Fabulations:
A Metafictional Study of Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Charles Palliser, and Robert Kroetsch

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled "Fabulations: A Metafictional Study of Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Charles Palliser, and Robert Kroetsch" is a *bona fide* record of the research work carried out by Hari K.V. Kollaroth at the Department of English, University of Calicut. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition.

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DECLARATION

I, Hari K.V. Kollaroth, hereby declare that this thesis is a *bona fide* record of the research undertaken by me, and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or title.

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PREFACE

Human beings must have started telling stories even before language attained the status of a fully developed system of communication. The story existed in different forms; in the form of a tall tale, a juicy morsel of gossip, or a narrative with mythical or religious connotations. In the long course of time, stories with moral lessons must have originated. But the basic aim of a story seems to be pleasure. Later they also must have found out that the story can be used for ulterior motives; to manipulate somebody or to project an agreeable view about oneself.

The story, primarily, is a narrative. In the long run, it became a source of comfort and solace when faced with the bewildering chaos of events, apparently meaningless. If those events had no order, they managed to impose an order on the stories at their disposal. Those stories had a neat order and came to an end tying up all the loose ends together. The indomitable spirit of human beings refused to give in to the forces of death and destruction. Some of those narratives had mythical connotations; sometimes they reached to heights out of the reach of the physical. Stories had their own conventions. It worked only within the bounds of those conventions. The grandma would tell stories at bedtime, but the listeners were not supposed to ask any questions in the middle. Even the most inquisitive one, who had a burning question within, had to suppress the urge to voice it.

Asking a question would not only irritate the teller, but would also result in the termination of the tale.

Long after that came a time when stories make no secret of their make-believe nature. Metafiction is fiction that is candid about the process in which it comes into being. The abandonment of the illusionary principle does not spoil the story, but adds richness to it. Now it is capable of theorising about itself, and looks back on the long history of its development. The oral tale also finds a legitimate place in this discussion.

Self-consciousness is an inherent feature of postmodern narratives. Postmodern films reveal the techniques of their own making. This kind of self-reflexiveness is not the result of a rupture in novel tradition. Theorists trace it back to literary works as old as Miguel Cervantes's fifteenth century novel; *Don Quixote.* Metafictional tendencies are there in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy.* In the heyday of Victorian realism, Jane Austen takes up the theme of novel writing in *Northanger Abbey.* The most explicit of metafictions were published in the nineteen fifties and sixties. John Barth's Lost *in the Funhouse* (1968), Robert Coover's *The* Babysitter (1969), and William H Gass' *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* (1968) popularised metafiction.

Metafiction does not let the reader forget at least for a moment that she/he is a part of the game of fiction. Elaborate textual games drive home the typical metafictional themes: history as a construct, language as an arbitrary system and the working of the fiction within

fiction. Conventions are broken for foregrounding their conventionality. Life-art connection is subjected to radical re-analysis. Literature is a second-order signifying system based on the structure of language. Theoreticians like Vladimir Propp and Roland Barthes have demonstrated the working of the system. The constituent elements assume meaning as a result of the sign value. The emphasis is more on the system as a whole. Roland Barthes' theories were instrumental in preparing the intellectual climate necessary for the proliferation of metafiction.

Among the precursors of metafiction, the Argentinian writer Borges stands apart with his amazing stature. He imagined the universe as the Library of Babel, where the whole of the world is contained in the books on the shelves. In one of his stories, "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*", a twentieth-century French author learns Spanish and starts rewriting *Don Quixote* in exactly the same words. He wanted to show that identical passages assume different meanings against the backdrop of a different century. The detective plot was a serious concern for Borges. His metaphors like the labyrinth and the library are invoked by metafictionists very often.

To a certain extent, metafiction was influenced by the critical theories that originated in the seventies and eighties. These critical schools, in their own fashion, deconstructed the received notion of literature as a system that embodied eternal truth. The feminist critics came down upon the old literature dubbing it as an agent of male domination. Marxian critics investigated into the capitalist

agenda of literature. Freudian critics were scanning literature for signs of repression. The deconstructionists conceived literature as a relativist system of signs open to endless signification. The conventional meaning of literature is subverted by all these approaches. In short, these critical schools shared an anti-humanist base. Human nature and culture were problematised entities in their terminology. Fiction could not keep aloof from the changes happening around, and naturally started probing the discursive contexts in which the story comes into being. By and large, reality and its representation were the basic concerns of metafiction. However, postmodernism has brought about cataclysmic changes in every sphere of human activity. The most conspicuous of its impacts lies in the complication of reality. Technological advancements, especially in the field of communication, have contributed to it significantly. The old distinction between 'reality' and 'performance' seems to be fading. In the history of literary criticism, a number of critics have tried to theorise on the metafictional phenomenon. Robert Alter, Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon, Mark Curry, Brian McHale etc. deserve special mention. This study has tried to incorporate the critical response of these critics.

The authors selected for this study represent different aspects of the metafictional trend. Robert Kroetsch is a Canadian novelist and poet. A deep involvement with the tradition of storytelling is the hallmark of his novels. *The Puppeteer* (1992) is about the writing of an autobiography and *The Studhorse Man* (1970) deals with a

biography. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) symbolises an all encompassing concern with history and fiction. Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) has got the status of a modern classic because it is a serious enquiry into meaning making in literature. Charles Palliser is an American-born British-based novelist. His first novel *The Quincunx* (1989) itself grabbed the attention of serious reviewers and academic critics. *Betrayals* (1994) represents a later stage of metafiction. For the sake of convenience, the following abbreviations have been used for the primary texts- *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller (IWNT), The French Lieutenant's Woman (FLW), Betrayals (BS), The Puppeteer (TP), The Studhorse Man (SM).*

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Chapter I

The Metafictional Angle

The term 'metafiction' was first used by William H. Gass, American novelist and critic, in the late nineteen sixties to describe contemporary novels that were somehow about fiction itself. Since then, metafiction has seen dramatic developments in terms of critical reception, ranging from outright dismissal to wholehearted approval. Literary history tells us that initial reaction to metafiction, by critics as well as readers, was far from favourable. Majority of commentators dismissed it as decadent, suicidal, and symptomatic of the death of the novel. Such a reaction was natural, given the fact that speculation was rife about the novel being an obsolete art form in the late sixties. Critics like Susan Sontag added fuel to the rumours about the death of the novel. In their readings, metafictional techniques reflected the inability of the traditional form of fiction to capture the complexities of the electronic age. Instead of paying attention to the positive implications of fictional self-consciousness, they interpreted such a literary development as a form of self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of the genre. However, critics at a later stage began to recognise metafiction as a positive development that adds richness and flexibility to the genre.

It is rather easy to see the indebtedness of this self-reflexive form to contemporary philosophical, linguistic and literary theories.

The twentieth century had seen radical changes in the way language is approached. In the new perspective, language is no longer regarded as a transparent medium that 'reflects' the world outside. Structuralist and poststructuralist theorists observe that language is an independent and self-contained system that generates its own meaning and mediates our experience of the world. The argument is that it is not possible to 'represent' the world as such, but only to 'reproduce' it through the complex system of language. Thus, the attempts to 'represent' the world invariably end in representing the 'discourses' of that world. This is the message that metafiction is trying to convey through its stylistic and structural innovations. A metafictional text proudly displays its conventions and artifice.

Robert Alter is one of the critics who attempted to define metafiction in *The Partial Magic* as: "A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality" (10). Patricia Waugh is another critic who has done a serious study of metafiction. She comments in her *Metafiction*:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative

> fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text. (2)

Both the definitions, with their emphasis on the same points underline the degree of critical consensus regarding the basic characteristics of metafiction. It is noticeable that the above definitions stress the significance of metafiction in the context of our understanding of the outside reality. The ultimate significance of metafiction lies in its pointing a finger at the construction of the extra-textual reality.

One reason why metafiction upsets conventional readers and critics is that it employs a large number of textual strategies that challenge the established tradition. Self-conscious fiction is bent on the debunking of illusionary principle in fiction. It taunts the reader from time to time to drive home the fact that the genre is built on the make-believe principle. At the same time, metafictional texts present traditional realist prose as well as self-reflexive elements. For example, it is only in the thirteenth chapter of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* that John Fowles breaks the illusionist principle and shocks the reader with a proclamation that it is nothing but fiction. The juxtaposition of both the models enables the metafictionist to facilitate a dialogue between them in terms of their ontological and aesthetic dimensions. Seen from another perspective, this coexistence affirms the relevance of the conventional mode within the new paradigm. The representation of the traditional base is a necessity because metafiction undertakes the task of dealing with the history of the

genre through its text. The primary significance of metafiction lies in this critical role. Commenting on the relevance of metafiction, Patricia Waugh says:

> This form of fiction is worth studying not only because of its contemporary emergence but also because of the insight it offers into both representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as genre. By studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity. (5)

This is the reason why metafiction is considered to be capable of theorising about it. The most remarkable feature here is the ability of the individual text to make statements that have a bearing on the history of the genre. In other words, the primary text is usurping the role of the critic.

