel is constructed on the constitutive principles of other works of fiction; Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* – although Wright's novel teems with references to and quotes from it – does not provide narrative patterns, themes, characters types, etc. for Wright to incorporate into his novel. The only chapter in the novel which deals with the textual constructedness of Faulkner's novel is the one blatantly entitled 'Bill Tuttle's Formal Analysis of *As I Lay Dying*'<sup>346</sup>.

*Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* turns part of its critical intelligence not toward external fictions or the embedding of external fictions, but on itself. This aspect of self-analysis in Wright's novel manifests itself in episodes when the narrative persona – a thinly disguised Wright – engages in shorter or longer commentaries not concerning Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, but the textual aspect of its own fictional story. The excerpt below is aimed at illustrating how Wright employs his narrator for the purposes of self-reflection.

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<sup>346</sup> Wright, pp. 32-49.



You know how the story goes, because you know the archetype. They read their papers in Phil's Pub [i.e. the venue of the scheduled presentations]. Since the papers were so contradictory, the results were inconclusive. This gave Charlie the opportunity to intervene on his own behalf. He came up with his own speech, and things went wildly from there. Eventually in the archetype, he wins the prize [which is none but Eve's hand], but remember, this doesn't necessarily hold in particular cases, which can deviate curiously from the original. It's the deviation and the differences that make them interesting.<sup>347</sup>

Even more ostentatiously, frequently it is Charlie and Eve, i.e. the main characters of the novel, who discuss the textual aspect of the discourse they are the organic parts of. As opposed to the omniscient narrator who reveals knowledge about the structure, theme, plot, etc. of *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* throughout the entire novel, characters acquire this textual metafictional insight only at the end of the novel, when the round-table discussions that host the scholarly debates about *As I Lay Dying* are over. It is owing to this metafictional hindsight that, for example, on page 227 Charlie and Eve discuss that they should write up an imaginary mini conference on Faulkner's novel in a dialogue form with the extension of a love plot; not surprisingly, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* is mostly written in a dialogue form and, as has been pointed out, contains a love plot. On page 230 they appoint themselves as the protagonists of the love plot and even suggest that the various critical schools represented during the imaginary conference should be personified; the various critical standpoints are indeed personified in the novel. On page 231 they discuss the title of the book – i.e. the title of Wright's novel, of course – which would encompass their ideas. And on the last two pages of the novel they decide to leave their fictional love plot open-ended; which *is* left open-ended in fact.

What is especially noteworthy about Wright's novel is that, besides attesting to the fact that it is aware of being metafictional, it displays awareness of the fact that, as Scholes proposes it, it loses most of its fiction perspective in order to maintain its intellectual perspectives.

And the debate. It's permissible to give this much away because your interest is not in what happened to Charlie and Eve but in what was said in the arguments [...] The most important thing was Charlie's own speech about his notion of recalcitrance, which you'll find in chapter 6, where it follows the planned speeches and generates the remaining chapters. That's what will hold your attention in this text, not the narrative, which I agree with you is pretty thin.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Wright, p. xvii.

<sup>348</sup> Wright, p. xvii.

This narratorial introduction from the novel reflects not only on the metafictional, but on the meta-metafictional dimension of *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors*.

## 6.4. Conclusion

The techniques of textual metafiction to be found in *Nice Work, Providence* and *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* – just like the technique of authorial intrusion discussed in the previous chapter – have an ontological aspect. Technically speaking, each instance of textual metafiction constitutes an outward reference from the ontological plane of fiction to the ontological plane of our experiential world, where intertextual referents, for example, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*, Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*; or intratextual self-referents, for instance, David Lodge's *Nice Work*, Anita Brookner's *Providence* and Austin M. Wright's *Faulkner, and the Professors* are not the figments of imagination but tangible works of fiction produced in the space and time of our everyday perception. Following this train of thought, as Patricia Waugh and Brian McHale also suggest<sup>349</sup>, each 'outward' reference exposes the illusory nature of fiction which realist novelists conventionally aim to maintain.

The breaking of the illusion, or – in other words – the act of frame-breaking, would, depending on how dramatically it is delivered, either make the reader aware of or shock him/her into recognition concerning the different ontological statuses of fact and fiction. What is especially interesting about the three academic novels that I have investigated so far, and in fact most literature-oriented academic novels are similar in this respect, is that none of the textual metafictions found in them administer the shock of recognition described above. This is, of course, the consequence of the fact that the construction of fiction and the consequent unmasking of reality by means of textual intrusions reveal no significant discrepancy between the two ontological frames. Instead of an ontological jolt, it is readerly awareness of the textual construction of fiction which metafictional frame-breaking develops. The observation, quite rightly, amounts to proposing that literature-oriented academic novels are primarily realist; and indeed, literature-oriented academic novels inherently possess an inseverable connection with our experiential reality owing to their natural engagement in the world of literature through the profession of the characters they normally feature.

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<sup>349</sup> For the discussion on ontological disruption see chapter 'Authorial Metafiction'.

The curious thing about metafictional academic novels is that they employ metafictional techniques to enforce their intended realism. I have coined the term ‘metafictional realism’ to refer to novels – e.g. *Nice Work*, *Providence* and *Recalcitrance*, *Faulkner*, and *the Professors* – which acquire their documentary nature by metafictional means. The metafictional appropriations that are mediated through Robyn Penrose, Kitty Maul and Charlie Mercer are designed to assist characters to display the highest possible degree of identity with a real life-like teacher of English literature, including extensive knowledge of literary scholarship. As opposed to other fictions, literature-oriented academic novels are especially well-fitted for incorporating other discourses in an unobtrusive fashion. Literature-oriented academic novels are essentially predicated on their connection with the experiential world: they are thematically specific by dealing – normally – with English departments, university teachers of literature, works of literature and various segments of literary scholarship. The conventional characters of literature-oriented academic novels – i.e. university teachers of literature – are portrayed in life-like situations when they discuss or comment on literary texts and literary theory. In a literature-oriented academic novel the settings and scenarios in which metafictional techniques frequently appear – e.g. seminars, lectures, conferences, literary debates, writing a scholarly article or a dissertation, drawing similarities between the various aspects of life and literary or critical discourses in everyday situations, etc. – are part of the academic novel’s generic characteristics. To sum up, for literature-oriented academic novels, textual metafiction, basically, is a convention. Depending on the technique the novelist decides to employ, instances of conscious textual appropriations can be integrated into literature-oriented academic novels without making readers feel that the appropriated discourses are incongruous, or that they are taken from an ontological dimension which evidently breaks the illusion of the story’s fictionality.

The conclusion that I wish to draw here concerns one of the most intriguing paradoxes of metafiction. In the chapter entitled ‘From Literary Realism to Postmodernism’ I expressed my agreement with a number of theorists arguing *for* the exhaustion of literary realism (i.e. eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realism) around the 1950s. I also subscribed to the view that metafictional experimental techniques represent a considerable turning away from realist literary conventions. What those types of textual metafictions that I have been analyzing in the present chapter have proved is that metafiction *can* harmoniously coexist with literary realism without the slightest hint of narrative discrepancy. This compatibility between realism and metafiction exists owing to a significant overlap between the phenomenological world and textual metafiction over the domain of literature. On the one hand, literary works and

literary theory are part of the experiential world mainly in the form of written media<sup>350</sup>; on the other hand, if these texts are consciously displayed in fiction, they constitute instances of textual metafiction. My readings of textual academic metafiction, however, have led me to conclude that the various instances of textual metafiction defy the general claim that metafiction is necessarily and fundamentally a narrative technique of illusion-breaking.

Besides its ontological implications, I prefer to consider textual metafiction as a literary device the value of which dwells in its capability for generating reading pleasure through its expressed dialogical potential. The dialogic potential of the novel was first explored by Mikhail Bakhtin. Applying Bakhtin's own position expressed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984)<sup>351</sup> concerning the dialogical novel, textual metafiction – by its incorporation of several discourses in one work of fiction – is 'the product of a collective effort'<sup>352</sup>. Based on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, any novel can be called metafictional provided its dialogic trait is foregrounded; or, the same thought paraphrased with Bakhtinian terminology, the basic condition of metafiction is self-reflexive heteroglossia, i.e. the diversity of discourse types and voices present in a work of fiction.<sup>353</sup> As Bakhtin points out, the novel, a notoriously elusive notion, is made up of an ever-swelling mass of everyday historical forms of communication. By default, there is no privileged language of fiction: the languages of memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, conversational registers, legal records, journalism and documentaries are all constitutive elements of what we commonly refer to as the novel. What Bakhtin termed as the dialogic potential of the novel is essentially the continual and inevitable interaction or dialogue that the various forms of literature and literary works in general maintain. Patricia Waugh points out that these languages 'compete for privilege', 'they question and relativize each other'<sup>354</sup>, but realist fiction resolves this process of relativization by suppression; i.e. realist fiction subordinates all forms to 'the dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author'<sup>355</sup>. Textual metafiction, owing to its inherent dialogic potential, frees the various discourses so that they can mix, compete, relativize and question each other. In David Lodge's *Nice Work* perhaps there is an additional level of consciousness concerning the novel's own dialogical potential as its author, David Lodge, was so much so familiar with

<sup>350</sup> For those who are professionally related to literary studies these texts represent an even more accentuated reality status.

<sup>351</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

<sup>353</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 263-271.

<sup>354</sup> Waugh, p. 5.

<sup>355</sup> Waugh, p. 6.

and intrigued by Bakhtin's theoretical contribution to the notion of intertextuality that he published his collection of essays on the subject matter under the title *After Bakhtin* (1990)<sup>356</sup>.

Most instances of textual metafiction are premised on both analogy and opposition, i.e. the appropriating text and the appropriated text share something essential. The common feature may be formulated in terms of precedence: the appropriated discourse, in one way or another, is an earlier instance of the appropriating discourse. From this point of view, the literary potential of metafiction arises from the combination of past and present. The dialogue that is thus established dislocates the narrative from the single point of view of the 'now' and creates a stereoscopic image of the represented events. By metafictional means the appropriating discourse, on the one hand, establishes itself, on the other hand, points beyond the appropriated text by presenting some kind of a departure from it. Applying Saussurian terms, the discursive dynamic of similitude and difference between signifier and signified constitutes the dialogical potential of textual metafiction. The reason why I have chosen to investigate David Lodge's *Nice Work* and Anita Brookner's *Providence* in some depth is because the dialogical nature of the textual metafiction they display is especially apparent.

Of course, there must also be an authorial pleasure in constructing self-contained textual metafiction, and surely there is a narcissistic aspect for a literary scholar in incorporating literary scholarship into his/her fiction. Linda Hutcheon in her tellingly entitled *Narcissistic Narrative* (1980)<sup>357</sup> attributes the aspect of self-reflection and self-engagement in metafictional novels to the narrative itself. Such anthropomorphisms occur relatively frequently in the critical lexis of modern literary theory – e.g. novels can resist, genres are able to compete, texts feel, etc. – but, I believe, it is really the author's professional narcissism from where reflection and self-reflection originate. Textual metafiction can be seen as an exhibition of the author's delight in formal control, in arranging and manipulating discursive material. Creating textual metafiction, therefore, requires considerable competence and craft. Perhaps it is not surprising at all that, as has already been pointed out, most writers of literature-oriented academic novels are literary critics as well.<sup>358</sup> Elaine Showalter also refers to the somewhat exhibitionist nature of this subgeneric variety of the academic novel when she comments in *Faculty Towers* that 'when English professors write novels, they tend to

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<sup>356</sup> David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>357</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980)

<sup>358</sup> It can be argued that the growing importance of literary criticism in the humanities from roughly the 1960s considerably contributed to the appearance of a class of novelists who – by being both critics and novelists –, technically speaking, were able to exploit the literary potentials of textual metafiction. That the marked appearance of textual academic metafiction can also be dated from the 1960s greatly supports the adequacy of the observation.

write about what they know best: other people's books. Even in some of the most celebrated and familiar academic satires, rewriting literary conventions is as important as mocking campus attitudes<sup>359</sup>.

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<sup>359</sup> Showalter, p. 9.

## VII. Readerly Metafiction

Piotrowski slumped back with an exasperated little crash. His chair shuddered. "Shit!"

I said nothing. The lieutenant was usually extremely careful about not using crude language around "ladies."

He sat up again, folded his hands in front of him. "Excuse my French, Doctor, but don't tell me this homicide is going to turn into another one of your literary mysteries."

Joanne Dobson, *The Raven and the Nightingale*, p. 93.

In novelistic practice, [applications of metalanguage] result in writing which consistently displays its conventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its conditions of artifice.

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 4.

### 7.1. The notion of readerly surrogacy

The reader, the act of reading and the process of interpreting a text are concepts and issues that have been dramatized in fiction perhaps ever since the birth of the novel. Even the 'Dear reader' address of a traditional, insinuating first person singular narrator persona in many a realist novel can be numbered among those metafictional techniques that can alert readers to the significant role they fulfil in the reception of fiction. Among the studies written on metafiction, however, only a few observations concern the techniques that illuminate concepts related to reading within fiction. I find this neglect rather undeserved for the fictional treatment of reading, I believe, is as effective a metafictional tool as any other, focusing either on authorship or on textuality. In Chapter Four entitled 'The Four Aspects of the Metafictional Novel' I coined the term 'readerly metafiction' for easier reference to those novelistic practices that explicitly raise consciousness relating to issues that concern the reader and reading. In this chapter, I wish to focus on the various manifestations of readerly metafiction in academic novels and their theoretical implications.

Perhaps the most frequently applied readerly metafictional technique is the dramatization of the reader by means of the so-called surrogate reader. Readerly surrogacy, *per se*, may manifest itself in a fictional character's engagement in reading a letter, a journal, a magazine,

a poem, a novel, a script, etc. In all these instances a fictional character embodies/clones the real/external reader by imitating the actual process of reading and interpreting texts. Mark Currie points out in *Metafiction* (1995) that readerly surrogacy may rightly be considered an endemic feature of fiction in general. The danger that the proposition entails, however, is that interpreting all surrogate readers as metanarrative devices would amount to considering a substantial portion of fiction as metafiction.<sup>360</sup> In order to avoid establishing a wrong equation between readerly surrogacy and readerly metafiction, I wish to establish that in the present investigation I consider only those instances of readerly surrogacy metafictional which are explicit in their address of, and engagement in issues related to the concept of reading.<sup>361</sup> Readerly surrogacy is premised upon the integration of the interpretative role and the interpretative capacity of the external reader into a work of fiction. Literary texts may present characters who are not necessarily engaged in reading fictional material; examples of non-fictional reading materials would be religious texts, actual speeches, existing legal documents or manuals. In order to adhere to the position that metafictional techniques raise awareness concerning the art of fiction within fiction, I have collected academic novels which mostly, if not exclusively, present surrogate readers involved in the act of reading and/or interpreting literary texts.

### **7.1.1. The surrogate reader as narrative accessory**

During my research of university novels I was pleasantly surprised by the recognition that academic fiction provides an exceptionally rich storehouse of readerly metafictional techniques. The sub-subgeneric varieties of the academic novel – and their possible intersections – which I found especially fruitful for the present investigation are academic mysteries and literature-oriented university novels.<sup>362</sup> Academic mysteries can be understood as the crossbreeds of the conventions of the academic novel and those of detective fiction: they feature academics, they are concerned with aspects of academic life, they are normally set in or around a university campus and their action traditionally develops along an on-

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<sup>360</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 5.

<sup>361</sup> Of course, the word ‘explicit’ is by no means an absolute qualifier and depending on how sensitively fictional dramatizations of the external reader are perceived, I could either overstate my argument or entirely miss what may be analyzed as an adequate instance of readerly metafiction. In the following chapter entitled ‘Non-fictional Metafiction’ I will further deal with the question of subjectivity in perceiving the various manifestations of self-conscious fiction.

<sup>362</sup> An extensive discussion on literature-oriented academic novels is to be found in the chapter entitled ‘Textual Metafiction’.



campus homicide. Academic mysteries are generically prone to displaying traits of readerly metafiction as one of their main components – i.e. detective fiction – inherently incorporates the notion of readerly surrogacy. As Mark Currie points out in *Metafiction*, the detective, or any other character whose role is to make sense of unintelligible events or to grapple with a mystery should be regarded as a marginal case of metafiction.<sup>363</sup> I agree with Currie in that the marginality of readerly surrogacy found in detective fiction arises from the fact that detective novels normally remain ‘implicit about their relationship to criticism or their own artificiality’<sup>364</sup>. Currie’s statement is also valid for the vast majority of academic mysteries. Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980)<sup>365</sup>, for instance, incorporates the conventions of both academic and detective fiction. Yet, Eco’s book completely lacks the intrusive self-awareness which metafictional novels display: the novel’s protagonists never contemplate their interpretative role in solving the mysterious murders, neither do they reflect on the process of interpretation, *per se*.<sup>366</sup>

There is, however, one particular and fairly copious sub-type of the academic mystery which undoubtedly possesses the explicitness which Mark Currie finds wanting in detective fiction. The sub-type I have in mind is made up of those academic mysteries which are engaged in the academic field of literature, i.e. they are the combinations of literature-oriented academic novels and detective fiction. In the previous chapter entitled ‘Textual Metafiction’ I already investigated literature-oriented academic metafictions for the simple reason that they self-reflexively appropriate and incorporate discourses from the domain of literature. The metafictional appropriations, as has been pointed out, can be novels, short stories, poems, dramas, etc. which provide thematic or structural analogies for the appropriating text. A considerable proportion of literature-oriented academic novels, however, can also be discussed under the aegis of readerly metafiction for their foregrounding of readerly surrogacy. Readerly surrogacy is the dramatization of reading, and literature-oriented academic novels readily offer texts for fictional characters for the purposes of reading. Literature-oriented academic mysteries traditionally involve a character – normally a detective – who resorts to reading and interpreting incorporated literary texts in order to make

<sup>363</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 4.