Metafiction seems like the flowering of a tendency that found expression from time to time in the long history of the genre. Occasionally, there had been texts that refused to conform to the narrow concept of 'mimesis'. Metafiction attempts to undermine the aesthetics that reduced fiction into the limiting terms of a mirror theory. At the same time, an analysis of the history of Western aesthetics shows that, right from Aristotle, art was considered to be an imitation of the extratextual reality and the higher the verisimilitude, the better was the value attached to it. Linda Hutcheon has commented in *Narcissistic Narrative* on the historical significance of metafiction:

> The course of literary history is being altered, and, as always, it is being altered by the texts, not the critics. In fact, this new narcissistic fiction is allowing a re-evaluation of the novels of the past, thanks to its challenging of the inadequate, reified critical notion of 'realism' based on a narrow product mimesis alone. (39)

The non-conformism attributed to metafiction lies in its positing an alternative to the narrow 'product mimesis'. It does not simply bank upon the 'realistic' impact of the techniques used to bring about such results in conventional fiction.

However, a concerted attempt to find an alternative to the poetics of mimetic adequacy had not been made till the 19th century. Novel critics in the nineteenth century were preoccupied with the moral implications of the text. Henry Fielding's novels mark a significant stage in the genesis of the novel. Fielding's avowed aim, quite in tune with the prevalent aesthetic concepts, was to bring about improvements in the reader.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, mainly in the critical propositions of Flaubert and later of Henry James, novel criticism seems to have embarked on its search for an alternative aesthetics to the dominant mimetic one. Flaubert was a trail-blazer because his focus was not limited to the subject matter, but he paid attention to the stylistic aspects too. In spite of a genuine interest in reality, Flaubert tried to lead fiction away from pure realism, the mere imitation of the day-to-day life. John Halperin in *The Theory of the*

Novel calls Flaubert "the first modern theorist of the novel" (12). Further, it can be seen that his theories of fiction anticipated many of the fundamental features of modernism in fiction. Just like Henry James' theories, they are remarkable for their significant departures from the mode and content of the early nineteenth century novel theory. With Flaubert, the inter-relationship of the constituent elements of an aesthetic creation and their relation to the work as a whole claims attention while the moral function of art takes a less prominent place. In this sense, Flaubert was the first writer to expound a systematic and widely applicable theory of the novel more concerned with its stylistics than with its didactic aims. Flaubert's pioneering spirit gets recognition from none other than Roland Barthes when he comments in *Writing Degree Zero*:

> Flaubert. . . finally established literature as an object, through promoting literary labour to the status of a value, form became the end-product of craftsmanship, like a piece of pottery or a jewel. . . .The whole of literature, from Flaubert to the present day became a problematics of language. (4-5)

Henry James represents another turning point in the history of novel criticism. The twin concerns for James were the psychological representation of characters through the dramatic method and the unobtrusiveness of the artist in the text. He also paid attention to the regulation of the style in accordance with the subject matter treated. Stephen Hazell commented in *The English Novel* that "modern

criticism of the English novel took its major impulse from Henry James" (14) and it aptly summarises Henry James' contribution to the novel tradition. He infused a wave of new energy into fiction by taking literary theories away from moral intention and bringing it closer to a preoccupation with the aesthetic base of the narrative structure.

Twentieth-century novel theory, on the other hand, brings an intense concern with the autonomy of the fictional text. Registering a radical break with the didactic preoccupations of nineteenth-century fiction itself becomes a big step towards a concern with the autonomy of the text. Modernist fiction signifies the culmination of this trend. The critic's effort, in reading an early modernist work of fiction, is less directed towards an investigation into didactic impact or verisimilitude. At the same time, realistic effects are neither disparaged nor abandoned. In critical terms, it means less emphasis on the relationship between reader and text and an enhanced interest in the relationship among the various structural components of the work of fiction.

It is interesting to note the reader-text relationship taking a different form in metafiction. It dramatises the role of the author in actualising the text as a structure of meaning, whereas nineteenth-century fiction looked forward to the moralistic impact of fiction on the reader. Virginia Woolf's canonical essay, "Modern Fiction" where she denounced authors like Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy as "materialists", and applauded James Joyce, signalled a rebellion against the reigning mimetic code in fiction. It was nothing less than

the rejection of the accepted conventions of realism when she said, "They (writers like James Joyce) attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelists" (107). What she denounces as materialism here is a preoccupation with the supposedly mirror-like presentation of an extratextual reality aimed by the nineteenth-century writers in keeping with the existent norms of fiction. In place of a presumably objective reality, Woolf introduces a shift of focus that is in favour of the individual consciousness and its perception of reality.

Reality or its representation in fiction is problematised here when Virginia Woolf advocates a new psychological reality and rejects the received notion of reality and fiction. Even though this does not amount to a major revolution in the epistemological terms governing the definition of reality, it foreboded changes. Modernists underlined the presence of 'realities' as perceived by different 'subject positions'. The thrust is upon the individual consciousness and the way it perceives reality, whereas in metafiction, it is upon language and literature as semiotic systems. Modernist fiction has got its moorings strong in the mimetic tradition. Analysing the modernist challenge to the classic realist tradition in fiction, Johnnie Gratton observes:

> In the modern novel, as in the visual arts, the main codes under attack are those sustained by the orthodoxy of classical nineteenth-century realism, with the attack itself

> often being justified in the name of a 'higher' form of the same basic mimetic urge, such as psychological realism, which prioritises the inner world of human subjectivity, or 'phenomenological' realism, which tracks the outer world as physically experienced by a human subject. (242)

In Gratton's account, modernist fiction represents a movement away from the tenets of classical nineteenth-century realism. Even though the realism propounded by modernists like Joyce and Woolf is part of the same mimetic principle, it challenges the 'reality concept' that formed the basis of classic realism. It expressed full faith in the existence of an objective reality that can be mirrored in fiction. Modernist fiction challenges the same when it puts the emphasis on the individual consciousness. It conceives reality as perceived in different ways by different points of view.

Linda Hutcheon, as a critic, has contributed tremendously to the discussions on metafiction. It is also a demonstration of the principle that new theoretical formulations and critical tools are developed to explain radical forms. When self-conscious fiction began to make its presence felt, most of the critics were either dismissive or critical about it. Hutcheon's theory of 'the mimesis of process' is capable of explaining this new development in a comprehensive manner, with special reference to the literary tradition. It is a result of her perceptive and incisive study of the various manifestations of textual narcissism in writers from different countries.

Hutcheon observes that the largely negative reviews that greeted self-conscious fiction were occasioned by the inability of the existing critical concepts to account for it. Metafiction moved in a direction diametrically opposite to the popular nineteenth-century form of novelistic realism. Theoretical base of traditional realism manipulated the reader to identify the finished products of imitation like 'characters' and the 'social milieu' and recognise their verisimilitude to the empirical reality for determining their literary value. The agent of creation and his imaginative powers were always hailed. Moreover, the codes and conventions of the genre that materialised the production of meaning were concealed. This, in a way, was a corollary of the traditional view of 'creation', the author by means of his mysterious powers fulfilling the act of creation. The conventional text, in this manner, construes the reader as a consumer.

On the other hand, metafiction incorporates self-reflexive statements that redefine the ontology of the fictional text. It makes no secret of the conventions by which fiction assumes its meaning. The reader is no longer passive before the text; she/he will have to be responsible for the act of creation and decoding. The complex process by means of which the reader derives meaning is often thematised in the metafictional text. The shift of focus from the 'product' to the 'process' signals epistemological changes for the fictional artifice. Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative* makes her stand clear as follows:

> Since product mimesis alone does not suffice to account for the new function of the reader as they are thematised in the

> texts themselves, a mimesis of process must perhaps be postulated. The novel no longer seeks just to provide an order and meaning to be recognized by the reader. It now demands that he is conscious of the work, the actual construction that he too is undertaking. . . . (39)

The "mimesis of process" exactly suits the theoretical premises of the new fiction. The question as to whether the shift of focus means an abandonment of the principle of mimesis is relevant. The essential nature of the novel as a mimetic genre does not change as a result of the inclusion of mimesis of process in the aesthetics of the novel. At the same time, it is a more comprehensive theory of mimesis that pre-empts the function of the critic by commenting on the role of the reader. This theoretical formulation also underscores the inadequacy of the rigid notion of product mimesis that reduced the genre into the narrow terms of the nineteenth century realistic novel.

The story and its telling were deprived of their innocuous aura in the twentieth century. The turning point in this respect was the profusion of theories that came forth from academicians trained in the structuralist and poststructuralist schools of thought. The propositions made by Ferdinand de Saussure on the nature and function of language in the human world were the starting point. It brought about fundamental changes in novel criticism. Post-Saussurean postulations had a direct bearing on novel criticism in the sense that many of the fundamental structures of traditionalism came under attack from the radicals.