<sup>364</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 5.

<sup>365</sup> Steven Connor in his study entitled *The English Novel is History 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) argues that, owing to its monastic setting, Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) ought to be categorized as the first mediaeval campus novel (p. 96.). Considering the fact that Eco heavily draws on the conventions of detective fiction in his novel, I wish to refine Connor’s statement one step further and mark Eco’s novel as an academic mystery.

<sup>366</sup> Instead of his characters it is Eco himself who devotes time to contemplate his novel’s engagement in the matter of interpretation in *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985).

sense of unintelligible events. Literature-oriented academic mysteries often involve concurrent manifestations of both textual and readerly metafiction, because frequently the reason why detectives read and interpret literary texts in novels is because they wish to find thematic or structural analogies in them with the aid of which they can unravel the unknown, e.g. a murder case. In these instances textual and readerly metafiction presents two overlapping facets of the same intertextual embedding: the former normally reflects on thematic or structural patterns; the latter concentrates on reading and reception.

The metafictional aspect of readerly surrogacy found in academic mysteries lies in their mimetic potential. The detective character is shaped as a clone of the external reader: both external and surrogate readers are bent on discovering facts in order to solve a mystery, both of them equally strive to find out who the murderer is, and both of them are engaged in the act of reading.

In Joanne Dobson's literature-oriented academic mystery entitled *The Raven and the Nightingale* (1999)<sup>367</sup> it is also the novel's appropriated literary content that proves instrumental in developing instances of readerly metafiction. *The Raven and the Nightingale* is part of Dobson's mystery series<sup>368</sup> set at Enfield College, a small elite campus in New England. The novel's protagonist is Professor Karen Pelletier, a teacher of English literature, who does not only teach Edgar Allan Poe's poetry, but also reads all sorts of related literary material in order to solve a mysterious on-campus homicide which is somehow connected to Poe's literary oeuvre. Dobson produces and reproduces a great deal of reading material in her novel – original poems, invented poems, literary criticism, *faux* diaries and letters, parts of novels and short stories, etc. – which the external reader reads *together* with Kate Pelletier, the literary sleuth and surrogate reader of the novel. *The Raven and the Nightingale* abounds in episodes in which the surrogate reader and the external reader read the same text and speculate together. In Chapter 22<sup>369</sup>, for instance, Professor Pelletier reads a diary which is typographically distinguished from the body of the novel. The numerous one-page-long diary entries reveal considerable information about a mysterious suicide case for both the surrogate reader and the external reader. As Karen Pelletier proceeds from one entry to the other, she stops and shares the emotional, psychological and epistemological impact that the diaries exercise on her. Chapter 22, virtually, reveals what it is like to be a reader, and we, real readers, can easily identify with our dramatized self, as the information that the diary reveals

<sup>367</sup> Joanne Dobson, *The Raven and the Nightingale* (London and New York: Bantam, 1999)

<sup>368</sup> Further novels in the series – including *Quieter than Sleep* (1997), *The Northbury Papers* (1998), *Cold and Pure and Very Dead* (2000) and *The Maltese Manuscript* (2003) – are also literature-oriented academic mysteries.

<sup>369</sup> Dobson, pp. 218-233.

is *as* novel and vital for us to solve the mystery presented in the story, *as* it is for Professor Pelletier. Dobson's self-reflexive treatment of reading, *per se*, becomes unmistakeable in the episode when Professor Pelletier, arriving home after one tiring day at the campus, selects nothing but 'a paperback mystery novel from her pleasure-reading pile'.<sup>370</sup>

Another briefer, yet potent metafictional reproduction of the external reader is to be found in James Hynes' academic mystery entitled *Publish and Perish* (1997). The book is a collection of three academic short stories involving horror, the occult and the uncanny. 'Casting the Runes', which is the final story in the book, recounts how Virginia Dunning, a young and striving university teacher, manages to get rid of a lethal demonic curse that Victor Karswell, an established male professor, has cast on her. Virginia eventually succeeds in turning Professor Karswell's own curse on himself and escapes. The closing pages of the book relate Karswell's final struggle to flee from the dark powers he has used so many times to destroy his academic adversaries. In a last desperate attempt he runs into one of the campus buildings late at night in order to find shelter from the curse-fulfilling dark cloud that has been following him. The episode, however, is split into two, as Hynes supplements his description of Karswell's horrid death-struggle with an intrusive, parallel-running narrative strain in which the young security guard of the campus building is reading the culminating scene of a paperback horror novel.<sup>371</sup> The events are perfectly synchronised: the graphic details of living human bodies turned inside out on the metadiegetic narrative level<sup>372</sup> are juxtaposed with the account of Professor Karswell's halved body hanging impaled on the celebratory sword of one of the bronze campus statues on the intradiegetic narrative level. Although Hynes' recourse to readerly metafiction is brief, the external reader cannot miss the intrusive similarity between his/her reading activity and that of the surrogate reader's. Although reader response is something that cannot with all certainty be predicted, Hynes, in any case, seems to have made a perceptibly concentrated effort to intensify the goriness of Karswell's death struggle, and make the external readers of his novel re-enact the surrogate reader's aversion to the metadiegetic scenes of terror and bloodshed.

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<sup>370</sup> Dobson, p. 134.

Although *The Raven and the Nightingale* contains a great deal of appropriated literary material, textual metafiction cannot be considered as its dominant aspect since the incorporated texts provide little thematic and/or structural analogies for the novel.

<sup>371</sup> James Hynes, *Publish and Perish* (New York: Picador, 1997), pp. 325-330.

<sup>372</sup> The terms 'metadiegetic' and 'intradiegetic' are taken from Gerard Genette's discussion of narrative levels in Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 227-243. According to Genette's definitions, the term intradiegetic narrative level is meant here to signify – chronologically speaking – the first narrative level, while the metadiegetic narrative level refers to the chronologically subsequently introduced, embedded second degree narrative.

There is an unusual *mise en abyme* effect to be discerned about the cases of readerly surrogacy found in Dobson's and Hynes' novels. The external reader and the surrogate reader are so alike with their engagement in reading and discovery that, we, external readers often feel compelled to identify with our surrogate self; i.e. I, the reader of the novel, see myself duplicated in the novel. *The Raven and the Nightingale* and *Publish and Perish*, therefore, contain a duplicate, a clone of the actual reader. There are cases, however, in which the foregrounding of the external reader is achieved by an infinite reproduction of the actual reading process. An example of this is to be found in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* which contains a short, yet very well-developed instance of metafictional readerly surrogacy. The episode that I am about to quote below is unique in the sense that the character that functions as a surrogate reader is engaged in the reading of the very discourse she is the organic part of.

I [i.e. George Giles] retraced my steps to the Circulation Room (no one seemed to be pursuing me) and having noticed from a corner of my eye a few moments earlier its single occupant – a longhaired pallid girl, uncoshmeticked and -washed, reading behind a desk marked INFORMATION – I took a long hazard.

'Excuse me, miss: is there any way up besides the lift?' [...] The pimpled maid, thin and udderless as Mrs Rexford but infinitely less prepossessing, looked over her spectacles from the large novel she was involved in and said with careful clarity – as if that question, from a fleeced goat-boy at just that moment, were exactly what she'd expected. – 'Yes. A stairway goes up to the Clockworks from this floor. You may enter it through the little door behind me.'

All the while she marked with her finger her place in the book, to which she returned at once upon delivering her line. Mild, undistinguished creature, never seen before or since, whose homely face I forgot in two seconds; whose name, if she bore one, I never know; whose history and fate, if any she had, must be *lacunae* till the end of terms in my life's story – Passage be yours, for that in your moment of my time you did enounce, answer to a simple question, but lacking which this tale were truncate as the Scroll, and endless fragment!

'-less fragment,' I thought I heard her murmur as I stooped through the little door she'd pointed out. I paused and frowned; but though her lips moved on, as did her finger across the page, her words were drowned now by the bells of Tower Clock.<sup>373</sup>

Normally, surrogate readers are depicted in the act of reading texts *other* than the ones they are the participants of. In the quote above, Barth applies readerly surrogacy in an especially accentuated, self-referential manner because the woman at the information desk is presented to be reading John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* itself. What makes this case of readerly metafiction even more effective than the fictional duplication of the external reader<sup>374</sup> is that

<sup>373</sup> Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 770.

<sup>374</sup> Examples of this kind of duplication are found in the readerly metafictional instances that I have already discussed in connection with Dobson's *The Raven and the Nightingale* and Hynes' *Publish and Perish*.

the aforementioned female character from Barth's novel seems to be reading *Giles Goat-Boy* concurrently with the external reader, i.e. with us. The moment the external reader has finished reading the words 'endless fragment' at the end of the penultimate paragraph, the fictional protagonists perceives the echo of his own inner thoughts – i.e. '-less fragment' – which comes back to him through the reading activity of the surrogate reader. George decides not to elaborate the significance of the episode, but we, external readers, are immediately alerted to the self-referential nature of the part. George is uncertain about having heard the echo of his own thought, but the external reader can take advantage of the permanence of written discourse in order to retrace the text once again: and yes, we can ascertain that the woman at the information desk *did* echo George's internal monologue, which normally would be inaccessible to her as a character.

The paradox that lies at the heart of the episode may fit even two theoretical categories often employed to characterise postmodernist fiction. According to David Lodge's argument spelt out in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977)<sup>375</sup>, the metafictional episode just quoted from Barth's novel could qualify as a case of narrative short circuit, because it may shock readers into recognizing that *Giles Goat Boy*, after all, is an artifice.<sup>376</sup> Following Patricia Waugh's classification – which is an extended and slightly refined version of Lodge's own categories – the metafictional episode from Barth's novel can also be seen as a narrative paradox, because the episode contradicts the logic of the fictional world according to which it is conceived.<sup>377</sup> From a readerly metafictional point of view, George's encounter with the girl at the information desk is also an example of an infinite narrative fractal pattern, the so-called *mise en abyme* structure – which is often considered as a variety of narrative paradox. The girl – who is the surrogate reader in the excerpt – is engaged in reading the same text as the external reader, i.e. John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*. Since she is reading the novel *together* with us, we can easily identify with our surrogate self. But the dramatization of reading is not complete yet.

The female character at the information desk, while being engrossed in her reading material, also encounters her own exact duplicate in the novel, her narrative clone, if you like: i.e. the longhaired, pallid, uncosmeticked and unwashed girl who is politely interrupted by a young man dressed in a goat skin garment (first degree), is reading about a longhaired, pallid,

<sup>375</sup> David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993)

<sup>376</sup> For a detailed description of narrative short circuit, see David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp. 239-245.

<sup>377</sup> For a detailed elucidation of narrative contradiction and paradox, see Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 141-143.

uncosmeticked and unwashed girl who is politely interrupted by a young man dressed in a goat skin garment (second degree). The knack of Barth's narrative *mise en abyme* is that further cloning of the surrogate reader is infinitely possible: the longhaired, pallid, uncosmeticked and unwashed girl who is politely interrupted by a young man dressed in a goat skin garment on the second narrative degree is reading about a longhaired, pallid, uncosmeticked and unwashed girl who is politely interrupted by a young man dressed in a goat skin garment on a third narrative degree, and so on and so forth. To put it simply, *Giles Goat-Boy*, as a book, includes itself, and the included duplicate *Giles Goat-Boy* also includes a further duplicate in itself, etc. Not only does the novel reproduce itself *ad infinitum*, so are the surrogate reader and the act of reading *Giles Goat-Boy* endlessly repeated. It is not only the girl who perceives the endless series of herself reading page 770 in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, but also we, external readers, who are – after all – the so-called narrative blueprints of the *mise en abyme* structure. George's perhaps unnecessary digression about not knowing the girl's name, his prayer which is addressed to glorify her – an utterly peripheral character – may be evaluated as a necessary narrative excess to ensure that the reader does not miss the metafictional disturbance in the novel.

### **7.1.2. Readerly surrogacy as a means of interpretation**

So far I have been investigating instances of readerly surrogacy which provide dramatizations of external readers and the act of reading. The metafictional charge of these dramatizations lies in analogy and similitude in the sense that the surrogate reader they present is constructed to strongly resemble the external reader: both of them are occupied with reading, both of them are reading the same texts concurrently, and ideally both of them respond to the texts they are engrossed in the same fashion. Readerly surrogacy of this kind is subtle, normally unobtrusive, lacking the permeating sense of self-awareness of those manifestations of readerly metafiction in which surrogate readers construct discourses in which they make it their prime duty to contemplate their roles as textual interpreters and provide various textual exegeses. In the following, I wish to focus on metafictional academic novels of the latter type. The academic novels that have been collected for further consideration go beyond establishing the kind of imitative resemblance between external and surrogate reader, and consequently readerly surrogacy advances from being a narrative accessory – which it has been so far – to determining mainstream thematic orientations in the

novels in which they occur. The common property of the following metafictional academic novels is that their authors have all seem to make it their explicit business to portray surrogate readers in the process of providing textual interpretations.

In his academic novel entitled *Pale Fire* (1962)<sup>378</sup> Vladimir Nabokov employs the technique of authorial surrogacy for the purposes of dramatizing the act of interpreting a lengthy epic poem.<sup>379</sup> Nabokov's book is highly unorthodox as its two main parts are a forty-page-long poem entitled 'Pale Fire'<sup>380</sup> and a 235-page-long commentary<sup>381</sup> about the poem. The former is presented to have been written by the recently deceased John Shade, an ex-colleague of the university teacher protagonist Charles Kinbote; the latter is the work of Kinbote himself. Nabokov casts his protagonist in the role of the surrogate reader as Kinbote reads 'Pale Fire' just like any reader would read a poem. Partly in the wake of, and partly parallel with his reading of 'Pale Fire', Kinbote records his interpretation of the poem in the form of textual references which constitute the most substantial part of the book.

'Pale Fire', i.e. the poem, is a complex work: at times it is reminiscent of Ezra Pound's cantos, at times of Wallace Stevens' poetry, in places it is highly rambling, often excessively allusive and frequently even banal, teeming with references that are glaringly of personal and autobiographical relevance. This complexity of the poem allows the reader to collect a number of impressions, reconstruct fragments of events, but, on the whole, the text denies the reader the possibility of arriving at a coherent, all encompassing interpretative pattern. Kinbote's literary exegesis is exceptionally unconvincing as Nabokov goes out of his way to present textual annotations that attempt to establish the sense of relevance between poem and commentary in an exaggeratedly forced manner. An eminent example generating this impression would be Kinbote's commentary on the word 'often', found in the poem in line sixty-two.

*Line 62: often*

Often, almost nightly, throughout the spring of 1959, I had feared for my life.  
Solitude is the playfield of Satan. I cannot describe the depths of my loneliness  
and distress. There was naturally my famous neighbor just across he [*sic*] lane,

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<sup>378</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Perigee, 1980)

<sup>379</sup> Interestingly, *Pale Fire* is hardly ever identified as a university novel. Closer inspection, however, reveals that Nabokov's novel fulfils all the requirements in order to qualify as a member of the subgenre: its protagonists are academics, some of its action takes place in or around a university campus and it is engaged in issues that are relevant for those academics who are specialized in the field of literature. What substantially supplies the academic aspect of the whole literary endeavour is that it is presented as a literary study which begins with a contents page and foreword, and ends in an index.

<sup>380</sup> Nabokov, pp. 31-70.

<sup>381</sup> Nabokov, pp. 41-304.

and at one time a took in a dissipated young roomer (who generally came home long after midnight). Yet I wish to stress that cold hard core of loneliness which is not good for a displaced soul. Everybody knows how given to regicide Zemblans are: two Queens, three Kings, and fourteen Pretenders died violent deaths, strangled, stabbed, poisoned and drowned, in the course of only one century (1700-1800).<sup>382</sup>

The reader of *Pale Fire* may frequently feel that the annotations are irrelevant, haphazard, deranged, disparate and even fantastic, stressing the self-importance, incompetence and megalomania of their author. *Pale Fire*, as a novel, emerges from the network of Kinbote's notes and constructs a text with two intertwined narrative threads. Both narratives foreground Charles Kinbote; firstly, presenting him as the exiled king of a country called Zembla; and secondly, centring on Kinbote as the alleged close friend of the late poet John Shade. The annotations alternate between the two narrative threads, relating either the adventurous escape of the Zemblan king, or recalling the friendship of the two academics. Kinbote projects either his Zemblan or the Shadian fantasies into the various lines of the poem and the reader may rightfully feel that the notes bear little if any relevance to Shade's work of art.

*Pale Fire* draws attention to and demonstrates a fundamental theoretical issue inherent in understanding a work of literature. The commentary part of the book may be understood as the ramblings of a madman, a misreading of the poem; yet, it is still a reading, and in that sense it is a viable attempt to make sense of a piece of literary discourse. *Pale Fire* makes the point that, essentially, the process of reading establishes a bond between text and reader. The latter mobilizes his/her associative capabilities to connect personal experience, knowledge, attitude, etc. to various parts of a literary work. The excesses of fantasizing that are involved in Kinbote's analysis ascertain the assumption that meaning is conceived in the reader's consciousness, no matter how much or little receptive, sensitive, associative, imaginative, etc. that consciousness may be. In fact, Kinbote's annotations, although in a considerably exaggerated manner, dramatize this sense-making process by projecting Kinbote's fantasies into a piece of unrelated – unrelated to 'Pale Fire', the poem – literary discourse. The commentary may be evaluated to be a misreading of the 'Pale Fire', yet, it also impels the critic to consider whether the interpretative practices that literary criticism offers can be considered to present more viable meanings at all. Nabokov formulates this question artistically rather than in a didactic manner, and unlike many other metafictionalists, he does not instigate a direct discussion of his theme involving literary terminology. The unreliability of Kinbote's narration leaves it to the reader to decide whether Shade and his poem are

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<sup>382</sup> Nabokov, p. 95.



Kinbote's inventions or the other way round. Therefore, the novel does not undermine the potential adequacy and legitimacy of the commentaries Kinbote presents. Focusing on this point of view, *Pale Fire* can be read as the celebration of semantic plurality inherent in all literary texts.

*Pale Fire* can also be conceived as a literature-oriented academic novel, from which perspective the readerly metafictional aspect of the novel deploys a satirical representation of a literary scholar and his unimpressive scholarly endeavour. The critique that one may locate in the work originates from the representation of Kinbote as a failed academic whose narrow-minded professional attitude to textual exegesis projects a deterring scholarly example. Kinbote's pseudo-literary commentaries present a negative example by suppressing the object of literary investigation and superimposing and overshadowing it by an ostentatious critic-self.

As a matter of fact, *Pale Fire* shares a number of major characteristics with Pablo Urbanyi's *The Nowhere Idea*: both novels are presented as scholarly investigations; both are said to be written by academics; and both pose as formalized critiques – be it of fictitious events or of a fictitious poem. Just like *The Nowhere Idea*, Nabokov's book could also be understood as an instance of writerly metafiction, in the sense that the one who provides the analysis of 'Pale Fire' is also the writer of the analysis. In *Pale Fire*, however, the main emphasis falls on Kinbote's role as a reader and most metafictional commentaries within the novel reflect on Kinbote's activity of interpreting the poem, not the writing of the interpretation itself.

The novels that I am going to discuss in the remaining part of the present chapter – just like Nabokov's *Pale Fire* – provide extended dramatizations of the interpretative capacity of the external reader. They are all literature-oriented academic novels, but as opposed to *Pale Fire*, they incorporate a considerable amount of critical discourse from the domain of literary theory. Theoretical discourse, of course, would obviously present a disruptively contrasting language use in a number of novels. Literature-oriented academic novels, nevertheless, provide a natural environment for incorporating theoretical discourses.<sup>383</sup> As will be demonstrated, the imports of theory may serve as a vital tool for metafictional novels to address the issues of reading and interpretation on an abstract level, often without providing either the primary reading material of the surrogate reader, or a dramatized reconstruction of the act of reading that material.

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<sup>383</sup> For an in-depth discussion on how literature-oriented academic novels are capable of hosting theoretical discourses, see Chapter Six entitled 'Textual Metafiction'.

The first excerpts that I have included below for further consideration are from David Lodge's *Nice Work*, a novel that I have already discussed in the Chapter Six, entitled 'Textual Metafiction'. There, I investigated the textual metafictional relevance of the novel by examining how its appropriated Victorian condition of England novels provide themes and organizational patterns for *Nice Work*. In his novel, apart from occasional shorter excerpts, Lodge makes no effort to reproduce those Victorian novels that his characters investigate; neither does he incorporate episodes illustrating his characters engaged in the act of reading. What basically remains of the attempt to duplicate the external reader discussed in the first part of this paper is the dramatized representation of a reader's interpreting a text. In fact, instead of the term 'surrogate reader', the phrase 'surrogate interpreter' may seem more appropriate to designate those fictional characters who exclusively discuss various interpretations of literary texts without actually being portrayed in the act of reading them. Also, the activity of reading, from being an activity normally displayed being performed in the present, becomes a prerequisite activity which is already completed in the past.<sup>384</sup> During the lecture episode in Lodge's *Nice Work*, Robyn Penrose, as the surrogate reader, presents already formulated, ready-made interpretations concerning various Victorian novels: a Marxist reading of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*<sup>385</sup> and a feminist reading of industrial novels written by women novelists<sup>386</sup>. For Robyn – as a surrogate interpreter – the novels she comments on are already 'digested' – i.e. they have been read, contemplated, investigated, probably re-read, collated, etc. –, which allows her to formulate such complex critical statements as follows:

'It hardly needs to be pointed out that industrial capitalism is phallogentric. [...] The characteristic imagery of the industrial landscape or townscape in nineteenth-century literature [...] is saturated with male sexuality of a dominating and destructive kind.

'For women novelists, therefore, industry had a complex fascination. On the conscious level it was the Other, the alien, the male world of work, in which they had no place. [...] On the subconscious level it was what they desired to heal their own castration, their own sense of lack.'<sup>387</sup>

Another instance of textual metafiction which focuses exclusively on the interpretative activity involved in reading is a five-page-long semiotic analysis of a cigarette advertisement

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<sup>384</sup> In these cases, the surrogate reader dramatizes an external reader who is in a so-called post-reading phase, who has already completed the reading of this or that primary reading material.

<sup>385</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, p. 77.

<sup>386</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 77.

<sup>387</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 78-79.

also from *Nice Work*.<sup>388</sup> Although in the example Robyn Penrose and Vic Wilcox do not investigate a literary text – and therefore they do not dramatize the interpretation of literary texts, *per se* –, their way of revealing layers of meanings in the advertisement's imagery perfectly exemplifies further cases of readerly metafiction. During the episode Robyn and Vic are driving home from a factory visit.

Every few miles, it seemed they passed the same huge poster on roadside hoardings, a photographic depiction of a rippling expanse of purple silk in which there was a single slit, as if the material had been slashed with a razor. There were no words on the advertisement, except for the Government Health Warning about smoking. This ubiquitous image, flashing past at regular intervals, both irritated and intrigued Robyn, and she began to do her semiotic stuff on the deep structure hidden beneath its bland surface.

It was in the first instance a kind of riddle. That is to say, in order to decode it, you had to know that there was a brand of cigarettes called Silk Cut. The poster was the iconic representation of a missing name, like a rebus. But the icon was also a metaphor. The shimmering silk, with its voluptuous curves and sensuous texture, obviously symbolized the female body, and the elliptical slit, foregrounded by a lighter colour showing through, was still more obviously a vagina. The advert thus appeared to be both sensual and sadistic impulses, the desire to mutilate as well as penetrate the female body.

Vic Wilcox spluttered with outraged derision as she expounded this interpretation. He smoked a different brand, himself, but it was as if he felt his whole philosophy of life threatened by Robyn's analysis of the advert.<sup>389</sup>

Robyn, during her lecture on industrial fiction as well as during her analysis of the cigarette advertisement, – similarly to Nabokov's Kinbote – verbalizes the cognitive process commonly referred to as interpretation. The fundamental difference between the two surrogate interpreters is that Robyn Penrose applies the methods and terminology of literary criticism. Mark Currie in his *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998) terms the kind of fiction which incorporates theoretical discourse theoretical fiction.<sup>390</sup> In the chapter devoted specifically to theoretical fiction, Currie formulates something essential about the nature of the type of readerly metafiction that novels like *Nice Work* contain. As he puts it,

theoretical fiction is a performative rather than constative narratology, meaning that it does not try to state the truth about an object-narrative but rather enacts or performs what it wishes to say about narrative while itself being a narrative. For this reason I prefer the term 'theoretical fiction' to the term 'metafiction', by

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<sup>388</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 220-224.

<sup>389</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, p. 220.

<sup>390</sup> Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 51.

which this kind of narrative self-contemplation has been named in the past two decades.<sup>391</sup>

With slight modifications, I agree with Currie's observation. As I see it, however, theoretical fiction is both constative and performative. It is constative in the sense that the critical discourse it contains serves the obvious purpose of commenting on an external object-narrative; in Lodge's *Nice Work* this object-narrative is made up of selected Victorian condition of England novels. Theoretical fiction, moreover, is also performative, because the very gesture by which it articulates commentary about another discourse – i.e. by way of being a type of metalanguage itself<sup>392</sup> –, it automatically transforms fiction into metafiction.

The aspect in which Lodge's dramatization of readerly interpretation significantly differs from all previous manifestations of readerly metafiction that I have investigated so far, is that it does not merely imply the theoretical issues related to reading and interpretation; the textual metafictional discourses it contains foreground, spell out and discuss what perhaps only a trained critic would be able to formulate.<sup>393</sup> The word 'theoretical' in Currie's critical label suggests that the production and – to some extent – the reception of theoretical fiction necessitate some knowledge of literary theory.<sup>394</sup> Although in *Nice Work* Vic Wilcox also contributes to the evolving metadiscourse by using plain language to provide his own interpretation of the cigarette advertisement, theoretical fiction most frequently manifests in the form of scholarly discourse. As the critical parlance that is required to supply the theoretical debates in a novel calls for an authoritative and correspondingly knowledgeable source, it is not surprising that most theoretical fictions are produced and reproduced in literature-oriented academic novels, with a professor of English literature as their protagonist. Consequently, in order to appreciate theoretical metafiction, knowledge of theory helps, and something more: one common property of nearly all theoretical fictions that I have read – and here I mean literature-oriented academic novels – is that the external reader is always expected to be familiar with the text that the surrogate reader is producing his/her commentary about.

A most extreme example of theoretical readerly metafiction is Austin M. Wright's literature-oriented academic novel entitled *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors: A*

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<sup>391</sup> Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 52.

<sup>392</sup> Theoretical fiction is metalinguistic by nature: it is a critical discourse about another discourse.

<sup>393</sup> I should point out that David Lodge may be the most popular, but by no means the first novelist to resort to incorporating theoretical literary discourse into fiction.

<sup>394</sup> At least those who have had some literary training may definitely find theoretical fiction a lot more engaging.

*Critical Fiction* (1999)<sup>395</sup>.<sup>396</sup> Wright's novel is especially interesting for the purposes of the present investigation because it represents a type of critical fiction in which fiction is massively overshadowed by theory. Embedded in Eve's quest for knowledge and Charlie's quest for Eve, the novel invites the reader to partake in an expansive literary discussion of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Although *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* incorporates a wide selection of theoretical issues starting from proposing a definition of art and a concept of literature, to discussing issues related to writing and reading, it is its engagement in the notions of reading and interpretation which is treated in the greatest length and depth. The novel's first chapter entitled 'As I Lay Dying and the Students'<sup>397</sup> is a collection of reader responses written by Charlie Mercer's fictional undergraduate students. The essays – without much artistic ingenuity on Wright's behalf – are prompted by Charlie's assignment: 'Describe a difficulty you found in *As I Lay Dying* and tell how you tried to solve it. Did this difficulty enhance or detract you from your appreciation of the novel? Explain, please.'<sup>398</sup> The readerly metafictional relevance of the chapter is obvious: each paper is a written account of a reader's experience of reading Faulkner's novel. Subsequent chapters are made up of presentations and panel discussions focusing on the interpretative possibilities inherent in *As I Lay Dying*. Chapter two, 'Bill Tuttle's Formal Analysis of *As I Lay Dying*'<sup>399</sup>, concentrates on the symmetries and unity of plot and character in order to formulate a reading which foregrounds the comic nature of Faulkner's novel. In chapter three<sup>400</sup>, the fictional Professor Jackson takes a deconstructive approach and labours to undermine Professor Tuttle's critical findings. The chapter is basically a piece of metacriticism, since the text that Jackson aims to deconstruct is not Faulkner's novel but Tuttle's critical discourse on it. It is only the last half a page of his analysis in which Jackson comes up with a typically postmodern, metafictional interpretation: *As I Lay Dying*, according to the argument presented by Jackson, stands for the death of the novel, as such.<sup>401</sup> Chapter four entitled 'Olga Wing's Complaint: Life in *As I Lay Dying*'<sup>402</sup> considers Faulkner's novel from a feminist point of view and discusses its portrayal of women.

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<sup>395</sup> Austin M. Wright, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* (Iowa City: University Press of Iowa, 1999)

<sup>396</sup> Wright also allows a heavy dose of textual metafiction to prevail in his novel as the narrative persona – a thinly disguised Wright – employs intrusive remarks on the constructedness of the novel. For a detailed discussion of the textual metafictional aspect of the novel, see Chapter Six, entitled 'Textual Metafiction'.

<sup>397</sup> Wright, pp. 3-30.

<sup>398</sup> Wright, p. 3.

<sup>399</sup> Wright, pp. 31-49.

<sup>400</sup> Wright, pp. 50-65.

<sup>401</sup> Wright, p. 65.

<sup>402</sup> Wright, pp. 87-98.

*Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* is rich in bibliographical references to such literary theorists – among others – as Roland Barthes, Wayne Booth, Cleanth Brooks, Jonathan Culler, Terry Eagleton, Northrop Frye, Wolfgang Iser, I. A. Richards, Tzvetan Todorov and, last but not least, the author, Austin M. Wright himself. As it turns out, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors*, to a large extent, aims to expound Wright's own theoretical discovery termed 'recalcitrance' which he published in *The Formal Principle in the Novel* (1982)<sup>403</sup> and 'Recalcitrance in the Short Story'<sup>404</sup>. Using Charlie Mercer as the mouthpiece of his piece of literary theory, Wright employs the round-table discussions in order to demonstrate the versatility and the all-round applicability of the notion of recalcitrance. Accordingly, Charlie Mercer establishes his interpretation of Faulkner's on Wright's notion of recalcitrance.<sup>405</sup> Although Wright does not spell it out directly, *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* seeks to investigate how readers can cope with problematic reading materials. Wright's notion of recalcitrance actually celebrates those reading difficulties which readers encounter while reading works of fiction.

## 7.2. Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated a number of novels with the purpose of demonstrating how readerly metafiction may manifest in academic fiction. The ordering of the referenced novels is intended to follow a gradual increase in their metafictional awareness concerning issues related to reading and interpretation. The gauge of metafictional awareness in the analyzed novels is length, i.e. the longer a manifestation of readerly metafiction is, the more self-consciousness the novel exhibits. The metafictional techniques that *The Raven and the Nightingale*, *Publish and Perish* and *Giles Goat-Boy* display are relatively short, and therefore their apparent metafictional significance is moderate. Just like in the case of textual metafiction, the longer the instances of readerly metafiction become, the less likely they are to induce readerly shock or bafflement. *Pale Fire*, *Nice Work* and *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors*, for example, constitute almost book-length instances of readerly metafiction. Since these three latter novels include a proportionally minor amount of non-

<sup>403</sup> Austin M. Wright, *The Formal Principle in the Novel* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982)

<sup>404</sup> Austin M. Wright, 'Recalcitrance in the Short Story' in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 115-129.

<sup>405</sup> Wright, of course, defines his notion of recalcitrance: it is an inherent characteristic of texts, readers and writers aiming at sustaining an engaging reading experience by means of various types of resistance.

metafictional discourse, the sense of discrepancy that the reader may experience while encountering metafictional episodes does not emerge.

What I consider a noteworthy area of inquiry in the handling of extended metafictional material is that of presentation. My observation is that the more theoretical the discourse of readerly metafiction is, the less artistic, the less fiction-like the novel which contains it becomes. Put in another way, theory is detrimental to art; or, formulated the other way round, artistic treatment of metafiction seems irreconcilable with an overwhelming presence of theoretical discourse. In order to counter my argument, some may point out that Nabokov succeeds in maintaining the artistic quality of his novel in spite of the fact that it contains a rather extended instance of readerly metafiction. Although the argument is correct, it should be noted that Charles Kinbote from Nabokov's novel, despite being a university teacher, provides the non-professional interpretation that a so-called ordinary reader<sup>406</sup> would be able to produce: he eludes both the discussion of the critical notions involved in reading and interpretation, and the theoretical argumentative prose characteristic of literary criticism. Kinbote, in fact, presents very few theoretical arguments in his interpretation – he simply projects his life story which the reader may or may not believe – into the poem. In the case of *Pale Fire*, therefore, the artistic can easily prevail: the reader is told the fantastic story of the Zemblan monarch, and fragments from a more ordinary story of friendship between two university professors.