The authors, on the other hand, were not indifferent to the dynamic discussions happening around. Some of them were deeply influenced by the Saussurean and poststructuralist theories, that they rejected the received notions of a fictional text and experimented with the newly emerging form. The reach and influence of these theories were so vast that few writers could stand apart. John Fowles' statement in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* speaks volumes about this phenomenon. "But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word" (85). The primary target of the Post-Saussurean thinkers was the concept of realism which presupposes that literary texts tell 'truth' about the period in which they were produced. Moreover, it conceived the author as a unique individual capable of expressing her/his individual vision of the objective reality outside. So, one of the commonsensical views of literature that came under fire was expressive realism; a fusion of the Aristotalean notion of 'mimesis' and the romantic conception of poetry as the expression of the perceptions and emotions of a person gifted with a superior sensibility. The fundamental duty of the author is to be true to nature, the subordinate one being that of expressing a personal and unique perception of that truth. When it comes to novel, expressive realism can be taken to mean 'verisimilitude' and 'honesty' in portraying the world of social relationship, blending it with a unique inner experience. The novel, essentially, is an expression of the

author's experience of the reality and his convictions are shaped by the socio-economic forces of the time.

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) was the starting point of the revolution. The strategies of Post-Saussurean critics are firmly grounded in the new linguistic theories propounded by Saussure. It starts from an analysis of language and tries to prove that language is not a transparent medium through which individuals transmit messages about an independent world outside it. From the opacity of language, they move on to show that it is language which plays the major role in constructing a world of things and ideas and in differentiating between them.

Saussure maintained that far from being a system of nomenclature, language is a system of differences with no positive terms. It is a system of signs, a 'sign' consists of a 'signifier' (the graphic or acoustic image) and a 'signified'. The relationship between the sign and the signified, at the same time, is arbitrary. But for a speaker of the language, the signifier and the signified are inseparable; the sound image 'horse' invokes the 'horse' and not the concept of 'dog'. This inseparability of the signifier and the signified creates the illusion of the transparency of language for the speaker, which in turn, results in a feeling that 'horse' is a natural label for an entity that exists unproblematically and independently in the world outside. If that had been the case, that is--words stood for pre-existing concepts--there would have been exact equivalents in meaning in different languages. But that is not the case. One example given by

Saussure is that of '*mouton.*' While there is only one word *mouton* in French, English speakers differentiate between 'sheep' which shepherds take out for grazing and 'mutton' which is eaten.

On the other hand, Saussure argued that language precedes the existence of independent entities and it makes the world cognizable to us by differentiating between concepts. There are no positive terms in language, only differential terms. Words acquire meaning not by virtue of their positive content but due to their differences with other terms of the signifying system. The wider signifying system is a creation of the society. Language is a matter of convention and only the social factor can create a linguistic system. As meaning is not inherent in the language, it is socially constructed as a result of a tacit agreement to attach certain signifieds to specific signifiers. Thus, it can be seen that such a system is a necessity for its various functions like the social organisation and social exchange. This underlines the conventional and public nature of meaning.

It is at this point that the question of ideology, which has been a convenient weapon in the hands of many poststructuralist critics in attacking 'classic realism', comes into the picture. In the light of the above postulations regarding the role of the language in the construction of meaning and social formation, it can be argued that language participates in ideology, "the sum total of the ways in which both people live and represent to themselves their relationship to the conditions of their existence" (42). This definition of ideology is given by Catherine Belsey in her famous *Critical Practice.* As Barthes has

demonstrated in *Mythologies*, ideology is always at work, in signifying systems like myths and discourses.

One example that is often cited to show the role of ideology in the construction of meaning through language is the use of 'man' or 'men' to mean people in general. Feminists have taken strong exception to the ways in which 'women' are excluded from history as a result of the obvious role played by patriarchal ideology in shaping our signifying system. In the above cited example, the words denoting male persons are used as the common gender nouns. Such a phenomenon, establishing an implicit equation between 'people' and 'male', assigns a secondary role to women, inferior to men.

In recent years, feminist critics have launched a massive campaign against the supposed ideological bias that is inscribed in the ordinary language. Some other common examples of sexist usage are words like 'spokesman' and 'chairman'. In the face of stiff resistance from feminists demanding more politically correct expressions, usages like 'spokesperson', 'chairperson', etc. have come to replace the earlier ones with an alleged sexual bias.

It is from the same philosophical premises--one that argues that signifieds are not pre-existing given concepts, but contingent and man-made--that poststructuralist critics attacked the validity of common sense and its role in naturalising many of the constructed signifying systems around us. Thus, from this perspective, radical theorists demolish the concept of language as a neutral nomenclature that transmits the meanings which exist independently outside it.

They argue that signifieds are not pre-existing transcendental concepts, but contingent, and therefore changeable. Language-learning is not an innocent process of acquiring the transparent medium, but we are being manipulated by language. Language speaks us and it is not a totality of pre-existing and given entities, but a man-made system of differences in the construction of which society plays a dominant role.

Poststructuralists problematise the traditional notion of common sense using the same strategy. Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* has shown the fallibility of the concept of commonsense by debunking many ideological myths masquerading as 'nature'. Structuralists demonstrated the intricate ways in which our thinking is related to language and other signifying systems like myth, social behaviour, gestures etc. The relationship between language and thought is precisely what explains the commonsensical or empiricist theory of language.

Such a line of thought leads the post-Saussurean theorists to question the validity of a realist concept of art. In the absence of a transcendental and pre-existing reality, realism's claims regarding the reflection of a world can only be interpreted as the reflection of a world constructed in language. From this perspective, 'the real nature of the world' is not reflected in literature as it is only a reflection of the various discourses through which we perceive the world, mainly banking on the now problematised 'commonsense'.

According to these theories, one of the most important consequences of the tradition of classic realism was an unproductive text and a passive reader. The classic realist text never tried to foreground the intricacies of its own making, and the text was presented to the reader as a finished product. An 'alienation effect' that Brecht had proposed for the drama was never proposed for the novel embedded in a tradition of illusion. The teachings of post-Saussurean criticism emphasised the need for a revolution in the ways of production and reception of a text, one that would free the reader from the bondage of a passive readership. In conventional literary criticism, the emphasis is not on the construction of meaning, but on truth and expressiveness. In these terms, the literary text was endowed with a transcendental status, a result of the mysterious process called 'creation'.

A critic like Catherine Belsey blames the capitalist ideology for propagating the notion of the literary work as a finished product embodying magical and timeless value. (See *Critical Practice*) Capitalism, according to her, always suppressed the process of production. The products are always associated with consumption, but never with the conditions of production. Goods are displayed or advertised in settings which simulate the conditions of their consumption or use; the labour involved is absent and the process is rendered mysterious or opaque. Transferring this logic to literary production, Catherine Belsey observes:

> A precisely similar suppression occurs in conventional literary criticism. The literary text is seen not as a construct, the result of a process, but as the natural reflection of the world it delineates or the spontaneous expression of its author's subjectivity. (126)

In tune with the above expressed critical principles, the post-Saussurean critics call for a productive critical practice that does not treat the text as an object of consumption, but subjects it to radical readings which make the work reveal its contradictions. The critic directs his efforts towards the discovery of plural meanings offered by the text; that often reaches even up to the conditions of its creation and the ideology inscribed in it. It is in this context that self-conscious novels which reject the illusionary principle of classic realism assume significance. These developments in linguistics and criticism, since Saussure has brought literature down to the level of other discourses depriving it of the privileged status, make self-conscious fiction an acceptable textual practice. While anti-traditionalists call for a productive critical practice that sheds light on the conditions of literary production; metafictional texts foreground the same, pre-empting the role of the critic. In this process, the text itself creates the conditions suitable for a creative 'reading,' that never look down upon the reader as a 'consumer', but as a 'co-producer'.

Experimentalism and trends like metafiction became a matter of debate in the 1950s. To defend realism in the fifties did not simply mean sympathy for empiricism and commonsense, but a broad

commitment to liberal humanism. Those who defended the old tradition dismissed experimentalism as decadent, politically reactionary and elitist. Kingsley Amis, William Cooper and C. P. Snow argued strongly in favour of realism and attacked the experimental group vehemently. Kingsley Amis said in defence of realism: "Believable stories about understandable characters in a reasonably straightforward style: no tricks, no experimental foolery" (40). Defenders of traditional realism also made it a point to line up behind liberal humanist philosophy. At the same time, there was a belief among many observers that one of the reasons why some of the authors abandoned realism in favour of more radical forms was their lack of faith in the conventional methods of representation. The explanation was that it was no longer adequate for capturing the new reality; so extraordinary, horrific or absurd. But the staunch realists still looked upon their contemporaries as unique historical individuals living together on the basis of certain common assumptions and methods of communication.

Authors like B. S. Johnson and Brooke-Rose were in the vanguard of the experimental group. They believed that the contemporary novel should investigate language, reveal its own provisional and fictional status and refuse what they perceived as realism's univocal perspective. They also deplored the treatment of modernism as an aberrant interlude in the history of the novel. B. S. Johnson felt that Joyce was only a starting point, and reality being mutable, its new representations were required.

At the same time, there were authors who advocated a more flexible theoretical basis for fiction. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel is neither associated with any particular social group nor defined by any given form. It is characterised by fluidity; for its features belong to no system of fixed generic characteristics. For him, it is associated with 'low' parodic literatures that ridicule 'high' culture and undermine the language of hegemonic groups. Bakhtin said that "the novel has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, not canonic" (39).