David Lodge's *Nice Work* is a transitory novel between fiction and theory as it presents a proportionally equally represented dual narrative arrangement: Robyn Penrose, on the one hand, is the protagonist of the fictional events represented in the novel; on the other hand, she is the originator, the appropriator of theoretical literary discourse. *Nice Work* offers the reader double pleasure: firstly, *Nice Work* is a modern condition of England novel; secondly, it is a challenging but rewarding intellectual reading material about literary history and literary theory. Lodge manages to maintain the balance of these components in his novel without compromising the integrity of its non-theoretical aspect.

Wright's *Recalcitrance, Faulkner, and the Professors* represents the theoretical extreme of the theory-fiction continuum which I have been employing for analysing extended readerly metafiction. As opposed to Nabokov's Kinbote, Charlie Mercer takes part in very little fiction. In fact, even the potential happy ending of Charlie and Eve's budding love affair is sacrificed on the altar of recalcitrance, because Wright, in order to create an eminently recalcitrant novel, decides to leave the love plot of his story open-ended. With the rather

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<sup>406</sup> The phrase ordinary reader here refers to a reader with no training in literature.

curtailed version of the essentially slim fictional plot, what the reader is offered is the theoretical parlance of literary criticism throughout ninety-nine percent of the novel.

As has been demonstrated, extended metafiction can provide expert insight into the art of fiction. Assuming, however, that extended theoretical fiction is the most advanced form of readerly metafiction, I suppose, is not quite the right attitude to evaluate metafictionality in these novels. I see this as putting the wrong items into the two pans of the scales. Firstly, whether one prefers theoretical fiction to theory-free fiction is a matter of taste. I may subscribe to the opinions of those critics who maintain that the effect of shock triggered by metafictional frame-breaking is the only adequate form of self-conscious writing. But I may also argue that brief metafictional episodes are always implicit by definition, and consequently, it is exclusively theoretical fiction which can satisfactorily address issues related to reading and interpretation within fiction. The basic problem with the two notions of metafictionality that I have outlined above is that they refer to two distinct metafictions: the former concerns the dramatization of the reader; the latter addresses the dramatization of the theory of reading. Because both dramatizations are aspects of the same subject matter, I propose to regard them as complementary rather than exclusory.



## VIII. Non-fictional Metafiction

Fiction is woven into all...I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid.

John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, pp. 86-87.

If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself.

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 4

The past, they say, is a foreign country, and I fictionalize (perhaps) these memories of that afternoon. But then my mother is dead. With all the others. She doesn't exist. And fiction is what doesn't exist.

Graham Swift, *Ever After*, p. 229.

### 8.1. Self-consciousness deconstructed

#### Nomenclature

The term 'non-fictional metafiction' requires some clarification for it refers to a kind of fiction which self-consciously denies its own existence. The meaning of non-fictional metafiction can be best illuminated in the context of the other three metafictional classes that I have discussed so far. Writerly, readerly and textual metafictions are premised on the Gassian notion of self-conscious fiction. As has been demonstrated, fictional self-consciousness conventionally signifies that the work of fiction possesses an explicit introspective propensity which is directed either at the author, the reader or the text itself. The direction of the inquiry that writerly, readerly and textual metafictions take, therefore, is always inward.

Non-fictional metafiction presents a radical departure from signifying self-consciousness in its conventional sense: instead of aspiring to investigate its own fictional world, it points outside of fiction to the phenomenological world in an attempt to prove that beyond fiction, our experiential reality is also discursive by nature. Non-fictional metafiction insists that without language we can no longer meaningfully refer to reality, *per se*. This view is

generally taken to be an all-encompassing one, including all literary and extra-literary domains; e.g. our everyday lives; philosophy; abstract concepts like freedom, love, faith; religion; psychology and history. A list of the most common discourses of reality – i.e. those narrative forms which are most commonly regarded to represent reality faithfully – would definitely contain the overlapping labels of historiography, biography, journalism and documentary. The practice of non-fictional metafiction is basically the foregrounding, the laying bare of the fact that within the bonds of language, fiction and the discourses we employ to render our experiential world do not differ. The various baring devices that non-fictional metafictions involve attempt to demonstrate that experiential reality is made up of, arranged and structured according to the rules of fiction. Fundamentally, fictional metafictions – i.e. readerly, writerly and textual metafictions – and non-fictional metafiction are different modes of self-reflection; what sets them apart is that the former reflects on the linguistic nature of fiction, the latter on the linguistic nature of non-fiction.

The concept of non-fictional metafiction that I have outlined so far is admittedly a post-structuralist one. It is the antithesis, the deconstructed version of the unproblematic Gassian notion of metafiction, i.e. fiction about fiction. The reason why deconstructionist literary theory finds metafiction so attractive is because the basic operational mode of metafiction – i.e. self-referentiality generated by the interaction of various discourses – can be easily conceived as literary deconstruction at work: the metafictional text entails elements that carry out its own deconstruction; there is a recognizably dominant discourse that is challenged by one that is peripheral; the metafictional text allows plurality of interpretations which questions the notion of an ultimate meaning. Deconstructionist theory, therefore, encounters no obstacle in translating its own terms into metafiction. Triggered by such theoretical contributors as Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and Michel Foucault, the notion of metafiction gradually came to signify a function of reading inherent in all fictions, and the term metafiction had consequently lost its ability to refer to a specific kind of self-conscious literature clearly distinct from other literary forms. The notorious penchant of deconstructionist literary theory for seeking for contradictions, reversals and paradoxes has, naturally, greatly upturned, and successfully deconstructed several aspects of what are generally taken for granted concerning fictional self-consciousness.

## The paradox of self-consciousness

One of the most often voiced postmodern theoretical contradictions regarding metafiction concerns its self-consciousness. As Mark Currie puts it,

there is [...] something about postmodern fiction, the deep involvement with its own past, the constant dialogue with its own conventions, which projects any self-analysis backwards in time. Novels which reflect upon themselves in the postmodern age act in a sense as commentaries on their antecedents. 'Self-consciousness' is neither new nor meaningfully 'self' consciousness, since the metafiction refers to fictions other than itself, in its own history.<sup>407</sup>

Currie<sup>408</sup> uses the phrases 'deep involvement', 'dialogue', 'commentary' and 'reference' in relation to 'conventions', 'antecedents', the 'other' and 'history'. The combinations that one is to establish from these words are especially relevant for the characterisation of the notion of metafiction, as they signify textuality and relationships between different kinds of discourses. The assumption that seems to lie at the core of the contradiction identified by Currie, however, is that the metafictional novel has no substance other than already existing texts written in the past. Consequently, the reason why the metafictional novel – according to the above argument – is incapable of reflecting on itself is because it does not possess a self, as such. As Barth in 'The Literature of Exhaustion' suggests, metafiction defines itself in the face of its own past, in the face of past literary forms and conventions. This constant dialogue that metafiction sustains with its antecedents evidently 'projects any self-analysis backwards in time'<sup>409</sup>. What we denote as metafictional self-consciousness, strictly speaking, is concerned with something *outside* the self.

Also, as Mark Currie rightly observes in *Metafiction*, 'there is a vertiginous illogicality about 'self-consciousness''<sup>410</sup>. The self-referential nature of metafiction should ideally suggest a Chinese box structure, a *mise en abyme* pattern for the metafictional novel; i.e. the novel should ideally reflect on itself, and on the fact that it reflects on itself, and, in turn, on its own reflection on the fact that it reflects on itself, and so on and so forth in an infinite regress. Besides illogicality, nevertheless, there is also a considerable degree of impossibility about metafiction, since the implied infinite process of self-reflection cannot be executed in a novel:

<sup>407</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 1.

<sup>408</sup> Currie himself ends up contradicting his statement concerning the lack of self-consciousness of the metafictional novel a number of times in both *Metafiction* (1995) and *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), which, I believe, is perhaps the result of a tangibly overemphasized general preference for contradictions in deconstructionist literary criticism.

<sup>409</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 1.

<sup>410</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 1.

the illusory and at the same time elusive goal of incorporating a total self-reflection would require the completion of an infinitely long book. A related problem is that the ideal of total self-reflection would also mean that a novel is able to reflect on all previous self reflections. The impossibility of this totality is obvious: once the process of self-reflection is judged complete and the work of metafiction is deemed ended, the finished article still offers itself for self-reflection. Therefore, metafiction is always incomplete, always impossible to appropriate all aspects and layers of its own criticism. Metafictional novels are known to incorporate aspects of their own criticism, but no matter how exhaustive that self-criticism may be, there will always be additional levels of criticism to make on itself *plus* the swelling number of criticisms already incorporated into it.

### The paradox of reality

The view that our experiential world is first and foremost grasped in terms of language entails the problem of whether it is possible to produce a linguistic equivalent of reality. Non-fictional metafiction especially problematizes the notion of relativity inherent in linguistic representations. In *Metafiction* Patricia Waugh astutely points out that metafiction, basically, rests on the Heisenbergian uncertainty principle: an awareness that ‘for the smallest building blocks of matter, every process of observation causes a major disturbance’<sup>411</sup>, and that it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed.<sup>412</sup> The linguistic transcription of reality, therefore, admits relativity and perspectivization, which results in semantic plurality; i.e. there may be as many linguistic representations – or readings – of what we traditionally consider as facts, as many perceivers there are. The premise that the linguistic nature of the non-fictional world is open to interpretations and readerly approaches, necessarily, goes against the view that experiential reality can be known through the materialist approaches of positivism and empiricism. Non-fictional metafiction basically thematizes the imperfections of language and foregrounds that language is incapable of producing verbatim renderings of experiential reality. As Patricia Waugh formulates, ‘in metafiction the historical world and the fictional world are held in a state of tension, and the relationship between play and reality is the main focus of the text’<sup>413</sup>.

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<sup>411</sup> Werner Heisenberg, ‘The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics’, in *The Discontinuous Universe*, ed. by Sally Sears and Georgiana W. Lord (London and New York: Basic Books Inc., 1972), p. 126.

<sup>412</sup> Waugh, p. 3.

<sup>413</sup> Waugh, p. 3.

The ultimate paradox concerning the deconstructionist notion of metafiction is that it is so much fraught with contradictions that it should ideally repel novelists, critics and readers alike. In practice, however, the indeterminacy and ambiguity surrounding the deconstructionist notion of metafiction have gained acceptance and are celebrated as truly postmodern qualities in fiction.

## 8.2. Types of non-fictional metafiction

Non-fictional metafiction consciously dramatize the fictional nature of the discourses that claim to represent experiential reality. Numerous techniques exist for this purpose, and their classification may be based on a number of principles. The categories that I have found most useful for the investigation of non-fictional metafiction within the domain of the academic novel are biographical metafiction and historiographic metafiction.<sup>414</sup> The former group encompasses novels which explicitly aim at foregrounding the fictional nature of biographical modes of writings; the latter class overtly lays bare the fictional nature of historiographic modes of discourses<sup>415</sup>. The foregrounding and laying bare that non-fictional metafiction sets out to accomplish is actually the undercutting, the undermining of the general truthfulness and realism that both biography and historiography claim.<sup>416</sup> The tools that are most frequently employed for this purpose are frames. What non-fictional metafiction necessarily involve is the interaction of various narrative frames. The process is, of course, familiar because this is what fictional metafiction frequently carry out. In Chapter Five to Seven – while describing writerly, textual and readerly metafiction – I already discussed illusion-breaking, or frame-breaking, as a common device in the practice of metafiction writing. There is, however, one essential difference between the frame-handling of fictional and non-fictional metafiction. The former is invariably predicated on one frame aiming at nullifying, invalidating or denying the existence of another frame. The latter is based on one frame seeking to enhance, coexist or

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<sup>414</sup> The term ‘biographical metafiction’ is my own coinage.

<sup>415</sup> Linda Hutcheon’s definition of historiographic metafiction in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) – i.e. novels which, firstly, acknowledge their own constituting, ordering and selecting processes in historically determined acts; secondly, put into question, at the same time as they exploit, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real (Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 92.) – is, in essence, applicable to both metafictional categories that I differentiate here. Nevertheless, the terminological separation of biographical and historiographic metafiction (while admitting that biographical and historical modes of discourses share a number of key characteristics) allows me to demonstrate that the deconstructive baring devices of non-fictional metafiction are capable of focusing on two entirely different narrative objects: people and historical events.

<sup>416</sup> The sense of credibility that these conventions generate mostly arises from the fact that they are non-fantastic, non-magical and non-mythical (Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 82.).

cooperate with another. The sense of bafflement or confusion that is traditionally – and I dare say mistakenly – associated with the notion of metafictional in general, however, is mostly the characteristic only of the invalidating type of frame-breaking.

The usefulness of treating non-fictional metafiction as an isolated, separate category from writerly, textual and readerly metafictions lies in the following argument. One of the general critical convictions concerning metafiction, as Patricia Waugh declares, is that

metafiction depends on the regular construction and subversion of rules and systems. Such novel usually sets up an internally consistent ‘play’ world which ensures the reader’s absorption, and then lays bare its rules in order to investigate the relation of ‘fiction’ to ‘reality’, the concept of ‘pretence’.<sup>417</sup>

Waugh and Brian McHale both subscribe to viewing metafiction – in all its manifestations – as the fictional means to investigate the relationship between fiction and reality. My opinion, however, is that in writerly, readerly and textual metafictions the conscious investigation of the relational problem between fiction and reality is of secondary importance. Fictional metafictions, although they often imply the different ontological statuses of the phenomenological world and fiction, mainly focus on the art of fiction – its receptive, productive and constitutive principles. Non-fictional metafiction, nevertheless, far from implying any difference between reality and fiction, takes the identity of fact and fiction as its main theme.

### **8.2.1. Biographical metafiction**

Biographical metafiction, as a term, is here intended to signify a type of fiction which: firstly, aims to supply and sustain its status of verisimilitude by means of applying the narrative conventions of literary biography; secondly, by employing various baring devices, it alerts the reader to recognizing that the discourses of fiction and reality are identical and inseparable. As I have pointed out in Chapter Two entitled ‘Inescapable Mimesis: Academic Fiction as Literary Realism’, biographies and autobiographies are especially frequent among academic novels. The metafictional treatment of biography, however, is a postmodern development for academic fiction.

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<sup>417</sup> Waugh, pp. 40-41.

A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990)<sup>418</sup> is the first of the two biographical metafictional works in which I would like to consider the notion of non-fictional metafiction. In Elaine Showalter's estimation, which I am ready to share, Byatt's *Possession* is 'the high point of academic fiction of the 1990s, a book that raised expectations of the literary quality of the entire genre, was, which received the Booker Prize for 1990'<sup>419</sup>. Byatt, by her own admission, got the idea for the novel

in the British Library, watching that great Coleridge scholar, Kathleen Coburn, circumambulating the catalogue. I thought: she has given all her life to his thoughts, and then I thought: she has mediated his thoughts to me. And then I thought: Does he possess her, or does she possess him? There could be a novel called *Possession* about the relationship between living and dead minds.<sup>420</sup>

The novel is about two young British scholars, who, upon the contingent discovery of a personal archive letter, work on reconstructing the secret love affair between two eminent Victorian poets. *Possession* gradually develops into a love-adventure story involving not only the relationship of the two poets, but the romance between the novel's twentieth-century biographer protagonists, Roland Mitchell, a part-time research assistant, and Dr. Maud Bailey, a scholar of women's literature.

Although Byatt does not instigate any direct discussion in her novel concerning how reality is structured according to the constitutive rules of fiction, her novel, as fictionalized biography, entails vital implications for our present discussion of non-fictional metafiction. One of the central foci of *Possession* is biography. The novel's protagonists are biographers, who attempt to piece together a series of past events with the help of poems, letters and diaries acquired from personal sources and scholarly archives. In spite of the ostensible success of their research activity, however, Roland and Maud are never able to reconstruct more than a scanty – yet correct – plot concerning the lives of their Victorian subject matters. The element of the novel that makes their observations complete, the part that is capable of reconstructing Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte as flesh-and-blood people is not supplied by the fictional scholars involved in the biographical research, but by the external author, by A. S. Byatt herself.

The technique that Byatt employs is the construction of two parallel narrative threads. For a substantial part, *Possession* is one single dominant narrative which focuses on contemporary

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<sup>418</sup> A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (New York: Random House, 1990)

<sup>419</sup> Showalter, p. 112.

<sup>420</sup> Catherine Burgass, *A. S. Byatt's Possession* (London and New York: Continuum Contemporaries, 2002), p. 34.

events and characters. At one point, however, Byatt introduces a parallel narrative which takes place in the nineteenth-century and presents the fictionalized resuscitation of the events Roland and Maud are discovering about a hundred years later. Byatt deliberately alternates the two narratives, which, for a while, leaves the reader unaware that the bare facts of biography discovered by the British scholars constitute only a skeleton of the past. The one who secretly breathes into Ash and LaMotte their former actuality – as Graham Swift is about to formulate it so eloquently – is the novelist. The covertness of this process arises from two factors. One, neither the characters, nor the author exhibits consciousness concerning the novel's metafictional nature.<sup>421</sup> Secondly, the discourses that construct the nineteenth-century events are initially diary entries and letters which were written by Ash and LaMotte and are subsequently discovered by Roland and Maud. Byatt, in the beginning, only occasionally inserts narratives which are actually set in the nineteenth-century and which are peopled by Victorian characters. The trick is that the reader does not notice that these infiltrating insertions could not have been conceived by any of the characters; the reader does not realize that the narratives which render the experience of the Victorian characters constitute creative interventions in the emerging biographical research which could have been substantiated exclusively by the external – i.e. extra-fictional – imaginative capacity of the novelist. As the novel proceeds, the narrative shifts into the nineteenth century become more frequent and more extended, and ultimately gain enough importance to have the privilege of constituting the final pages of the novel.