Analysing the history of critical response to metafiction, it can be seen that David Lodge stands out as a critic who treated the question seriously. Metafiction and experimental fiction were perceived as a direct challenge to the traditional mode of realism. This, in turn, was associated with the liberal humanist philosophy. As Lodge states it in "The Novelist at the Crossroads", "if the case for realism has any ideological content, it is that of liberalism" (113).

Everywhere in his critical writings, Lodge asserts his concern for realism, but he is sensible enough to understand and admit that novelists are experimenting with it in manifold ways. He has no apprehensions about the future of realism, but believes that it has to be re-defined to accommodate the changes. "The Novelist at the Crossroads," as the title indicates, has been a typical response to metafiction, a development that has been termed as decadent and suicidal by some other critics. The thought pattern in the essay is formulated in response to Robert Schole's critical work *The Fabulators* where Scholes endorsed the experimental writings of authors like

John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut and Iris Murdoch as valid reactions to the exhaustion of the realist mode in fiction. The reason for such a development, given by Scholes, was that the novel could no longer sustain a synthesis of the 'empirical' and the 'fictional' strains that it had achieved in its better days. With the disintegration setting in, these fabulators had started exploring the fictional possibilities of the genre, as the empirical strand that is closer to realism faded away from the scene.

Lodge quarrels with such a neat and uncomplicated thesis ruling out realism and the empirical mode. According to him, the novel form cannot be just reduced into the experimental and the overtly imaginative alone. On the other hand, Lodge identifies four categories; the first one the already decayed traditional novel, secondly the non-fiction novel, thirdly the fabulation and the fourth category of the novel which exploits more than one of these modes without fully committing itself to any.

By the second category of the non-fiction novel, he means the novels of authors like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer who had claimed to have written novels true to history, without any attempt at falsification of the details. Lodge denotes the fourth category as rather eclectical in technical and thematic concerns; the various types being the trick-novel, the game-novel, the puzzle-novel and most importantly the novel that investigates the relation of art to life. Lodge prefers to call it the 'problematical novel' and admits its obvious affinities with both the non-fiction novel and fabulation. Incidentally,

this strain, identified as the problematical by Lodge, is what came to be called metafiction later. This is how David Lodge defines it:

> Whereas the fabulator is impatient with 'reality', and the non-fiction novelist is impatient with fiction, the kind of novelist I am talking about retains a loyalty to both, but lacks the orthodox novelist's confidence in the possibility of reconciling them. He makes the difficulty of his task, in a sense, his subject. (110)

The wholehearted approval that is evident in David Lodge's comment on metafiction a few years later in *The Art of Fiction* is indicative of the degree of acceptance it had found among readers and critics. David Lodge, who was opposed to experimentation, said, "In fact, so far from being a failure, *Slaughterhouse Five* is Vonnegut's masterpiece and one of the most memorable novels of the post-war period in English" (210).David Lodge's words have to be weighed against the radical form of Kurt Vonnegut's work *Slaughterhouse Fire* (1969) which features stunning frame-breaks and a shocking admission, quite uncharacteristic of conventional fiction, about the 'failure' of the project.

When metafiction was recognised as a development deserving critical attention, the question that arose was that of the relation of self-consciousness and novel tradition. The majority of critics who analysed the history of fiction for signs of self-consciousness were of the opinion that it had a long association with novel tradition. Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* was a

pioneering study that attempted to study the critical implications of narrative narcissism.

In his search for signs of narrative narcissism, Alter turns to Renaissance Spain and concludes that *Don Quixote* was the earliest example of self-consciousness. Alter demonstrated that scenes like those in which Quixote is shown reading the book in which his adventures are described are obvious examples of the text's concern with the question of the relationship between the reality and its portrayal in the book. He also drew attention to the presence of multiple narrators in some older texts and interpreted it as a sign of the awareness of the fictitiousness of represented action.

The textual complexities in *Don Quixote* offer immense scope for metafictional analysis. Cervantes insinuates that the real narrator of the story is an Arab, Cide Hamete Benengeli, and he was notorious for his unreliability. On certain occasions, *Don Quixote* foregrounds topics like historical accuracy, and the relation of history and fiction. The second 'narrator' has got serious roles to perform, translating and editing the original text; thus pointing to the layers of discourse in the novel. Anthony J Cascardi comments on the textual intricacies of *Don Quixote*: "Because of the way in which *Don Quixote* is framed, it establishes the novel as a genre that is textually subtle and intertextually rich" (66).

Some commentators who have looked into the issue of tradition listed out antecedents like Chaucer's framing device in *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's plays within plays. The narrative framework

in the epistolary form, intertextual parodies in Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* also have been pointed out as instances of narcissism. Gabriel Josipovici in *The World and the Book: A study of Modern Fiction* pointed to the medieval allegories of Langland and Dante and their indifference to the realistic principle.

Tristram Shandy displays an intense concern with the ordering devices in fiction; the diagrams, unusual uses of type, and strange numbering of the pages clearly point in this direction. The self-reflexive devices in the novel also include discussions about critics, different kinds of readers, different narrative conventions etc. In fact, there are plenty of instances to show that *Tristram Shandy* presents novel writing as a highly artificial activity, mainly based on conventions. Many of the stylistic devices in the text shed light on the ontological questions of the novel form. Robert Alter makes this comment on *Tristram Shandy:*

> *Tristram Shandy* is a continuous demonstration and celebration of the irrepressible power and ubiquity of the imagination, but at the same time Sterne must repeatedly concede the possibility, so palpable in the thought of his age, that the imagination is a cheat, a purveyor of substanceless flimflam in a mechanistically determined physical universe. (38)

Sterne's ontological enquires about the status and truth value of fiction were not as sophisticated as that of twentieth century

metafiction. Nor did it have the philosophical background of developments like structuralism and poststructuralism. But still, the spirit of enquiry was the same in both cases. An analysis of the tradition of self-consciousness in literary history may prove that it is not the result of a sudden rupture in the novelistic tradition. But the consistency and the backing of the philosophical premises from which it problematises the act of representation in novel make it different from earlier manifestations of self-consciousness.

Metafiction has rebelled against the established conventions of traditional realism in various ways. A notable example is that of frame-breaks which create a jarring effect on the reader who expects an unproblematic and smooth reading. Frame-breaks function by subverting a convention that is generally taken for granted. The disillusioned reader is forced to have a look at the conditions in which she/he is denied the comfort of an unproblematic reading. A device of frame-break that almost all metafictionists have experimented with is an unconventional ending to the novel. This, in turn, becomes a convenient tool in the hands of the metafictionist in discussing some valid points about the philosophical and aesthetic basis of the genre.

A problematic ending in which all loose ends are not tied together points to the fact that the traditional realist text was based on an unrealistic concept of representation. The high point of realism in fiction presupposed that it replicated a reality out there in the world. A frame-break in metafiction exposes the falsity of such a realist claim.

In the realist scheme of affairs, the author was deemed to be the absolute authority that had a privileged access to the reality. The glaring drawback of such a theory of representation, as it has been demonstrated by postmodern texts, is its silence on the tyrannical role of the reading public in dictating the generic conventions. These generic conventions are generally termed as the natural conventions governing that genre. The expectations of the reading public were very much like a social institution bearing the unmistakable stamp of the period. The novel has acquired its present shape through years of evolution; which was nothing but an extension of the socio-political set up of the different periods.

It would be too naïve to assume that the reading public; who are 'consumers' of the novel in a way, had no role in determining the shape of the novel. An analysis of the most salient generic convention of the novel, the happily ever after ending proves certain points. The average reader always looked forward to an ending in which all loose ends were neatly tied up and the conflicts that arose during the development of the plot were resolved. This demand and yearning for finality, in a way, can be explained in the light of the human beings' craving to impose a discernible pattern on the flux of events around.

One particular occasion in which the expectations of the reading public exerted a palpable influence on the generic features of the novel was during the Victorian era. Many of the now popular Victorian novels were published in serialised form, in popular magazines, and

had to bend to popular opinion. When pressure from the public mounted on the publisher, the author had to yield.

The ending of the novel was the most vulnerable of the conventions. Authors were under tremendous pressure to wind-up the novels in a conclusive manner so that the hero and the heroine were united without any suggestion of a murky future for them as characters. The well-being of the society at large was also ensured. In rare cases, where the characters had to be content with a less bright future, the readers, in the form of letters to the editor and the publisher, ensured that 'justice' was done. Literary historians suggest that even Charles Dickens had to bend down to the tyranny of the reading public.

David Lodge in his essay "Ambiguously Ever After: Problematical Endings in English Fiction" *(Working with Structuralism)* cites the example of Dickens' *Great Expectations.* Pip, the narrator, returns eleven years after the conclusion of the main action to the site of Miss. Havisham's house, now demolished. There he meets his old love Estella. The story is set for their reconciliation, as Estella, who had once spurned him, is much humbled after her unhappy marriage to Bentley Drummond, now dead:

> I look her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting form her. (519)

This was a typical ending for many of the Victorian novels, but originally Dickens had intended a less happy ending. In the ending now often printed as an appendix to the novel, Pip hears that Estella had married a second time. Such a situation in which the author was largely manipulated by the tastes and expectations of the readers was not a Victorian phenomenon. It happened in the eighteenth century to Samuel Richardson, who is said to have stuck to the tragic ending to his *Clarissa* even in the face of bitter complaints from devoted readers. These events definitely point to the provisional nature of the methods of representation in fiction. David Lodge in "Ambiguously Ever After" comments on the phenomenon:

> When novels were published in serial form, or in volumes published separately over a longish period, there was continual feedback from the audience during the process of composition, and the author was always likely to come under pressure from his friends, his publishers and the reading public at large to provide an ending that conformed to their desires. (146)

A contemporary phenomenon that is very much similar to the Victorian one is that of popular soaps on the television. The basic criterion for deciding the fate of a character or a turn of event is the T.R.P rating. Television companies sometimes employ market research firms to feel the pulse of the viewers. The conclusions of the surveys decide the shape of the next episode.

The question that has to be posed here is that of the realist claims of fiction. Traditionalists always argued that their portrayal of reality was more truthful than that of modernists and postmodernists. Self-reflexive fiction, with its ambiguous endings, looks more realistic because it does not try to impose a contrived ending. Realist fiction with all the elaborate conventions to follow was less true to 'experience'. 'Experience' and 'reality' were two operative words for a traditionalist while mounting an attack on experiments in fiction. David Lodge says:

> Even ending a story at all--ending in the sense of tying up all the loose ends of plot, settling the destinies of all the characters--even this comes to seem like a falsification of reality. (*Working with Structuralism*156)

The realist claim of fiction does not hold water in the face of systematic opposition from metafiction. John Fowles' main concern in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is with the tyranny of narrative conventions in Victorian fiction.

An obvious consequence of the proliferation of self-conscious novels was the search for an objective critical typology to describe and classify metafictional texts. The fact that these texts display an amazing degree of diversity renders the formulation of a typology all the more difficult. The typology developed by Linda Hutcheon for the classification of metafictional texts is remarkable for its flexibility and comprehensiveness.

Linda Hutcheon (*Narrassistc Narrative*) begins with a fundamental distinction between self-reflexive texts, the diegetic model and the linguistic model. The diegetically self-conscious novels are conscious of their own narrative process. The linguistically self-reflexive mode, on the other hand, demonstrates both the limits and powers of their own language. In Hutcheon's words, "in the first case, the text presents itself as diegesis, as narrative; in the second, it is unobfuscated text, language" (23). Within this broad classification, Linda Hutcheon makes a further classification, of overt and covert texts. In overtly narcissistic texts self-consciousness and self-reflexion are evident and explicitly allegorised or thematised. Covertly narcissistic texts, on the other hand, are less self-conscious than the overt ones. The self-reflexiveness will be internalised or structuralised.

Overtly diegetic narcissistic texts are aware of their status as literary constructs. They generally foreground their narrative identity and for that an acknowledgement of the role of the reader is necessary. Overtly diegetic texts do not shy away from the reader; but through plot allegories, narrative metaphors and even narrative commentaries, make the reader aware of the fact that she/he is creating a fictional universe. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is singled out as an example of overtly diegetic model. The narrative conventions that are parodied always draw the reader's attention towards the intricacies of the fiction-making involved. In keeping with the explicitness of the form, it is natural for the overtly diegetic text, sometimes, to address the reader directly.

Covertly diegetic model, on the other hand, is a 'covert' version of diegetic self-reflexiveness, as indicated by the term. The text may not address the reader directly, but would communicate the diegetic message by means of internalised structural devices. In the course of actualising these textual structures, the reader will be indirectly following the instructions of the text. In her detailed typology of metafiction, Linda Hutcheon singles out four models preferred by covertly diegetic self-conscious texts; the detective story, fantasy, games, and the erotic. One reason why the detective plot becomes a popular device for self-reflexive texts is the inherent hermeneutic implications of the detective story. The detective genre is laden with elaborate conventions that demand total absorption from the reader. The reader's mission resembles that of the detective.

Fantasy models, on the other hand, make telling comments on the creation of a fictive world that is self-sufficient in its own right. While overt narcissism tells this to the reader's face, covert diegetic model of fantasy, by making the reader an accomplice in the actualisation of a fantasy world, drives home the point subtly and unobtrusively. The game model appeals to the metafictionist precisely due to its emphasis on the elaborate rules involved in a game. The reader gets a vicarious satisfaction, similar to the creative pleasure of the author, while actualising the internalised structure. As for the erotic model, influential critics like Roland Barthes and Helen Cixous have stressed the obvious parallels between the actualisation of a text

and the sexual act. Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* has internalised the erotic model.

Covertly linguistic model draws the attention of the reader to the semantic aspects of the text through riddles, jokes, puns, anagrams etc. This type makes the reader experience the language. An explicit awareness of its own linguistic identity is the hallmark of the overtly linguistic model of narcissism. The guiding principle for the metafictionist here is that language has an active role in constructing meaning. Naturally, the metafictionist also foregrounds the ideological uses to which language can be utilised. An exploration into the potentials as well as the inadequacies of the language in creating a heterocosm is a part of the overtly linguistic project.

The question of defining metafiction against postmodernism, the movement that coincided with the publication of many canonical self conscious texts, has always been a difficult one. Nonetheless, there seems to be critical consensus now on metafiction being a manifestation of postmodernism. The fact that many of the novels labelled as 'postmodernist' have exhibited varying degrees of self-reflexiveness underscores the inherent affinity between these two developments. The problem regarding the definition of metafiction with reference to postmodernism had been voiced during the early stages of critical conceptualisation in the field of postmodernism. In the seventies, the term 'postmodernism' was used extensively to refer to contemporary self-conscious texts. John Barth's use of the term 'postmodernist fiction' in his essay in the January 1980 issue of *The*

Atlantic titled "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction", was in this context. However, an influential critic like Linda Hutcheon objected to the rather restrictive use of the term postmodernism to include a broad contemporary phenomenon like metafiction. Hutcheon preferred the term 'metafiction', to 'postmodernism' in her *Narcissistic Narrative* on the ground that postmodernism seemed to be a limiting label (2). Nevertheless, recent discussions on postmodernism suggest that postmodernism is regarded as a broader movement and metafiction as one of its major manifestations.

Metafiction, in a way, can be interpreted as a direct product of the increased social and cultural self-consciousness. This, in turn, is an offshoot of the awareness within contemporary culture of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday reality. From the postmodernist perspective, metafiction takes part of its project to have a second look at the social and cultural phenomena around us. Linda Hutcheon, in her *Politics of Postmodernism,* lays down the aim of postmodernism as follows:

> . . . de-naturalise some of the dominant features of our way of life, to point out that these entities that we unthinkingly experience as natural (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural', made by us, not given to us. (2)

This de-naturalising agenda is the central factor that draws metafiction closer to the postmodernist impulse. Naturally, metafiction

came to be evaluated as a manifestation of postmodernism. Discussing the 'introspective' inclinations in postmodernism, Brian McHale observes in his *Postmodernist Fiction*: "Indeed the workings of all postmodernist world-making machines are visible, in one way or another, to one degree or another; this precisely, is that makes them postmodernist" (196). Postmodernism, whether it be in art, architecture or literature, harps on the construction of meaning rather than on the meaning itself. It takes nothing for granted, and subjects the make-believe or illusionary conventions to ruthless dissection. Postmodernism and metafiction share most of the basic preoccupations like parody, intertextuality and a movement against narrative closure.

Linda Hutcheon's comment applies to the debunking of conventions that takes place in literature. The make-believe nature of fiction gives way for more introspection and transparency. Thus, the fundamental feature of metafiction that makes the reader draw parallels between metafiction and postmodernism is its self-consciousness. The influence of Saussurean statements and the resultant linguistically conscious critical climate is obvious in the emergence of self-conscious cultural forms. The structuralist and poststructuralist theories had their legitimate influence in effecting a radical shift in our perception of language and its ability to 'reflect' the world. It is not surprising that metafiction, much like postmodernism, challenges the empiricist world view of realism from within the boundaries of fiction. Metafictionists distrust the claims of language in

reflecting an objective reality outside. She/he is engaged in a de-bunking project which tries to prove that our experience of the world is mediated through language. Laying bare of the codes and conventions of fiction is meant to foreground the 'constructed' nature of the fictional text.

In a famous critical formulation, Brian McHale has appraised the change from modernist fiction to postmodernist fiction in terms of a change of the dominant, from the dominant of epistemology to that of ontology. He says that the typical question before the postmodernist novelist would be: "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (9). Similarly, the concomitant modernist questions would have been, "What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it? and so on". Naturally, the major concern of the modernist novel of the early twentieth century was with the nature and limits of individual consciousness. The plurality of techniques in the modernist novel is explained by McHale as symptomatic of the anxieties regarding the world; what can be known, understood and explained about it?