*Possession* does not word its metafictional message in a didactic manner – as, for example, authors of textual metafiction frequently do –, but, in a sense, artistically epitomizes that the so-called 'world of facts' that biographical writing is conventionally associated with, not only involves, but is constituted according to the rules of fiction.<sup>422</sup> The fact that Byatt has written another book on the theme entitled *The Biographer's Tale*<sup>423</sup>, certainly indicates that she is greatly interested in the fictional exploration of the theoretical issues involved in non-fictional metafiction.

The novel that, in many respects, is very similar to Byatt's *Possession* is Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992)<sup>424</sup>. As opposed to Byatt's novel, *Ever After* explicitly deals with the issues of biography and the relationship between the biographer and his/her subject matter. Swift presents his novel as the protagonist, one-time lecturer of English literature and theatrical

<sup>421</sup> The text exhibits metafictional qualities all the more so, but its elucidation requires the critical apparatus of the literary critic.

<sup>422</sup> In *Pale Fire* Nabokov also chooses the artistic showing of metafiction rather than the didactic telling of it.

<sup>423</sup> A. S. Byatt, *The Biographer's Tale* (London: QPD, 2000)

<sup>424</sup> Graham Swift, *Ever After* (London: Picador, 1992)



manager Bill Unwin's manuscript. The manuscript is essentially biographical in the sense that it recounts Bill's own life, and reconstructs part of Bill's long-deceased Victorian ancestor, Matthew Pearce's life. The unifying theme of *Ever After* is loss. Bill, as a child, loses his first stepfather (he does not know who his real father is); later, by the time he is fifty, he loses his mother, his wife and his second stepfather. Similarly to Bill, Matthew loses his family: his third son dies at a young age and later he is forced to abandon his family. The novel, to a great extent, aims to recover Bill's lost beloved ones, and it is Bill's unexpected discovery of Matthew Pearce's personal diaries among his mother's legacy that Pearce's life – and his cherished family – also become the objects of biographical reconstruction. The novel's engagement in attempting to reconstruct past events is what constitutes the narrative prerequisite of non-fictional metafiction.

Swift relates Bill's and Matthew's personal histories by constructing – just like Byatt – two intertwining narrative threads. Both are rendered by Bill. The two narrative threads are separated chronologically: while the former is instigated in 1989 with retrospective jumps back into Bill's personal history; the latter is situated in the 1840s. Swift's writing swings back and forth between the two time periods, which enables the reader to perceive the thematic parallels between the progress of the two distant human fortunes. The metafictional significance of this chronological displacement, nevertheless, is that it allows Swift to problematize the issue of fact and fiction in storytelling on two fronts: there is the autobiographical history of Bill's own life recollected from his own memory; and there is the reconstructed biography of Matthew Pearce which is created from his Notebooks. *Ever After* overtly poses the question whether the discursive – and highly subjective – rendering of one's own life differs from the biographer's ostensibly historical, factual narrative reconstruction of past events.

Swift answers the question by reflecting on the modes of autobiographical and biographical writing one by one. As far as the former is concerned, it is an important aspect of the novel's metafictional dimension that Bill recovers his own story from early childhood from his own memory. Swift's rendering of Bill's memories is convincing: the first earliest recoverable memories about Bill, the child, are tentative and fragmentary; while his later recollections are endowed with the sharpness of observation of the adult protagonist. Bill, nevertheless, admits: 'The fiction of my life (if that is what it is) may as well serve as the fact [...] I am who I am. I am Bill Unwin (there, I declare myself!).'<sup>425</sup>; and by doing so, he makes no pretence that his autobiography is in any way an objective rendering of events. Bill's

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<sup>425</sup> Swift, p. 160.

admission recalls Heisenberg's uncertainty principle: I, the observer can never produce objective facts.

*Ever After* also investigates whether biography is in any sense more factual than autobiography. Again, Swift is explicit about his line of inquiry. This is how Bill introduces Matthew Pearce, his biographical subject matter.

The facts about Matthew Pearce as they stood in the year 1844. The facts infused with a good deal of theory, not to say imagination. The Notebooks do not begin till 1854, though they begin with a backward reference to that summer day in 1844, which, scrupulous as Matthew's memory was, might have been subject to a degree of narrative licence. The facts, mixed with a good deal of not necessarily false invention. *Pace* Potter [a historian], I am not in the business of strict historiography. It is a prodigious, a presumptuous task: to take the skeletal remains of a single life and attempt to breathe into them their former actuality. Yet I owe Matthew nothing less. As Ruth [Bill's deceased wife] would have said, the script is only a beginning: there is the whole life. Let Matthew be my creation. [...] And if I conjure out of the Notebooks a complete yet hybrid being, part truth, part fiction, is that so false? [...] So what is real and what is not?<sup>426</sup>

The 'degree of narrative license' that Swift accentuates in the excerpt links Matthew's own Notebooks to Bill's manuscript: both are fictionalized autobiographies. As far as Bill's engagement in the reconstruction of Matthew's life is concerned, the reference above to historiography, or more precisely to 'strict' historiography, explicitly demonstrates Swift's view: autobiography, or personal historiography, is both fact and fiction. The facts of the past for Bill are out of reach. While Bill is presented in the role of the biographer, his inability to reconstruct history without the help of fiction is constantly foregrounded. For instance, when Bill attempts to picture Matthew, he demonstrates that the moment the historian runs out of facts, fiction takes over.

He was born in Launceston, Cornwall, in March 1819, son of John Pearce, clockmaker, and Susan Pearce. And he began the Notebooks thirty-five years later, on the day of the death of his third-born son, Felix. So much for plain, hard fact.

But I prefer to get the measure of him, to picture him early one morning, in his twenty-second year, in an inn-yard in Oxford, about to leave that city, a fully educated young man, to take his modest and unsung place (he has no fond ideas) in the world.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Swift, p. 90.

<sup>427</sup> Swift, p. 90.

‘You have to picture the scene’<sup>428</sup>, insists Bill throughout the novel in order to encourage his reader to take part in his vision. The written biography on Matthew deliberately lacks and plays down the certainties of the so-called factual forms of writing – e.g. the documentary. This is a vital tool for creating the self-consciousness of the novel. The biographical introduction of the deceased Matthew, for example, explicitly lays bare the biographer’s recourse to fiction: ‘I [i.e. Bill] see him [i.e. Matthew] (I have no proof of this; I have no idea what he looked like at all) as one of those robust sober-looking young men in whom youth puts on only a tenuous appearance’<sup>429</sup>. The events that are related in Bill’s biographical research are also fashioned to give away their fictionalized nature: ‘I [i.e. Bill] invent all this. I don’t know that this is how it happened. It can’t have been like this simply because I imagine it so’<sup>430</sup>. The novel’s awareness of the fact that it presents a fictionalized biography, and that this fictionalized biography presents truth as a combination of fact and fiction is acutely explicit when Bill declares

What do I know of Matthew? I conjure him up, I invent him. I make him the protagonist (a touch of Potter’s TV temerity) of this ‘dramatized version’. I drag him into the light. He might have been no more than the bland words on a mossy gravestone.<sup>431</sup>

The novel seeks to answer whether the possession of data about people who do not live any more, or records of past events equals the possession of dead people or the past. Swift formulates his direction of inquiry explicitly when Bill poses the rhetorical question to himself: ‘If I owned the Notebooks, did I own Matthew?’<sup>432</sup>. Bill’s answer is an obvious no; Swift, however, appears to insinuate that historians, quite regrettably, think otherwise. *Ever After* proposes that biography and historiography are the ‘institutions’, the authorities to turn the fictional into factual, to provide an illusion of factuality; and that the agent of this process of verification and approval is the biographer himself. ‘From now on, he [i.e. Matthew] would be ‘real’’, declares Bill, and the following excerpt from which this sentence is taken can be read as a ritual, an act of declaration by the biographer, an incantation, sanctification, a magical sentence with the help of which, although illusorily, the world of the unknowable, subjective, relative could be rendered knowable, objective and absolute.

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<sup>428</sup> Swift, pp. 80, 101, 179, 185.

<sup>429</sup> Swift, p. 91.

<sup>430</sup> Swift, p. 109.

<sup>431</sup> Swift, p. 145.

<sup>432</sup> Swift, p. 165.

And they [i.e. the notebooks] were, by his own [i.e. Matthew's] description, the record of his life as a fiction: 'the beginning of my make-belief'. From now on, he would be 'real' – he would live according to the way things truly were. But if the soul is a fiction, why should a book – a few ideas set down on the page – make so much difference to the world?<sup>433</sup>

The fundamental difference between Byatt's *Possession* and Swift's *Ever After* is that the latter novel does not supply the fictionalized, reconstructed biography as the result of the unseen, creative endeavour of the novelist. Swift entrusts his main protagonist with the fictional reconstruction of Matthew Pearson. Bill does excellent biographical work and the true metafictional quality of the novel is continually asserted by Bill's own reflexive and self-reflexive activity in creating the fiction around the skeletal fragments of fact.

### 8.2.2. Historiographic metafiction

Another area of investigation which is organically related to my notion of non-fictional metafiction is the so-called historiographic metafiction. Historiographies in the academic novel are very common; countless fictional renderings can be found which record the birth and development of various British or American seats of higher learning. In spite of the fact that the academic novel appears to invest so much energy into historicizing its past, the metafictional treatment of academic historiography is exceptionally rare. Using Mark Currie's appropriate definition of historiographic metafiction, 'the self-conscious re-engagement with historical subjects'<sup>434</sup> is something that has not become central for writers of academic novels.

The one historiographic academic novel the metafictional implications of which I wish to investigate here is Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975)<sup>435</sup>. Bradbury does not engage into the metafictional treatment of historiography by the construction of supporting factual and fictional narrative frames<sup>436</sup>; i.e. the novel does not offer, for instance, the historiography of an institution of higher education which is concurrently or subsequently complemented with fictional narrative components. Instead, Bradbury dramatizes the concept of history in the form of a fictional character. Howard Kirk, the protagonist of the novel, is the history man: he teaches sociology at Watermouth, an imaginary British provincial university; he is a radical sociologist, a media don, a community activist, a 'terror to the selfish bourgeoisie' and

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<sup>433</sup> Swift, p. 183.

<sup>434</sup> Currie, *Metafiction*, p. 14.

<sup>435</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976)

<sup>436</sup> This is the technique that both Byatt and Swift employ in the novels that I have discussed so far.

a 'theoretician of sociability'.<sup>437</sup> Nested in the context of the Kirks' marriage in the late 1960s, *The History Man* recounts how Professor Howard Kirk keeps himself and the entire academic milieu around him in a constant state of historical movement for a whole semester. Being the self-appointed driving force behind the sociology department, the Kirk family, the social life of the academic community and most of the radical movements on and off the campus, Howard attempts to control and manipulate everyone – students and faculty alike – in order to propel the flow of events.

The means that Kirk deploys in order to shape the future are basically contemptible: as a teacher, he radicalizes his students; as a womanizer and adulterer, he manipulates women; and as a grandiloquent mouthpiece of empty radicalism, he makes people believe that his radical ethos is genuine (which it is not). Indeed, Howard epitomizes little that would make him likeable. In *Faculty Towers* Elaine Showalter describes Howard Kirk as a villain, who can only 'smash and destroy people, institutions and values'<sup>438</sup>. Showalter's characterisation corresponds to the typical critical response to *The History Man* which employs the corrupted nature of Howard's character as a springboard for addressing larger ethical issues either from social, political, educational or feminist points of view. Yet, Howard Kirk also has a metafictional significance: he is the conscious engine of the novel's plot. In spite of his apparent immorality, Howard is aware of the fact that he does manage to 'run' things around him: he organizes parties, sit-ins, demonstrations, infidelities and all the complex web of action that develops on the pages of *The History Man*. The sense of purpose with which Howard voluntarily plunges into actuating all the events around him becomes perceptible in the lengthy descriptions of planning, organizing, and, literally and metaphorically, plotting. Howard's metafictional relevance emerges from the fact that he sees history as his conscious design; i.e. history is something that can be devised and written down just like any fictional story. Howard uses his influence over plot with great dexterity and the novel abounds in episodes which are portrayed as the result of the protagonist's shaping will.

Most reviewers see Howard's control over the unfolding events as illusory, which, I suppose, may have a lot to do with the ethical low-ground he assumes in the novel. Ferenc Takács also argues in the postscript of his Hungarian translation of *The History Man* (1979) that Howard is not the cause, but the sufferer of history, a helplessly drifting person in the stream of history.<sup>439</sup> Takács' view is certainly valid if the novel is regarded without a discursive outlook on history. As an instance of non-fictional metafiction, nevertheless, the

<sup>437</sup> Bradbury, *The History Man*, p. 3.

<sup>438</sup> Showalter, p. 76.

<sup>439</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *A történelem bizalmasa*, trans. by Ferenc Takács (Budapest: Európa, 1979), pp. 329-335.

flow of history presented in *The History Man* is nothing less or more than discourse; and in that sense the fictional history of the novel is indeed shaped according to the will of the protagonist.

The novel's history, however, is only ostensibly shaped entirely by Howard Kirk. The mastermind, the ultimate script-writer behind the façade of fiction is Bradbury himself. If Howard's control of history is a delusion, it is Bradbury who enables it. The two episodes which testify that things can slip out of Howard's control are undoubtedly the ones which relate the suicide attempts of Henry Beamish and Barbara Kirk. The former incident takes place at the Kirks' first party. Howard, of course, had no intention of driving Henry into committing suicide and he, as the history man, refuses to consider that Henry did indeed want to put an end to his life. Yet, Howard's impression of being in control is not endangered seriously: Henry recuperates and life around Watermouth University goes back to normal. History in *The History Man*, however, repeats itself: the setting is again the Kirks' house and it is again a party; but this time it is Howard's wife, Barbara Kirk who slashes her wrist with a piece of a broken window. This time, no one is around, and owing to the loud merriment that is taking place in the house no one notices her suicide attempt. Since the scene ends the novel, the reader does not learn whether Barbara survives or not. The circumstances imply tragedy if we choose to regard the episode as the death of a human being. The Howard Kirk who found Henry's attempted suicide so utterly unacceptable and unexplainable, would have certainly failed to come to terms with the death of his own wife in a world which is supposed to follow his bidding.

What is incongruent about Henry and Barbara committing suicide, nevertheless, is that neither of them is portrayed to be in a crisis situation the volume of which would justify their willing surrender of life. The suicide attempts may be seen as the final acts of two desperate people, but both Henry and Barbara live a moderately affluent and self-fulfilled life. Surely, they have their own reasons to feel discontent about their lives, but in no sense are they in a state of irresolvable disaster. There is, however, a metafictional message in the novel which may help explain Henry's and Barbara's suicide attempts. As Howard's psychotherapist and lover, Flora Beniform points it out in relation to Henry's near-fatal accident, 'suicide is the traditional way of nullifying oneself as an actor'<sup>440</sup>. The metafictional consciousness is already there in Flora's statement: the implication that one is an actor amounts to declaring that one is a character, which already reveals the constructedness of the story. The implication here is that Henry, not as a person but as a character, is willingly removed from the history of *The*

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<sup>440</sup> Bradbury, *The History Man*, p. 117.

*History Man*. That this removal was not instigated by Howard is clear, and that it might have something to do with another script-writer of history is suggested by the repetition of the act, by Barbara's removal from the plot. It is only the final part of the novel that the reader may become aware of the presence of *il miglior fabbro*, the true script writer of the novel. As Patricia Waugh argues, Bradbury reminds 'the reader of his ultimate control through the ironic repetition of events at the end'<sup>441</sup> of the novel.

There is an undeniable hint of writerly metafiction about the way *The History Man* foregrounds the constructedness of history. According to an alternative reading of the novel, Bradbury – who is commonly identified as the shadowy man scurrying unseen in a campus building in an irrelevantly short scene of the novel – can be seen as *the* history man. Read in an unconventional way, the title page of the novel already establishes this equation: Malcolm Bradbury [is] *The History Man*. Throughout the novel Howard is repeatedly asked: 'Who's Hegel?'. The question is never satisfactorily answered, but, I suppose, it would be a mistake to opt for the referential reading of the novel and argue that Kirk, beyond all his vices, was way too incompetent as a professor of sociology to do so. Concentrating on the metafictional relevance of the novel, just like in the case of suicides, the questions are used as tools; their repetition draws the knowledgeable reader's attention to what Hegel suggested: to the unmistakable similarity between history and reality, that history reads like a novel.