The second part of McHale's thesis is about the foregrounding of ontological questions in postmodernist fiction. The strategies of postmodernist fiction are aimed at foregrounding ontological issues. Brian McHale also discusses the oldest of the classical ontological themes in poetics; the otherness of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience. But the postmodern heterocosm theory postulates that mirroring is not the only possible relationship

between the fictional world and the reality outside. The author does not altogether abandon the external field of reference, but he finds equal pleasure in creating an internal world of reference too. The world that he creates may mirror an external reality but this extraliguistic world is not the sole standard against which it is to be judged. Moreover, the act of creating the 'heterocosm' or fantasy world is no secret, the maker dabbles in its revelation. The 'heterocosm' theory puts forward a very valid statement regarding radical metafiction. The metafictional text is no longer dependent on the narrow concept of mimesis. When the question of reference is re-defined, it is also capable of incorporating a text that makes no secret of its otherness, and at the same time exults in it.

Brian McHale's comment on the postmodernist novelist's role in the creation of a heterocosm once again underlines its affinity with metafictional flaunting:

> No longer content with invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds, the artist now makes his freedom visible by thrusting himself into the foreground of his work. He represents himself in the act of making his fictional world- or unmaking it, which is also his prerogative. (30)

Postmodernist fiction's foregrounding of the ontological questions is consistent and deliberate. The creation of a heterocosm is a recurring feature in its ontological foregrounding. The introduction of self-consciousness into the creation of heterocosm is what precisely draws the postmodernist into the metafictional league. In a way, self-

consciousness is an agent of further ontological probing in the form of postmodernist fictional heterocosm. When the author lays the narratorial conventions and codes bare, it is foregrounding the ontological status of the text. In addition, it also problematises the reader's ontological presumptions regarding the world outside.

Another point on which postmodernist concerns converge on metafictional ones is in the case of history. History has become a major preoccupation for postmodernist fiction. Linda Hutcheon has famously stated in *The Poetics of Postmodernism* that the specific poetics of postmodernism is encapsulated in a type of novel called "historiographic metafiction," which she defines as "those well- known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). Its paradigmatic quality lies, according to Hutcheon, in its concern with literature, history and theory. Its theoretical awareness of history and fiction as human constructs encourages its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.

This development signals two important things; one the postmodern transgression of genre distinctions, secondly the new perspective in which transcendental status is denied to a discipline like history. The post-Saussurean revolution in the field of knowledge and knowledge systems has radically changed the concept of history. The discursive identity of the discipline is foregrounded, with the inevitable consequence of the demolition of the hierarchy of discourses. History no longer has the privileged position it had

enjoyed among the academic disciplines. The territory of fiction is neither distant nor fantastic; it colludes in the manufacture of history and vice versa. The textual strategies of postmodernism encourage the entry of history, official as sell as apocryphal, into fiction's field. The major manifestation of postmodernist revisionism is in the form of apocryphal history. Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* comments on the meeting of history and fiction in postmodernism:

> In postmodernist revisionist historical fiction, history and fiction exchange places, history becoming fictional and fiction becoming "true" history--and the real world seems to get lost in the shuffle. But of course, this is precisely the question postmodernist fiction is designed to raise: real, compared to what? (96)

As indicated earlier, the meeting of history and fiction, two hitherto separate disciplines, is the result of a deeper trend within postmodernism, the rebellion against genre divisions: Ralph Cohen's statement on this postmodern impulse makes the picture clear:

> Critics and theorists who write about postmodern texts often refer to 'genres' as a term inappropriate for characterising postmodernist writing. The process of suppression results from the claim that post-modern writing blurs genres, transgresses them, or unfixes boundaries that conceal domination or authority, and that 'genre' is an anachronistic term and concept. (293)

Postmodernism's aversion to genre distinctions stems from the belief that a genre theory, especially in the case of fiction, backgrounds literary artifice and linear continuity.

Another remarkable development that demonstrates the blurring of genre distinctions in twentieth century is that of 'New Journalism'. It was a term used to describe a style of writing in journalism and fiction which used techniques considered unconventional at that time. The term was used authoritatively with its present meaning in 1973 by Tom Wolfe in a collection of journalistic articles he published as *The New Journalism,* which included works by Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, Norman Mailer etc. Wolfe identified the techniques borrowed by New Journalism from fiction. They used scenes rather than historical narratives widely, preferred dialogues to quotations and statements, and resorted to the use of first person point of view. The use of fictional techniques did not mean that the writings were considered fictional, because they did not abandon the principle of veracity and dependence on the 'reporter's truth'. A development that was parallel to this and much significant was the practice of authors like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer who chose real-life events as the subject matter of their novels. It was also a fact that these two writers resented comparisons of their writings to Tom Wolfe's practice.

Such a strain of novel called the non-fiction novel got established with the publication of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* in 1965. It presents real events and uses techniques of fiction for

narrating them. Capote's novel was a factual account of the murder of a Kansas farm family and the capture and execution of the criminals who murdered them. As in journalism, Capote made use of exhaustive interviews with people who were somehow associated with the case. Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (1986) is another remarkable instance of this hybrid genre. It is an autobiographical account of the 1967 March on the Pentagon and shares the features of both history and fiction. Such a merger of two genres, considered exclusive so far, has got very serious implications for the ontology of fiction. Michael Wood, Associate Professor of English at Columbia University says on the *New York Times* website:

> But perhaps the most general feature of the New Journalism is its insistence on the resemblances between fact and fiction--whereas the older journalism worked hard at playing those resemblances down. With its heavy reliance on the technical resources of novels and short stories, the New Journalism is not suggesting that its stories are not true--on the contrary, we are always told that an immense amount of research has gone into getting the facts straight. Consequently, it is not suggesting, either, that we cannot distinguish any more between fact and fiction. What it is suggesting is that fiction is the only shape we can give to facts, that all shapes are fictions.

This conclusion is exactly similar to the arguments of critics who described historiographic metafiction as the quintessential

postmodern literary form. To say that postmodernism denies history would be wrong; on the other hand, it argues that history is accessible to us in the form of texts. The past, of course, existed but we perceive it in the form of a human construct called 'history'. In this sense, even the seemingly innocuous representations of the past, including eye-witness records are 'texts'. It is this new wisdom that emboldens the historiographic metafictionist to look at history from an entirely different and revolutionary perspective. The role of history in conventional novel criticism was largely defined in terms of a realistic model against which the merit of the novelistic representation was evaluated. Postmodernist fiction problematises the very concept of history by asking questions like: What is history? What is its relation to reality? and how is representation and language related to reality?

This problematisation of the narrative by postmodern fiction is corollary to similar trends in postmodern theory. It underscores the role of the narratives in legitimising many of the cultural and political constructs around us. Jean Francois Lyotard's postulations regarding the transcendental power of narratives in offering a totalising scheme of explanation has a seminal role in postmodern discussions. What is being challenged by the historiographic metafictionist is the master status of traditional historical knowledge. It speaks loudly about the provisionality and indeterminacy of the historical knowledge. In this sense, history is closer to fictional structures in terms of their discursive identity. Linda Hutcheon says: "What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both

history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past" (89).

In this debunking of the meaning-making function of human constructs, postmodernism problematises the received notion of historical knowledge. Moreover, the postmodern revision of historicism shows no tinge of nostalgia in its critical reviews of the past and its representations. The obvious lack of respect shown to the hierarchy of discourses has caused the traditionalists to ring the alarm bell. But the new kind of historiography maintains that history cannot be written without ideological analysis and awareness. This ideological awareness of the act of writing is what leads to the restoration and foregrounding of the discursive situation of the utterance. As far the problematisation of history by this new artistic form is concerned, Linda Hutcheon says:

> The past really did exist. The question is: how can we know that past today--and what can we know of it? The overt metafictionality of novels like *Shame* or *Star Turn* acknowledges their own constructing, ordering, and selecting process, but these are always shown to be historically determined acts. It puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this historiograhic metafiction. (Poetics 92)

A much celebrated example of historiograhic metafiction is Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977). Coover's text, primary concerned

with a few crucial events in the history of America in the nineteen fifties centres around Richard Nixon the President, and the execution of Rosenbergs. Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg were American communists who were executed for passing nuclear weapons secret to the Soviet Union. The prosecutor's primary witness, David Greenglass, stated that his sister Ethel typed notes containing U.S. nuclear secrets in the Rosenberg apartment in September 1945. This case has been at the centre of the controversy over communism in the United States. Ever since, supporters steadfastly maintained that the conviction was a case of victimisation, resultant of the communist witch-hunt.

It is a fictionalised account of the Rosenberg case in which Richard Nixon's point of view is projected. The liberal use of metafictional devices is instrumental in subjecting the American history and ideology to ruthless critique. The distinguishing feature of Coover's text that has earned it notoriety during its times was the extensive use of real-life people, incidents and documents. *The Public Burning*, by demonstrating the textual form through which history is mediated, repudiated many of the empirical notions of history. The unconventionality of Coover's text also lies in its refusal to make clear distinctions between fact and fiction. It treats history as a discourse and a discourse, naturally, is susceptible to all the ideological manipulations. In his reading of *The Public Burning,* Raymod A Mazurek comments:

> Extending the metafictional critique of the realistic novel, novels like *The Public Burning* imply not only that the realistic novel is a series of conventional signs masking as reality, but that history depends on conventions of narrative, language, and ideology in order to present an account of 'what really happened'. (195)

One controversial aspect of *The Public Burning* was the use of Richard Nixon. There are many chapters presented from Nixon's point of view. The presentation of contingent events by the media also underlines the text's engagement with history. Opinion-makers like *The Times* and *The New York Times* were exposed for their ideological harbouring in presenting the contingent as 'history'. The apparent objectivity of *The Times* is satirised and exposed. Most of the statements, with a historiograhic colour, are made by Richard Nixon. He, on the other hand, is presented as an active ally and victim of the American ideology personified by Uncle Sam, an arrogant and supernatural creature.

Parody is a literary device that has become popular among metafictionists. Metafictional parody is a landmark development in the sense that it subverts the idea of unitary meaning and objective interpretation. Parody underscores that the text is not a self-sufficient unit capable of producing meaning. The production of meaning takes place in relation to other texts too. The text in question, at this point, is definitely related to the anterior texts that had come before it. *The Canterbury Tales* and *Arabian Nights* are two anterior texts very often

invoked by metafiction. The question of escaping the ghostly influence of the dead author even while deriving the much-needed life-blood from the tradition has always been a delicate one. Seen in the light of Harold Bloom's theory of "Anxiety of Influence", the influence of anterior texts and dead authors is something to be escaped. Metafictional parody arises from another matrix and has got obvious positive connotations for it.

The new paradigm insists that the existence of the text in itself--a structure of signs--does not guarantee meaning. The presence of the well-informed and sophisticated reader, who is informed about the history of the genre, is crucial in generating meaning. This meaning-making process automatically becomes richer and infinite when individual texts are played off against multiple antecedents.

Critical response to metafictional parody has been varied. One group of critics interpreted parody as symptomatic of the decadence of the novel. Robert Burden, in an essay titled "The Novel Interrogates Itself: Parody as Self-conscious in contemporary Fiction" makes an insightful study of metafictional parody in Fowles, David Lodge and Angus Wilson. According to him, metafictional parody is a self-conscious interrogation of the English novel tradition. The relationship with the past literature and established conventions figures prominently in it:

> Parody, I am suggesting, is to be understood as a mode of aesthetic foregrounding in the novel. It defines a particular form of historical consciousness, whereby form is created to

> interrogate itself against significant precedents; it is a serious mode, unlike some types of playful imitation which are also identified in the same category. (136)

Burden's definition of parody stresses on two main points: its fusion of creation and critique, and secondly the significance of the development that has very profound implications for the tradition of the novel. He goes on to analyse the two distinctive ways in which parody functions in the self-conscious novel. First, with reference to or direct imitation of a number of specific writers and works. This may be called 'local' parody. Secondly, a more general kind of parody that is critical of the conventions of writing, narrative techniques, and modes of relationship with the reader. He considers John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as belonging to the second type, a novel that takes upon itself an overall critical appraisal of the conventions and values of nineteenth-century realism.

Linda Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative* tries to accommodate metafictional parody into the detailed typology developed by her for the analysis of self-reflexive works, treating parody as a hallmark of overt diegetic narcissism. A metafictional text that acknowledges its fictionality in this manner is fit to be described the most authentic and honest, reasons Hutcheon. Patricia Waugh appraises metafictional parody as a point of renewal having the significance of a generic change. In her estimate of metafictional parody, Waugh finds similarities with the Russian formalist concept of 'defamiliarisation'. It achieves an effect of renewal by exposing and revealing the habitual

and the conventional. Metafictional parody functions along the same lines. Patricia Waugh defines it as follows:

> In these terms, therefore, metafiction represents a response to a crisis within the novel--to a need for self-conscious parody undermining in order to 'defamiliarise' fictional conventions that have become both automatised and inauthentic, and to release new and more authentic forms. Parody as a literary strategy, deliberately sets itself up to break norms that have become unconventional. (65)

So the ingenious textual strategies in metafiction are forms of self-analysis and critique. Elizabeth Dipple observes that parody requires redefinition because for many readers, "it still carries negative connotations indicating a degradation of a primary text by the wit of a destructively comic imitation" (9). At the same time, it is to be noted that all critics do not evaluate parody in the same vein. The term 'pastiche' was used by this group to refer to a degraded form of parody which was supposed to be an outcome of the realisation that everything had been done before. Fredric Jameson described the parodic self-reflexivity of postmodernism as symptomatic of an age in which the much-needed connection with the past had been lost. *(Post modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism)* According to Jameson, parody in the postmodern age has been replaced by 'pastiche', devoid of political critique and historical awareness. What was disturbing to him was the lack of objective in such 'blank parody'.

Even though metafictional authors share the same theoretical premises, there are significant variations among them in terms of techniques and modes of presentation. First and foremost, a metafictional text makes a clean breast of the contingencies in which it comes into being. The author appears as an agent of creation, not a privileged transcendental voice. The reader is an active co-participant in the act of creation. Calivno's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is a good example of the reader's role in the creation of meaning.

The narrative device of stories within stories is a common phenomenon in metafiction. Some critics trace the development back to ancient Indian texts like *Mahabharatha, Ramayana,* Vishnu Sharma's *Panchathanthra,* and *Vikramaditya Tales.* Another classic example of such narrative tangle is *Arabian Nights.* When a story is being told as a part of the frame, the reader's attention is naturally drawn to questions like truth value, intentions and manipulations. The framework of *The Canterbury Tales* and *Arabian Nights* are often parodied in metafiction. Charles Palliser and Italo Calvino evoke this prototype in their metafiction. The storytelling session in *Betrayals* has obvious parallel with the story of the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales.* The device of frametales also invites comparison with the mise-en-abyme motif in postmodern fiction.

As the basic preoccupation is with the construction of reality, self-conscious fiction takes a second look at history. There are metafictional texts in which real-life people rub shoulders with fictional ones. Very often, the theme of self-reflection is woven into

the text with the help of structural devices. The metaphor of sexuality is employed in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* with this purpose. Self-conscious works also experiment with typographical features to invite attention to the physical existence of the text. A writer like Robert Kroetsch dabbles in the use of the oral tradition of storytelling to recast the fictional structure.

However, it adds to the complexity of the metafictional enterprise when the postmodern scenario churns out a new reality concept. The pervasive influence of the visual media as well as the new dimension of reality called 'virtual reality' necessitates a redefinition of the relationship between fiction and reality. Postmodernism has been making deeper inroads into human beings' perception of reality. It is pertinent to have a look at the tradition of representation in the light of these developments.

Chapter II

Aesthetics of Reading: Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*

One of the most striking things about Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) is its opening. Perhaps for the first time in the history of fiction, the narrative begins on the title cover, addressing the reader. The dramatic opening of the novel is notable for various reasons. For one thing, it introduces the protagonist of the novel, the Reader. The immediate reference is also to the extratextual reader who takes up Calvino's text for reading. The fact that the text has a reader as its protagonist also brings out the seriousness that is assigned to the act of reading.

The very title of the work *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (*IWNT*) serves the purpose of a manifesto. Deliberately left incomplete, it denies a sense of completion to the reader. Going by the title, it is likely to be a thriller, but it is everything rolled into one: a detective story, romantic tale, thriller and so on. The reader is going to decide the course of the novel. In that sense, the author is not going to pronounce the last word on the text. The power and authority that had been assigned to the author in traditional criticism is challenged. The importance that is given to the act of reading is one of the concerns that sets modern metafiction apart from previous novelistic consciousness, reasons Linda Hutcheon in her *Narcissistic Narrative*:

> The reader is explicitly or implicitly forced to face his responsibility toward the text, that is, toward the novelistic world he is creating through the accumulated fictive referents of literary language. As the novelist actualises the world of his imagination through words, so the reader -- from those same words--manufactures in reverse a literary universe that is as much his creation as it is the novelist's. (27)

The role of the reader in *IWNT* validates Linda Hutcheon's comment. The final shape of the text, even though it is flexible, is to be decided by the reader.

The significance of the act of reading and writing does not end there. Several critics have commented on the 'semiotic world view' in *IWNT*. The structure as well as the content of the novel is so planned to take a serious look at the construction of meaning in the world. Many of the incomplete narrative pieces in the text make telling comments on the way human beings make sense of the world. Literature serves the purpose of a grandnarrative that provides meaning models for other kinds of readings. In terms of the importance given to reading and the reader, *IWNT* is a demonstration of Barthes' distinction between the *lisible* and *scriptible* texts. The role of the reader in actualising the text is the key to this distinction. *Lisible* text envisages the reader as a consumer and offers nothing beyond conventional forms and meanings. The *scriptible text*, on the

other hand, gives full freedom to the reader and defines meaning as open-ended and flexible.