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<sup>441</sup> Waugh, p. 49.

### 8.3. Criticism of non-fictional metafiction

#### The 'self' of metafictional self-consciousness

As has already been pointed out, literary deconstruction has successfully managed to instil a considerable amount of contradiction into the notion of self-consciousness, by which it also succeeded in arguing away the all so characteristic component of self-referentiality from metafiction. The selflessness of the metafictional text that is suggested in the excerpt quoted under the sub-title 'The paradox of self-consciousness', however, is only ostensible. In order to argue against the selflessness of the metafictional novel, I wish to reference Patricia Waugh, who, in the first chapter of her study entitled *Metafiction*, discusses the self-conscious nature of the metafictional novel. In an exposition regarding the different natures of the metafictional novel and the anti-novel, Waugh points out that, as opposed to the conventions of the anti-novel, 'metafiction offers both innovation and familiarity through the individual reworking and undermining of familiar conventions'<sup>442</sup>. Waugh, while acknowledging that the metafictional novel displays considerable interest in literary conventions, sees the self, the non-borrowed substance of the metafictional novel in its idiosyncratic, experimental departures from established literary forms. Not only do I subscribe to Waugh's opinion that experimentation endows a literary text with a unique self, I would also argue that metafiction even manages to draw the reader's attention to its own idiosyncrasies. This is an important point because, as Waugh observes, basically every text can be understood as 'a balance between the unfamiliar (the innovatory) and the familiar (the conventional or traditional)'<sup>443</sup>; and in that sense, all novels could be considered metafictional. What really differentiates metafiction from non-metafictional texts is that the former exhibits acute awareness of the extent to which it conforms to or departs from the conventions and patterns of other literary texts.

#### Relativity and subjectivity

The general difficulty inherent in non-fictional metafiction is that its application wholly depends on the reader's endorsement of the linguistic view of the experiential world: i.e. the

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<sup>442</sup> Waugh, p. 12.

<sup>443</sup> Waugh, p. 12.



conviction that there is nothing outside language. Readers who do not subscribe to this theoretical precondition of non-fictional metafiction would find little if any sense in those critical writings which detail how a novel foregrounds the fact that the phenomenological world is structured according to the constitutive rules of fiction. So, non-fictional metafiction is applicable if and only we accept the post-structuralist premise that everything is discourse. It is beyond doubt that non-fictional metafiction and post-structuralist literary theory share many essential qualities, yet, the two terms, I believe, signify merely overlapping rather than identical notions and their distinction should be recognized and maintained rather than concealed.

While it is true that metafiction can be seen as a form of deconstruction, the majority of self-deconstructive texts lack the high degree of explicitness and self-consciousness that fictional metafictions commonly display. While the deconstructive nature of a text is often a matter of interpretation, fictional metafictions lay bare the literary conventions of their own discourse by using narrative techniques that are ostentatious, that flaunt, call attention, impress, and shock readers into new perceptions. It is often the characteristically interpretation-dependent, and therefore often implicit nature of deconstructive readings that has compelled critics to recognize the critical ambiguity of whether the identification of the poststructuralist notion of metafictionality in a text is a result of objective discovery or subjective invention.

As Mark Currie implies in *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, deconstructionist readings frequently do not speak for themselves.<sup>444</sup> Although a number of novels evidently address theoretical issues related to literature, deconstructionist critics are especially prone to read completely unrelated novels as the allegories of their favourite bits of literary theory. Currie's description below of how he resorted to creating theoretical fiction during the writing of his *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, I find especially appropriate.

I didn't choose *Dr Jekyll* for its co-operation with my argument. It was chosen for me by the series editor who wanted the discussions published in this series to have common literary reference points. If anything, I made it co-operate. I read through it underlining in pencil only those bits which referred to the act of writing itself or which illustrated difficulties in the logic of self-narration. I borrowed heavily from the argument of a lecture I give regularly on self-narration in a similar text, Hogg's *Confession of a Justified Sinner*, in which an apparently reformed narrator tells us what a liar he used to be. In short I have forced the text to say what I want it to say, rewritten it as a theoretical fiction on the basis of selective evidence,

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<sup>444</sup> Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, pp. 132-133.

surreptitiously translated it while conveying fidelity to it, ventriloquised through it without moving my lips.<sup>445</sup>

An example of the postmodern critic's projecting activity would be Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980) which is often claimed to be a metafictional novel because its detective protagonists, who throughout the novel try to make sense of the mysterious murders in a medieval monastery, stand for the difficulties of interpretation in fiction; so they say. But, as was already pointed out in Chapter Seven entitled 'Readerly Metafiction', Eco's book completely lacks the intrusive self-awareness which metafictional novels display: the novel's protagonists never contemplate their interpretative role in solving the mysterious murders, neither do they reflect on the process of interpretation, *per se*.

During my discussion of metafiction I have attempted to select novels which speak their own metafictional quality without my creative/critical intervention. Of course, the degree of how implicit or explicit the manifestation of certain metafictional devices is can be considered to be wholly dependent on how sensitive the reader is to perceiving manifestations of fictional or non-fictional self-referentiality in a text. My observation is that the one significant difference between fictional and non-fictional academic metafiction is that the former is markedly less problematic to detect and appreciate. Biographical and historiographic academic metafiction is normally implicit and rarely goes beyond suggesting a relationship between fiction and reality. It is for these reasons that I consider non-fictional metafiction as the most minimal form out of the four metafictional classes that I distinguished in Chapter Four entitled 'The Four Aspects of the Metafictional Novel'.

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<sup>445</sup> Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, p. 132.

## IX. Two Readings of David Lodge's *Small World*

### 9.1. Introduction

The present chapter incorporates two interpretations of David Lodge's *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984)<sup>446</sup>. The first reading entitled 'Literary Theory at the Crossroads: A Referential Reading of David Lodge's *Small World*' is conceived in the spirit of referential criticism and aims at elucidating the documentary value of the novel. The second analysis entitled 'Textual Metafiction in David Lodge's *Small World*' focuses on the various manifestations of metafictional writing that can be found in the novel. The objective of integrating these two entirely different critical responses to the same academic novel in one chapter is to demonstrate that postmodern academic fiction, besides offering valuable insight into the world of higher education, possesses an equally important and discerning line of inquiry which concerns the art of fiction. Hopefully, the present chapter will illuminate new critical avenues for the postmodern academic novel and provide a more comprehensive view on the nature of academic fiction.

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<sup>446</sup> David Lodge, *Small World: An Academic Romance* (London: Penguin, 1985)

## 9.2. Literary Theory at the Crossroads: A Referential Reading of David Lodge's *Small World*

If you think...that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you were never more mistaken. [...] Calm your expectations, reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool and solid lies before you.

Charlotte Brontë: Prelude to *Shirley*<sup>447</sup>

David Lodge is the member of a special caste among the writers of academic fiction: he is a professor of literature and he is a literary critic; his most successful academic novels are mainly literature-oriented academic novels; and his literature-oriented academic novels mostly deal with literary theory. Although Lodge's two other famous academic novels entitled *Changing Places* (1975) and *Nice Work* (1988) also deal with literary criticism, *Small World: An Academic Romance* is his work of fiction which immerses the deepest into the concerns of literary scholarship and literary critics. The novel may aptly be described as a richly endowed treasure-house of literature. Literary criticism from Marxism, structuralism, deconstruction, reader-response theory to liberal humanism; literary works from Horace, Ludovico Ariosto, Spenser, Keats, Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Matthew Arnold, Hawthorne, Yeats, T. S. Eliot to James Joyce; theory of prosody and narratology and a great deal of whatever literary material lay at hand became part of the novel.

The strikingly high density of world literature and theoretical knowledge may be intimidating enough to prompt the uninitiated reader to put the book down. Lodge was certainly aware of the danger of writing about literature and literary theory without providing lucid explications, and recognized that only the intelligible rendering of his chosen academic content would ensure the general readability of his novel. Lodge himself commented on this aspect of *Nice Work* in an interview with Raymond H. Thompson.

I write to communicate, but like most literary writers I don't display all my goods on the counter. The books are written in a layered style so that they have coherence and comprehensibility on the surface. I don't want to write books that repel lay readers who don't know much about the literary sources, and so there

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<sup>447</sup> Lodge, *Nice Work*, p. 11.

is in the novel itself a certain amount of indirect explication of the analogy between modern professors and knights of romance.<sup>448</sup>

*Small World* fulfils its generic promise of instructing and informing the reader about a specific piece of reality within the domain of higher education, firstly, by introducing the mainstream branches of contemporary literary theory; and secondly, by portraying the influence of post-structuralism on literary studies in the 1980s. The fictional realm of *Small World* is peopled with professors of literature, who, each armed (and armoured) by one of the contending leading literary theories of the 1980s, set about combating one another in a quest for an ultimate literature chair – the UNESCO chair –, the acquisition of which would prove and maintain the superiority of the literary theory its owner adheres to. It is through these major characters that the reader can learn about Marxism, the basics of structuralism, reader-response theory, liberal humanism, deconstruction or the basic principles of formalism. The protagonists of the novel take every opportunity, be it a conference or just a literary conversation, to go into lengthy discussions of their theoretical convictions. This is, for example, how one can read extensively about the fall of structuralism and the emergence of deconstruction at the opening conference in Rummidge. The more literally disposed most certainly enjoy and benefit from the lucid explications aiming at introducing the various theoretical schools. The purposeful guidance that Lodge offers, nevertheless, at points goes back to absolute basic-level discussions out of special consideration for lay readers. Persse McGarrigle's genuine question concerning literary theory below is to demonstrate my observation.

Angelica looked annoyed. "Oh, what a nuisance that I missed it [i.e. a conference paper]. I'm very interested in structuralism."

"What is it, exactly?"

Angelica laughed.

"No, I'm serious," said Persse. "What is structuralism? Is it a good thing or a bad thing?"

Angelica looked puzzled, and wary of having her leg pulled.<sup>449</sup>

The discussions of literary theories also fit into a grander design which concerns no less a theme than the future of literary criticism itself. Introducing his subject matter by applying the conventions of the romance tradition, Lodge imports medieval sources to establish a network of symbolism in the narrative. The sovereign of the land of literary theory is Arthur

<sup>448</sup> Raymond H. Thompson, 'Taliesin's Successors: Interviews with Authors of Modern Arthurian Literature' (May 15, 1989) <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/intvws/lodge.htm>> [accessed April 11 2006], p. 1.

<sup>449</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 14.

Kingfisher, who is ‘doyen of the international community of literary theorists, Emeritus Professor of Columbia and Zürich Universities [...], now retired but still active in the world of scholarship. A man whose life is a concise history of modern criticism’<sup>450</sup>. The connections that the symbolic use of names establishes are easily detectable. The first name is a reference to King Arthur, the legendary knight, leader of the Knights of the Round Table. The Arthurian association is ingeniously evoked in the closing part of the novel when Kingfisher presides over the final literary battle of his literary knights errant. The name Kingfisher, however, is an allusion to the Fisher King, or the Wounded King who figures in the Arthurian legends as the latest in a line charged with keeping the Holy Grail.

Lodge effectively stretches the Arthurian analogy even further. Although Arthur Kingfisher – the ‘king among literary theorists’ and the one who ‘personifies the whole profession of academic literary studies’<sup>451</sup> – is always accompanied by the beautiful Song-mi Lee (his attractive future wife), and is surrounded by more books and honorary degrees than he can remember, he is desperate at no longer being able to achieve an erection or an original thought. Similarly to the medieval sources in which the physical disability of the Fisher King is paralleled by the ruined state of his country, the physical and intellectual impotence of Arthur Kingfisher symbolically coincides with the sterility of the scholarly land he presides over. For those who are well-versed in modernism, the imagery is undoubtedly also an Eliotian one.

‘The profession is in a very un’healthy condition’<sup>452</sup>, comments Fulvia Morgana (also a markedly Arthurian name), Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Padua, while outlining the theoretical stalemate in the field of literary criticism within the fictional world of *Small World*. The stalemate Fulvia observes, however, is not fictional at all. One of Lodge’s main foci in his novel is the crossroad literary scholars – and therefore most English departments – faced in the 1970s and 1980s. *Small World* portrays this decisive period in literary studies as the theoretical battlefield of outworn critical convictions with few creative ideas of how to go on. One of these creative ideas is the wholesale endorsement of literary deconstructionism. The notoriously subversive, sceptical and at points inapplicably theoretical tendencies of literary deconstruction, however, – as Lodge goes out of his way to demonstrate in his novel – made a significant proportion of the profession fear that it would endanger the establishment of literary studies. A fictional solution to the directionlessness of literary

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<sup>450</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 93.

<sup>451</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 119.

<sup>452</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 119.

criticism is contemplated, and the promise of resolution materializes in the ultimate literary rank, the UNESCO chair of literature.

Lodge's fictional representation of the theoretical path-finding of the late 70s and early 80s centres around the question whether literary criticism should embrace deconstruction as its mainstream direction or not. One aspect of this question which Lodge highlights concerns the choice between deconstruction and traditional humanist scholarship. In an episode, Rodney Wainwright – a teacher of literary theory at the University of North Queensland<sup>453</sup> – is attempting to resolve the issue in the paper he is writing for a conference entitled 'The Future of Criticism'. Wainwright, with a perceptible note of disapproval in his estimation of literary deconstruction, recapitulates the conflict between deconstruction and traditional humanist scholarship as follows: '*The question is, therefore, how can literary criticism maintain its Arnoldian function of identifying the best which has been thought and said, when literary discourse itself has been decentred by deconstructing the traditional concept of the author, of authority?*'<sup>454</sup>. That Wainwright never finishes his paper mirrors the complexity inherent in his question. For Arthur Kingfisher it is just as difficult to decide whether to become a flag bearer of deconstructionism or not. For him, the other two alternatives are structuralism and traditional humanist scholarship. As reported by Fulvia Morgana while having a conversation with Morris Zapp *en route* for the next conference venue, Kingfisher, similarly to Wainwright, is unable to make a choice.

Everybody was waiting to see what line he would take on deconstruction. Would 'e be for it or against it? Would 'e follow the premises of 'is own early structuralist work to its logical conclusion, or would 'e recoil into defence of traditional humanist scholarship? [...] 'E said, on the one hand this, on the other hand that. 'E talked all around the subject. 'E waffled and wandered. 'E repeated things 'e said twenty, thirty years ago, and said better. It was embarrassing, I am telling you. In spite of all, they gave 'im a standing ovation.<sup>455</sup>

The debate over electing the ultimate literary theory is effectively reduced throughout the greater part of the novel to a choice between deconstruction and a rather anti-theoretical branch of liberal humanism. Lodge singles out main characters to personify these two contending schools of thought: the American Morris Zapp – who stands for post-structuralism – and the British Philip Swallow – who represents liberal humanism. With the unfolding controversy between the two critical avenues, the reader gradually learns about a

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<sup>453</sup> Wainwright teaches a course entitled 'Theories of Literature from Coleridge to Barthes'.

<sup>454</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>455</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, pp. 118-119.

fundamentally British hesitance toward subscribing to radical theoretical thoughts. Lodge, again, draws on his first-hand experience as a British literary scholar. With the petering out of structuralism and the emergence of deconstruction, continental – mainly French – theorizing gave extra dimensions to the complexity of critical thought and language. In the novel's Swallow-Zapp narrative counterpoint, professor Swallow stands for the withdrawal from the kind of literary criticism that would mean precious little for the ordinary reading public, and bitterly comments on the increasing influence of deconstructionism as 'that fundamental scepticism about the possibility of achieving certainty about anything, which I associate with the mischievous influence of Continental theorizing'<sup>456</sup>. Subscribing to the tenets of traditional humanist scholarship, Swallow defines the legitimacy of literary criticism as follows.

The function of criticism was to assist in the function of literature itself, which Dr Johnson had famously defined as enabling us better to enjoy life, or better endure it. The great writers were men and women of exceptional wisdom, insight, and understanding. Their novels, plays and poems were inexhaustible reservoirs of values, ideas, images, which, when properly understood and appreciated, allowed us to live more fully, more finely, more intensely [...] It was the job of the critic to unlock the drawers, blow away the dust, bring out the treasures into the light of day.<sup>457</sup>

The title of Swallow's book, *Hazlitt and the Amateur Reader*, is also a succinct encapsulation of the conviction that instead of becoming the private game within elitist intellectual circles, literary criticism should be transparent enough to serve the ordinary reading public. Lodge seems to find this point about literary criticism so vital that he even goes out of his way to demonstrate it by citing William Hazlitt's own condemnation of critical elitism.

A critic does nothing nowadays who does not torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings...His object indeed is not to do justice to his author, whom he treats with very little ceremony, but do to himself homage, and to show his acquaintance with all the topics and resources of criticism<sup>458</sup>

The continually foregrounded representation of humanist scholarship is unmistakeable in the *Small World* as Philip Swallow never really slips out of the mainstream of the narrative. In the ongoing Swallow-Zapp controversy Lodge demonstrates how literary post-structuralism is capable of deconstructing even the very notion of literary criticism. In the following excerpt it

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<sup>456</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 27.

<sup>457</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 317.

<sup>458</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 161.



is Philip Swallow who reacts with much exasperation to Morris Zapp's declaration concerning the pointlessness of producing further and further interpretations to literary works.

"Then what in God's name *is* the point of it [*i.e.* discussing literature] all?" cried Philip Swallow, throwing his hands into the air.

"The point [says Morris Zapp], of course, is to uphold the institution of academic literary studies. We maintain our position in society by publicly performing a certain ritual, just like any other group of workers in the realm of discourse – lawyers, politicians, journalists."<sup>459</sup>

Apart from Morris Zapp's nihilist, yet unequivocal adherence to literary deconstruction, none of the fictional literature professors are able to resolve, even in fictional terms, the threat of dissolution that post-structuralism holds in store for literary studies. Wainwright's sexual daydreaming while he is attempting to think of a solution to the conflicting values of traditional humanist scholarship and deconstructionism is one of Lodge's humorous ways to approach the issue.

"*One possible solution,*" he writes, and then pauses, gnawing the end of his ballpen.

*One possible solution would be to run to the beach, seize Sandra Dix [his student] by the hand, drag her behind a sand dune, pull down her bikini pants and*

"Cuppa tea, Rod? I'm just going to make one for Meg and me."

Bev's [his wife's] red perspiring face peers in at the open window. Rodney stops writing and guiltily covers his pad. After she has gone, he rips out the page, tears it up into small pieces, and tosses it into the wastepaper basket, where it joins several other torn and screwed-up pieces of paper. He starts again on a clean sheet.

*The question is, therefore, how can literary criticism...*<sup>460</sup>

Rodney Wainwright, of course, remains unable to finish his paper, thus, also successfully maintains the problem of choosing between deconstruction and liberal humanism throughout the novel. Even when he finally makes it to the conference in Jerusalem and is standing in front of his fellow academics – apparently just pausing because, having read the last line of his unfinished paper, he has run out of words – he is rescued by Philip Swallow's sudden collapse in the audience. The episode, naturally, is yet another postponement of the answer concerning the future of literary criticism.

Ingeniously translated into the novel's network of romance symbolism, the novel envisages a goal worthy of all the knights errant of the literary world to fight for: the UNESCO chair of literary criticism, a purely conceptual chair with a salary of a hundred

<sup>459</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p.28.

<sup>460</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 85.

thousand dollars a year, a research assistant team at your disposal, generous travel grants allowing you to fly about the world and no particular work to be done! Even Rudyard Parkinson, a venerable Oxford don, Regius Professor of Belles-Lettres at All Saints' College contemplates the academic trophy; as Parkinson points out, 'even if UNESCO was an institution routinely sneered at in Oxford Common Rooms. Nobody was going to sneer at one hundred thousand dollars a year, tax-free, to be picked up without the trouble of moving one's books'<sup>461</sup>. But beyond the financial advantages of the post, possessing the UNESCO chair, the ultimate literary Grail, also represents the selection and the consequent dominance of *one* of the contending theoretical schools in the field of literary criticism.

That such an implausible UNESCO chair would offer a plausible remedy to the all too serious problems of literary criticism, however, is a solution that Lodge, even on a fictional level, rules out. The leading literary professors of the fictional academic world are unable to convince Arthur Kingfisher, chairperson of the session, about the superiority of their theoretical convictions. Lodge, however, contemplates *one* particular resolution that would potentially be able to settle the theoretical battle royal. It is by asking the right question that Persse McGarrigle, re-enacting the legend of the Holy Grail, manages to break Arthur Kingfisher's intellectual (and sexual) sterility.

"What do you *do* if everybody agrees with you?" [asks Persee McGarrigle from the nominees, who are all unable to answer intelligibly]

"That is a very good question [says Arthur Kingfisher]. A very in-ter-est-ing question. I do not remember that question being asked before." He nodded to himself. "You imply, of course, that what matters in the field of critical practice is not truth but difference. If everybody were convinced by your arguments, they would have to do the same as you and then there would be no satisfaction in doing it. To win is to lose the game."<sup>462</sup>

The instantly – at least in intellectual terms – reinvigorated Kingfisher, with little hesitation, decides that instead of choosing one of the contestants he should appoint himself for the post in order to maintain the balanced presence of the various branches of criticism on the literary scene. Consequently, instead of the predominance of one literary theory, Lodge's own vision is a kind of critical eclecticism in which all the contending critical currents of the 1980s can coexist and operate in harmony. The suggestion behind Kingfisher's words is that academic competition should not be based on the fierce exclusion of competing branches of literary theory, but should always strive to maintain a balanced tug-of-war in which the opposing

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<sup>461</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>462</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 319.

theoretical forces would constructively move forward the cause of literary criticism. That the novel systematically reduces its main subject matter to the choices between either structuralism-deconstruction or deconstruction-liberal humanism, I suppose, reflects Lodge's own critical preferences.

As Peter Barry writes in *Beginning Theory* (2002), 'the 1980s probably saw the high-water mark of literary theory. That decade was the 'moment' of theory, when the topic was fashionable and controversial'<sup>463</sup>. *Small World* offers an informative fictional rendering of this period in the history of literary scholarship, rich in theoretical explications and their literary applications. Lodge employs literary analogies to describe the world of literary scholarship he was an active participant of, and introduces – embedded into an overwhelmingly romance pattern – a literary community in which professors of literature zoom from one conference to the other all over the world seven days a week looking for intellectual challenge. The feat that Lodge accomplishes is remarkable: out of the cardboard characters that stand for easily identifiable stereotypical images, out of the unfeasibility of the romance-driven action, a real world emerges. Lodge fuses the antithetical impulses of realism and the romance with great ingenuity, and the resulting fictional world seems both authentic and acceptably imaginary at the appropriate scenes. The novel, far from being a neutral representation of 1980s' theoretical climate, is strongly opinionated. Lodge presents a condemning image of the academe and questions the traditional 'the winner takes all' form of academic competition. The message of *Small World* is infused with a great deal of corrective purpose. Not only does the novel function as a pseudo- 'introduction to literary criticism' course book<sup>464</sup>, it even passes judgement, levels criticism at its own subject matter. It is in this sense that *Small World* can be grasped as a fictional criticism of literary criticism.

### 9.3. Textual Metafiction in David Lodge's *Small World*

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<sup>463</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary Theory and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>464</sup> Judging from its high content of romance literature, *Small World* might as well be used as primary material on a romance survey course.

Not many people are capable of adjusting their perceptive apparatus to the pane and the transparency that is the work of art. Instead they look right through it and revel in the human reality with which the work deals.

Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*

As was defined in Chapter Four entitled ‘The Four Aspects of the Metafictional Novel’, textual metafiction contains narrative techniques which formulate and make explicit critical propositions concerning the textual constructedness of a novel. Textual metafiction may be concerned with how the novel is structured, what organizational patterns are employed in it, it may be concerned with the formal properties of fiction, with intertextual relationships or references to other texts. David Lodge’s *Small World: An Academic Romance* is one of the most illustrative examples of academic textual metafiction. The subtitle of the novel already attends to its metafictional function by focusing on the literary conventions that the upcoming text exhibits. I wish to point out that the academic novelness of *Small World* does not reside in its interest in the romance as a narrative form. As Lodge declared in an interview with Raymond H. Thompson, ‘to me it [i.e. the romance] was just a device. It’s not as if I have a thematic interest in that particular body of material. [...] One likes each novel to look like a new solution to the problems of narrative’<sup>465</sup>.

Lodge’s last statement, nevertheless, carries weighty implications. He talks about the ‘problems’ of narrative and offers a solution by endorsing the romance as a form of narrative configuration. The problem of the narrative is, of course, ultimately the problem of language, the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world by using words. Accepting that our experience and knowledge are mediated through language, ‘literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself’<sup>466</sup>. Metafiction illuminates this construction in an idiosyncratic way, through formal self-exploration and a heightened self-consciousness.<sup>467</sup> Whenever a text heavily draws on borrowed literary conventions, one is justified in suspecting to find some metafictional act at work. In the following interview excerpt, Lodge reveals how romance became the central organizing principle in his work.

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<sup>465</sup> Thompson, p. 1.

<sup>466</sup> Waugh, p. 2.

<sup>467</sup> A metanarrative is aware of the difficulty of representing the ‘outside reality’ and resolves the dilemma by representing the *discourses* of the world outside its own fiction.

I remember writing in my notebook something like, what the novel needs is some kind of principle of unity--perhaps some myth which would function like the Odysseus myth in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[...] Then it struck me that here was a story which could provide the mythic skeleton or underpinning necessary to give shape to my modern comedy of academic manners [...] It gradually grew on me that there was an analogy between my story and the Arthurian story, particularly the Grail quest in which a group of knights wander around the world, having adventures, pursuing ladies, love, and glory, jousting with each other, meeting rather coincidentally or unexpectedly, facing constant challenges and crises, and so on. This all corresponded to the modern world with its Round Table of professors [...] Once I realized that the Grail legend could provide the structural principle for my story, then I really felt my novel could work.<sup>468</sup>

The novel reiterates the statement that is made in the subtitle in an array of highly different modes. Lodge systematically prepares his reader. The opening motto of the novel taken from Nathaniel Hawthorne's preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* already encourages the reader to meditate about the nature of the romance as a literary form.

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a novel.<sup>469</sup>

Hawthorne's words lead us to metafictional dimensions as well as philosophical depths. By alluding to what Coleridge termed as 'the willing suspension of disbelief'<sup>470</sup>, the motto uses the romance-novel comparison to heighten the reader's awareness of the never absolute borderline between fiction and reality. The issue is undoubtedly familiar. What is fiction? What is reality? What is the connection between the two? Can reality be represented in fiction? If so, how? These are some of the questions that postmodern fiction attempts to explore, and the words borrowed from Hawthorne, in a sense, promise that *Small World* will indeed provide a new solution to the problems of narrative.

*Small World* can be grasped not only as one romance plot, but a collection of romances. Although the quest of Persse McGarrigle frames the narrative, a multitude of other love threads and quests are detectable in the novel. In fact, the characters are involved in so many love affairs and pursue so many goals that it is these threads that finally compose the narrative texture, with rather feebly constructed references to a single dominating plotline serving as the backbone to the events. Persse McGarrigle pursues his idealized lover; Philip Swallow, a

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<sup>468</sup> Thompson, p. 1.

<sup>469</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. iii.

<sup>470</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Chapter XIV', *Biographia Literaria*, (1817) <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html>> [accessed April 10 2007]

teacher of literature at the University of Rummage – and an old acquaintance for those familiar with one of David Lodge’s previous novels entitled *Changing Places* – is in search of pleasure and women; Ronald Frobisher, a failed writer, is looking for a style that would return the talent he lost; Cheryl Summerbee, a check-in clerk at Heathrow Airport and an ardent reader of romantic fiction, is waiting for the knight who would make her romantic dreams come true; Joy Simpson, captive of her desires, seeks joy (note the unmistakably telling name), and a great deal of other people start out as protagonists of single, independent episodes. But as the reader proceeds, these secondary plotlines slowly but surely meet and fuse, and the final narrative develops into a collection of interrelated romances, a multiple romance.

The novel, especially the individual romance threads, heavily draws on the tradition of romance literature by borrowing parts of texts or textual qualities from the Arthurian legends, *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto, *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser, *The Eve of St. Agnes* by John Keats, Tennyson and his vision of Victorian medievalism and Eliot’s *The Waste Land* with its imagery saturated by the legend of the Fisher King. There is no mistaking about the close correlation between Lodge’s use of literary allusions and the novel’s structure. The textual imports, often quoted or acted out by the characters who people *Small World*, exert a shaping influence on the narrative: the idea of interweaving action instead of just a linear series of adventure stories originates from Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*; the Arthurian legends, the classical Alexandrian and the Renaissance epic romance patterns further enhance the quest and love elements of the novel.<sup>471</sup>

Although *Small World* may prompt its readers to contemplate the relationship between these imported romance texts and the adventures of the academics – who seek love, promotion and joy in the midst of conferences –, a more profound metafictional quality dwells in the novel’s own explication of its own nature as romance. Lodge saw lots of possibilities in the intertextual broadening of his theme by theoretical discourse. The novel often theorizes its appropriated literary conventions and discusses narratological issues related to the romance genre. One of these issues concerns the various endings of romance-induced minor narrative patterns in the novel. *Small World* can be conceived of as a collection of interlaced romance subplots. The structure of the various subplots, however, is far from being identical: some of them result in failure, some of them result in success and some of the quests remain unfinished, as if it had been on purpose to display the complete spectrum of

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<sup>471</sup> Lodge himself provided a detailed account of the various sources and patterns he had applied in his interview with Raymond Thomson (Thompson, p. 1.).

romance endings. Philip Swallow, for example, realizes that he is not really a romantic hero after all; families reunite; some people forgive each other, others resolve to hate even more; Persse McGarrigle, as he does at the beginning of the novel, finds another heart to win and embarks on another quest.

Lodge astutely theorizes McGarrigle's open-ended romance thread by embedding it into Morris Zapp's discussion of literary post-structuralism: 'the idea of a romance as narrative striptease [is] the endless leading on of the reader, a repeated postponement of an ultimate revelation which never comes – or, when it does, terminates the pleasure of the text'<sup>472</sup>. Persse McGarrigle falls in love with Angelica Pabst, a bright literature scholar, and decides to marry her. The only problem is that he can never find her. Persse travels from Rummage to New York through innumerable conferences only to find that Angelica has just left the place he has arrived at. The pattern unmistakably correlates to some of the arguments Derrida used to undermine the structuralist principles of language. The argument, in a nutshell, is as follows: Saussure claimed that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. Meaning is acquired in a process of exclusion within the system of signs, i.e. everything is what it is not. Therefore, since the value of a sign is totally given by the system, every unit is in the grip of the total. Derrida used a simple example to point out the logical shortcomings of structuralism. What if I want to find out everything about one particular item? If that one item can only be found by the exclusion of every other item, I will have to go through an endless process of turning from one excluded item to the other. The result is that there will always be a constant shift between the signified and the signifier. It is this kind of deferment or displacement that Persse's quest is based on. The conceptual analogy is ingeniously played down with Persse never being able to find Angelica, with his quest never having an ultimate settlement.

Angelica Pabst, at an unofficial conference panel entitled *Ad Hoc Forum on Romance*, proposes another variation on Zapp's ideas.

If epic is a phallic genre, which can hardly be denied, and tragic the genre of castration (we are none of us, I suppose, deceived by the self-blinding of Oedipus as to the true nature of the wound he is impelled to inflict upon himself, or likely to overlook the symbolic equivalence between eyeballs and testicles) then surely there is no doubt that romance is a supremely invaginated mode of narrative. [...] Epic and tragedy move inexorably to what we call, and by no accident, a 'climax' – and it is, in terms of the sexual metaphor, an essentially *male* climax – a single, explosive discharge of accumulated tension. Romance, in contrast, is not structured this way. It has not one climax, but many, the pleasure of this text comes and comes

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<sup>472</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 29.

and comes again. No sooner is one crisis on the fortunes of the hero averted than a new one presents itself; [...] no sooner has one adventure been concluded than another begins. The narrative questions open and close, open and close, like the contractions of the vaginal muscles in intercourse, and this process is in principle endless. The greatest and most characteristic romances are often unfinished – they end only with the author's exhaustion, as a woman's capacity for orgasm is limited only by her sexual stamina. Romance is a multiple orgasm.<sup>473</sup>

Angelica's lecture is not merely a feminist-deconstructionist-psychoanalytical<sup>474</sup> analysis of the romance form. Apparently, action in *Small World* develops very much according to the theoretical observations she outlines. The final statement of Angelica's paper, referring to Persse McGarrigle's open-ended romance, can even be seen as a self-congratulatory gesture on Lodge's behalf.

The self-referentiality of *Small World* resides precisely in the fact that the already outlined multiple romance structure is blended with a great deal of romance-related theory. The embedded theoretical discourses (i.e. the explications of the various critical schools) exert their shaping force in a somewhat reversed process: the romance pattern of the novel originates from a set of narrative conventions that have been observed and put down by other critics. With this process in mind, the making of *Small World* is more like reconstruction than construction. The conscious recycling of the romance literature that Lodge does, of course, inevitably results in a narrative configuration that points to its own architecture, its own internal arrangement, as if the novel was in search of itself, as if the narrative attempted to define its own existence, its main qualities. By the very act of appropriating and meditating about the romance, the novel gains a determining metafictional quality. Instead of an omniscient narrator, the metanarrative episodes of the novel, like a transposed soliloquy, find their ways through the characters. Perhaps at this point Lodge was rather negligent, as some of the self-identifying outbursts of the narrative originate from people who normally would have no idea whatsoever about the critical observations they actually utter. Be it carelessness, or the novel taking over the voice of a character for a sentence or two – as if it was also endowed with the consciousness and authority to do so – *Small World* goes so far as defining itself.

‘A real romance is a pre-novelistic kind of narrative. It's full of adventure and coincidence and surprise and marvels, and has lots of characters who are lost or enchanted or wandering

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<sup>473</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, pp. 322-323.

<sup>474</sup> c.f. Muries Dimen, 'The Engagement Between Psychoanalysis And Feminism', *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* (Vol. 33, No. 4 (1997)) <<http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=cps.033.0527a>> [accessed June 05 2006] pp. 527-548.



about looking for each other, or for the Grail, or something like that'<sup>475</sup>, says Cheryl Summerbee. Although it is highly improbable that Cheryl, a check-in clerk at Heathrow, would be able to come up with an utterance like that, the sentence may as well stand for *Small World* itself (yet another note of authorial self-appraisal is perceivably lurking in Cheryl's – Lodge's – summary).<sup>476</sup> Lodge stretches the notion even further. The novel's metafictional awareness is not limited to a preoccupation with its own 'romanceness'. Lodge also saw the possibility of addressing a more global literary agenda by projecting his interest in self-referentiality into the subgeneric evolution of the academic novel. In the following conversation Hillary Swallow and Morris Zapp (also known characters from *Changing Places*) contemplate the changing tendencies in the profession with regard to literature.

"That's how it is in the academic world these days [*i.e.* travelling to conferences all around the world]," said Morris Zapp. "I was telling a young guy at the conference just this morning. The day of the single, static campus is over."

"And the single, static campus novel with it, I suppose?" [Hillary Swallow]

"Exactly! Even two campuses wouldn't be enough. Scholars these days are like the errant knights of old, wandering the ways of the world in search of adventure and glory."<sup>477</sup>

The metafictional paradox in the quote is striking. This is the only case when the narrative, instead of its romanceness, makes references to its own campus-novelness. Hillary Swallow, with no literary education, is clearly not in the position to make such critical statements concerning the campus genre. Hillary Swallow and Morris Zapp apparently *know* about the larger context in which the novel they feature was conceived. Their acute knowledge concerning the existence and potential trends of the academic novel lends the meta-discourse a quality of obvious inconsistency. Whether Lodge was right in his prediction concerning the future of the campus novel, – now, more than twenty years after the publication of his novel – is clear: the academic novel did not follow the ways of the global campus and *Small World* has remained an idealized small world, experimental in many ways.

According to the romance expert Gillian Beer, romance 'frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations by drawing us entirely into its own world – a world which is otherwise unattainable'<sup>478</sup>. As has been pointed out, the metafictional quality of the text exerts a force

<sup>475</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p.258.

<sup>476</sup> The idea of self-referentiality is certainly the complete opposite of authorial unobtrusiveness, for which Lidia Vianu celebrated the novel in the first place (Lidia Vianu, *British Desperados at the Turn of the Millenium*, (Bucharest: LiterNet Publishing House, 2005) <<http://editura.liternet.ro/click.php?id=153&ver=pdf>> [accessed April 16 2006], pp. 196-197.)

<sup>477</sup> Lodge, *Small World*, p. 63.

<sup>478</sup> Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (New York: Methuen 1986), p. 3.

that is completely opposite in direction to the gravitational pull of the romance: metafiction is excessively and explicitly displays its own constructedness; the romance, on the other hand, strives to conceal this activity by completely engaging the reader. It may be argued that *Small World*, in effect, is the tug-of-war of these engaging and distancing techniques. There are forces on both sides. The issue ultimately boils down to the initial romance-novel opposition Hawthorne so well characterised in the preface of his *The House of the Seven Gables*. It is important to remember that academic fiction is primarily the product of literary mimesis. *Small World*, after all, is an academic novel because, firstly, it pictures a transitory change in the academic community in a rapidly globalizing world; secondly, because it takes a profound interest in the present state and future of literary criticism. Lodge also admitted that the basic idea of the novel is rooted in his first-hand experience as a commencing conference attendant. The extreme unlikelihood of the novel's action aims precisely at compensating for those components that would anchor *Small World* to the realist tradition in literature. The novel, as John Gross characterizes it, 'bristles with outrageous coincidences. As Persse's quest proceeds, it turns into a farrago of foundlings, identical twins, long-lost mothers, million-to-one chance meetings – in a word, it turns into an unashamed romance'<sup>479</sup>. Whether the forces that would engage and distance the reader are balanced is probably a matter of individual perception. Much of the allure of *Small World*, nevertheless, originates from the fact that the reader is compelled to keep stepping inside and outside the charmed circle of fiction.

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<sup>479</sup> John Gross, 'Books of the Times', *The New York Times* (March 8, 1985)  
 <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE6DA1139F93BA35750C0A963948260&sec=&pagewanted=1>> [accessed June 05 2006]

## X. Conclusion and Speculations

A page is an area on which I place my signs I consider to communicate most clearly what I have to convey [...] Therefore I employ within the pocket of my publisher and the patience of my printer, typographical techniques beyond the arbitrary and constricting limits of the conventional novel. To dismiss such techniques as gimmicks or to refuse to take them seriously is crassly to miss the point.

B. S. Johnson, *Albert Angelo*, p. 176.

Terms like ‘metapolitics’, ‘metarhetoric’ and ‘metatheatre’ are a reminder of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect construct and mediate their experience of the world.

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.

In 1898 George Saintsbury wrote an article entitled ‘Novels of University Life’ in which he expressed his belief that the time of university fiction was up. As the brief excerpt from his critique demonstrates below, Saintsbury founded his statement on observations related to the realities of English higher education, and on prevalent representational strategies that novelists had been employing in order to produce fictional renderings of university life.

Perhaps the day of University Novels, as such merely or mainly, is a little past. It came naturally when the Universities themselves became objects of interest and places of possible sojourn to a large proportion of people than had been the case earlier, and while this condition was more or less new. With completer vulgarisation the special attraction of the subject may cease.<sup>480</sup>

Needless to say, university fiction continued to exist. That the so-far uninterrupted readerly and critical interest in the subgenre is a consequence of a relentlessly evolving higher education *and* its not so rapidly evolving representational strategies is most probably true. Critical declarations which herald the death of the subgenre similarly to Saintsbury’s article,

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<sup>480</sup> George Saintsbury, ‘Novels of University Life’, *MacMillan’s Magazine* 77 (1898), p. 343.

nevertheless, tend to come to light whenever either there is a let-up in the pace of development in higher education, or when the novelty of certain individual representational modes completely wear out. In both cases it is the excessive exploitation of certain thematic or formal conventions that sets into motion the process of devaluation; putting it more blatantly, anything may become boring if it is pressed beyond a certain level of conventionality.

The title of the present dissertation implies periodization, and periodization, in turn, implies the shifting characteristics of the academic novel; both implications entail a complexity which academic fiction is hardly ever associated with. Rephrasing the title of the dissertation into a thesis sentence, it goes as follows. Thesis number one: the development of the academic novel can be divided into two main periods. The first is the so-called mimetic period which lasted up to the 1960s. Novelists of the mimetic academic fiction characteristically focussed on the thematic address of higher education. In the second, so-called metafictional period – which can be dated from the 1960s –, there is an evident enhancement in the thematic profile of academic fiction.

As Ian Carter and Kenneth Womack suggest, it may be argued that the innovative nature of postmodern academic fiction resides in its penchant for formal experimentation. The observation, however, is incorrect. While it is true that since the 1960s a significant amount of academic novels have been published which boldly combine the conventions of other genres or subgenres, it is systematically overlooked that even before the advent of postmodernism there had been a massive output of academic romances, academic mysteries, academic spy novels, academic satires and academic condition of England novels. My conviction is that postmodern academic fiction differs from all prior trends in the subgenre by its explicit and acute self-consciousness; hence the term ‘metafictional academic novel’. The self-consciousness or self-referentiality of postmodern academic fiction is quintessentially a *thematic* enhancement to the subgenre’s default interest in higher education. The new theme that self-conscious academic novels address is the art of fiction: its genesis, its constructedness and its reception.

Of course, a number of factors had contributed to the emergence of the postmodern academic novel. According to my thesis number two, the mimetic-metafictional shift in the development of academic fiction is the joint consequence of, firstly, the exhaustion of the subgenre’s internal representational devices which had been employed to further the thematic exploration of higher education; secondly, the large-scale exhaustion of the realist novel’s generic representational conventions. As to why exactly self-conscious fiction is what became

dominant after the 1960s, there are two answers. The first one is related to the exhaustion theory; namely, that it is in moments of exhaustion-generated paradigm shifts when novelists engage into the self-conscious introspective investigation of their fictions. To put it more simply, the wholesale endorsement of metafiction is a syndrome of literary exhaustion. One could immediately contradict my argument by pointing out that metafiction is still plentiful in spite of the fact that the crisis of the realist novel is for today a distant memory. The observation would be correct, but it is only the first half of my argument. Still adhering to thesis number two, I maintain that literary exhaustion can only trigger the appearance of large-scale fictional self-consciousness. The persistent presence and apparent flourishing of academic metafiction for the last fifty years is the consequence of another factor.

It is frequently argued that the appearance of a new race of novelists who are more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fictions, if not trained in literature – mostly university professors of literature –, have considerably advanced the development of self-conscious fiction. The statement, although it is true, greatly simplifies the matter. The writing of self-conscious fiction, *per se*, does not necessarily require literary training. Also, in spite of the fact that there must have surely been trained novelists of academic fiction before the 1960s, the number of metafictionally inclined academic novels written before the 1960s is insignificant. And here comes the second part of my argument, the sustained interest in metafiction since the 1960s is culturally encoded. As Patricia Waugh in one of the mottos at the beginning of this chapter so appropriately formulates, ‘terms like ‘metapolitics’, ‘metarhetoric’ and ‘metatheatre’ are a reminder of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world’.<sup>481</sup> Although Waugh wrote down her observation in 1984, the notion of widespread cultural self-consciousness has not abated a single bit for the last thirty-five years. Perhaps owing to my extensive knowledge about the notion of metafiction, I come across instances of unmistakably deliberate meta-reflections in television and radio programmes, contemporary films and, of course, fiction on a daily basis.

Apart from the metafictional novels that I have investigated in the present dissertation so far, John Williams’s *Stoner* (1973); Erik Tarloff’s *The Man Who Wrote the Book* (2000); Michael Malone’s *Foolscape* (1991); John L’Heureux’s *The Handmaid of Desire* (1996); James Hynes’ *The Lecturer’s Tale* (2002); John Hassler’s *The Dean’s List* (1998); Gail Godwin’s *The Good Husband* (1994); John Fowles’ *The Ebony Tower* (1974); Christine Brooke-Rose’ *Textermination* (1991); A. S. Byatt’s *Babel Tower* (1996), *The Biographer’s*

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<sup>481</sup> Waugh, p. 2.

*Tale* (2001); Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1952); Michael Fryan's *The Trick of It* (1989); Edith Skom's *The Mark Twain Murders* (1989); Sarah Smith's *Chasing Shakespeares* (2004); Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001); David Lodge's *The British Museum of Falling Down* (1965), *Changing Places* (1975), *Author, Author* (2004); Amanda Cross' *The Theban Mysteries* (1971), *The Question of Max* (1976), *The James Joyce Murder* (1981), *No Word from Winifred* (1986), *The Players Come Again* (1990), *Honest Doubt* (2000); Joanne Dobson's *The Northbury Papers* (1998), *The Maltese Manuscript* (2003); Robert Grudin's *Book* (1992); Stevie Davies' *Four Dreamers and Emily* (1997) and Alexander Theroux's *Darconville's Cat* (1981) are just some of those academic novels which have been written since the 1960s and are equipped with significant metafictional aspects.

It seems logical to pose the question why the metafictionality or the experimentalist relevance of a long list of academic novels has not been considered so far. Thesis number three provides an answer by arguing that in spite of the dramatic changes that have affected both the thematic scope and representational conventions of the academic novel, critics have essentially still interpret academic fiction on the basis of its referential content. I personally see the present dissertation as a much-needed critical catching up with the actualities of academic fiction.

The title of the present dissertation suggests that my research theme is as much academic fiction as much it is metafiction. It was during the investigation of the latter subject matter that I felt the necessity to come up with a comprehensive, yet practical taxonomy for arranging the various manifestations of metafictional writing. It is this taxonomy which is phrased in thesis number four: metafictional techniques can be placed in a fourfold system according to whether they exhibit explicit consciousness concerning, one: the author, two: the reader; three: the constructedness of the text, and four: the constructedness of non-fiction according to the rules of fiction. The four categories are respectively labelled as writerly, readerly, textual and non-fiction metafiction. The first three categories – also referred to as fictional metafiction – derive from the view that literary communication cannot take place without an originator, a medium and a recipient. Therefore, fictional self-consciousness can only manifest in reference to these three components. The fourth category, labelled as non-fictional metafiction, operates according to a deconstructionist reversal – i.e. it contradicts the separability of reality and fiction by arguing that experiential reality is structured according to the constitutive principles of fiction –, owing to which it is treated outside the scope of the tripartite system of fictional metafiction. It is the undeniably dramatic influence of

deconstructionism on postmodern thought which necessitated the inclusion of the ostensibly incompatible non-fictional metafiction into my study of self-conscious fiction.

One of the most interesting observations of my research is that the two major thematic interests of the metafictional academic novel – i.e. higher education and the art of fiction – can harmoniously coexist with each other with the slightest hint of narrative discrepancy. For a while I considered my observation unprecedented, until I came across Gerald Prince's *Narratology* (1982). In the chapter entitled 'Metanarrative Signs' Prince argues that the metanarrative sign is a moment of reflexivity in narrative which, like Jakobson's referential function, can happily coexist with straightforward referential aspects of the narrative.<sup>482</sup> Although I cannot claim to have discovered the notion of this coexistence, investigating how this thematic symbiosis manifests in individual novels has been a rewarding experience.

As Patricia Waugh rightly observes, 'metafictional novels and their authors explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing'<sup>483</sup>. The statement is pregnant with relevant implications. First of all, the exploration of fiction within fiction presupposes an authorial will. That this authorial will is not a mere conjecture becomes obvious from the fact that the various manifestations of metafiction are normally meant to be explicit and flaunting; they are meant to be noticed by the reader.<sup>484</sup> It is not infrequent that metafictional novels contain explicit authorial participation, whereby they communicate to readers about their craft in the form of direct speech. Secondly, the metafictional message of self-conscious novels is generally conveyed on a level of intelligibility which does not exceed the capabilities of the average reader. The more intellectually inclined branch of metafiction labelled as theoretical fiction is clearly *intended* for a somewhat expert reader. Thirdly, which is also my fifth thesis, as far as authorial intention is concerned, metafiction clearly runs counter to the so-called anti-intentionalist school in literary criticism. It is especially writerly metafictions which provide irrefutable evidence that the critical reception of the metafictional academic novel can, and at times should be predicated on an attempt to seek authorial intention.

During my readings of metafictional academic novels I have been often reminded of David Copperfield, the popular illusionist, who, occasionally, accepts invitations to television programmes to reveal parts of his craft. I cannot miss the analogy between Copperfield the disillusionist and metafictional novelists. Applying Coleridge's well-known dictum, both the making and the reception of fiction is predicated on the willing suspension of disbelief;

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<sup>482</sup> Gerald Prince, *Narratology* (New York: Monton, 1982), pp. 115-128.

<sup>483</sup> Waugh, p. 40.

<sup>484</sup> Of course, extended metafiction greatly mutes the discursive contrast which triggers readerly awareness of the presence of fictional self-consciousness.

which, generally, amounts to declaring that fiction is predicated on the sustenance of illusion. Metafictional novels and novelists are the so-called literary disillusionists – or as Klinkowitz would have it, anti-illusionists<sup>485</sup> –, who lay bare, reveal and unmask the craft of conjuring illusion in fiction; and the process of exposure inevitably destabilizes the reader's immersion in the fictional world.

The traditional idea of maintaining the illusion that fiction creates is basically a convention. This convention has been ingrained in the average reader. Metafiction, basically, depends on the presence of this convention. In this dependence of metafiction on the convention of illusion, nevertheless, it is already encoded that for metafiction to continue to exist it should never stop changing and evolving. In a sense, change is the single one tool with which metafiction can ensure its existence. Why? The answer is simple. For those generations which have acquired literary conventions and their reading habits since the 1960s, metafiction is surely becoming more and more familiar. Projected forward, this process of familiarization may settle one day, and for the average future reader metafictional or non-metafiction will eventually be just two different conventions. If that takes place, the novel would most probably go through another literary revolution, as disruptive in nature as modernism and postmodernism were. Although the eventual conventionalization of metafiction is a possibility, for the time being, metafiction shows no signs of fatigue.

Metafiction fulfils a vital function in the development of human thought and consciousness: it makes us aware that 'neither historical experiences nor literary fictions are unmediated or unprocessed or non-linguistic'<sup>486</sup>. This recognition plays an instrumental role in unsettling our familiar concepts concerning the nature of 'truth' and 'fiction', and possibly helps us on our way to achieve a more comprehensive and viable understanding of our world which is both material and linguistic. The metafictional academic novel has proved especially suitable for this noble purpose, perhaps owing to the fact that metafiction and academe overlap in attempting to discover the human condition, be it considered real or fictional.

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<sup>485</sup> Klinkowitz, p. 161.

<sup>486</sup> Waugh, p. 30.



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