Roland Barthes, the theoretician, was a dominant influence on Italo Calvino. Paul A Harris says: "Calvino's writing may be seen as a pragmatic response to a question posed by his friend Roland Barthes some three decades ago, "What is Literature?" (69). From Barthes' structuralist point of view, literature is not a privileged discipline that expresses the transcendental truth. Literature assumes its power and significance by virtue of a network of signifiers. These signifiers are the results of literary conventions that have been in place for years. Calvino takes an iconoclastic view of literature and subverts many of the essentialist notions associated with it.

At the centre of the text is a search for meaning. Individual readers as well as reading communities are engaged in a hot pursuit of meaning. It is also remarkable that different readers approach the elusive meaning from different perspectives. The most stubborn among them are the Reader and his companion Ludmilla, who are on the look out for a text that would give satisfactory answers to their questions. It should be said that the text is harsh in dealing with these readers because they owe allegiance to the classic theory of reading.

IWNT has no 'plot' in the conventional sense of the term. The whole plot of the novel is concerned with 'the reading expedition' of the Reader who buys a copy of Calvino's novel. As he finds it to be a defective one, he goes to the publisher and there he meets the other

Reader, a young woman called Ludmilla. The meeting was a turning point in their life that decided not only the future course of their reading, but also that of their lives. There is an exact correspondence between the course of their reading, and their life. It is not possible to say whether it is the life influencing reading or the other way round. Ludmilla and the Reader have got very clear ideas about what they expect of the story they pick up to read. It is not very difficult to detect that these are the things that they look forward to in life. As for the correspondence between their 'reading' and 'living', the text says:

> Your reading is no longer solitary: you think of the other Reader, who, at this moment, is also opening the book; and there, the novel to be read is superimposed by a possible novel to be lived, the continuation of your story with her, or better still, the beginning of a possible story. This is how you have changed since yesterday, you who insisted you preferred a book, something solid, which lies before you, easily defined, enjoyed without risks, to a real-life experience, always elusive, discontinuous, debated. (30)

The statement makes it clear that their preference is in favour of a story that is "solid" and "easily-defined". These expectations, in a way, are reflexive of their attitude to life. In other words, these are the things that they expect in their life to happen. The uncertainty that looms over life does not always allow these luxuries. An unexpected happening may break the smooth progress of the 'story' at any time. But readers desperately seek for these qualities in literature. Even

though the events in life do not follow a pattern of linear progress, literature allows it. A beginning, a middle, climax and falling action are there in the realm of literature only. When these standards are applied to life in turn, it creates an impression of 'solidity' and 'certainty' in an otherwise chaotic flux of events.

It is the search for complete meaning that fuels the journey of the Reader and Ludmilla. The problems that they encounter on the road to a sense of finality put their patience to test, but the journey continues. The Reader finds that the copy of *IWNT* has only the first sixteen pages and they are repeated. He returns his copy to the bookseller and is told that the novel he has been reading was *Outside the Town of Malbork.* Instead of the misprinted *IWNT* he gets a complete version of Malbork. But it is not the same novel he has been reading earlier. He faces another problem of binding and the reading is again disrupted. By this time, the Reader is joined by his love interest Ludmilla, the female reader, in his pursuit of a complete novel. Both of them consult Professor Uzzi–Tuzzi, of the Department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages and he gives an extempore translation of what he thinks to be *Outside the Town of Malbork.* But it turns out to be another novel, *Leaning from the Steep Slope.* The odyssey continues, to the publisher, then to an author named Silas Flannery, to a revolutionary state in South America and finally ends in a library.

Whatever minor differences both the readers had in terms of reading attitudes are solved in the course of their joint readings. They keep a distinctive identity, apart from all other readers in the text. It

Lotaria and her study group look into the manifold discursive situations governing the production and reception of a text, Marana proposes his mystification theory. The theory of unproblematic reading is different from all these positions:

> Now you understand Ludmilla's refusal to come with you; you are gripped by the fear of having crossed over to 'the other side' and of having lost that privileged relationship with books which is peculiar to the reader: the ability to consider what is written as something finished and definitive, to which there is nothing to be added, from which there is nothing to be removed. (93)

This kind of an innocent reading that takes meaning as "finished and definitive" is unproblematic and the reader prefers it. He is afraid that a Lotaria–like enquiry into the making of that meaning may deprive him of the pleasure of reading.

By the time the search for a text that allows innocent readings continues, the plotline involving the reader and Ludmilla thickens. Starting from her kitchen, he was able to have a comprehensive reading of the woman. And by that time, the events of their life remind them that they are 'falling in love' and the other typical elements of the conventional story also make their appearance. Irnerio, in certain respects, had all the qualities of a villain, but he was a non-conformist who does not 'read' his life in terms of the structure of a popular narrative. Ermes Marana's character fits easily into that of a villain, and his efforts to win Ludmilla over to his side go in vain. By this

stage, the Reader has no competitors around and the plot smoothly sails towards 'a happily ever after ending'. The Reader's odyssey, in this sense, mimics the structure of a popular narrative.

The final provocation for a happy conclusion to their stories was in the form of a question from the seventh reader in the literary symposium held in the library:

> Do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end? In ancient times a story could end only in two ways: having passed all the tests, the hero and the heroine married, or else they died. The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death. (204)

The Reader decides to marry Ludmilla and live happily ever after. The decision is an affirmative one because it ensures the continuity of life and stalls the possibility of death for the time being. In another sense, the reader compensates for a lacunae that is there in the plot he has been pursuing, the lacunae of narrative closure and definitive meaning.

It is easy to see that the Reader applies the logic of the text to life. It is quite common for people to use analogies and metaphors from the world of reading. Figurative expressions like 'to turn a new page', and 'begin a new chapter of life' are examples of this kind of usage. It is interesting to note the correspondence between the novel book and the book of life. But this similarity is not an inherent one, but a highly arbitrary one. Brought up in the tradition of the book, it

is natural for human beings to apply the same logic and rationale to life. The conventional story or its simpler manifestation like the fairytale has a predictable course. The hero is victorious, wins the hand of his ladylove or he courts death. Tragi-comedy is rather an aberration in the long history of literature. Even the superior talent of Shakespeare could not make it appealing to the audience. Our dependence on the laws of the narrative can be traced back to the folk tales and grandma's tales. By demonstrating the construction of a literary narrative, Calvino is trying to explore the questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. The narrative of the Reader is highly effective in that purpose.

Among the readers who pore over the fine print in books and discuss them, Lotaria and the members of her study group are distinct because of their peculiar attitudes. If Ludmilla and the Reader care for the innocent pleasures of reading, Lotaria's group concentrate on the textuality of the work. They approach the novel not as an expression of transcendental voice through a privileged individual, but as a text that is produced in well-defined discursive contexts. This realisation is evident in the way the group analyse the fragment of a novel. Immediately after the reading of the novel, they discuss it in terms of themes like "the polymorphic-perverse sexuality", "the laws of a market economy", and "the homologies of the signifying structures" (75). Every member of the group looks at the text from a particular critical standpoint.

Lotaria's preoccupation with the text and its discursive context has similarities with Barthian theories of the text. Roland Barthes, in his *S/Z* has demonstrated the way a text functions in our social realm. Barthes achieved it by breaking Balzac's story 'Sarrasine' into its constituent elements. It starts from a description of the codes that go into the making of the text: proairetic code, hermeneutic code, semic code, symbolic code and the referential code. Each code is the accumulated cultural knowledge that enables a reader to recognise details as contributions to a particular function or sequence.

Lotaria's approach to the text is more political, she envisages the work as a product of the existing power relations in the society. A corollary to this proposition is her belief that the work of art can be instrumental in solving the ills of the society. That is why she insists on knowing "the author's position with regard to trends of contemporary thought and problems that demand a solution" (40). As far as Ludmilla is concerned, literary output is something that can be compared to the production of pumpkins on a vine. Lotaria cannot approve of such an attitude to fiction and she considers Ludmilla's efforts "a big waste of time" because she "reads one novel after another, but never clarifies the problems" (40). Her politically committed stand also makes her describe Ludmilla's method, "a passive way of reading, escapist and regressive" (146).

Reading is the central metaphor in *IWNT not* only because it has a Reader as the protagonist, but also because it makes serious self-reflexive comments on it. The activity of reading is not confined to

books, but it is construed as the process by which human beings make sense of the world. The metafictionist's comments on the pervasive influence of reading in the human life definitely propose a theory regarding the inherent relationship between the reading of books and other kinds of readings in life. The system of reading manages to convey sense because of the presence of an elaborate sign-system behind it. As the structuralist would tell us, the semiotic system of language is an arbitrary one because there is no inherent relationship between the individual sign and the signified.

After getting exposed to the signifying system of the language, children get familiar with the system of literature. Genre distinctions in literature are purely a matter of convention. Genres and sub-genres are constructed on the basis of these conventions. A child that grows up exposed to the stories will naturally apply the conventions of these stories to the bigger story around her/him called reality/life. Even though life does not allow neat beginnings and endings for the pattern of events, the individual tries to impose one. Happily ever after endings are desperately sought after in life as well as in literature.

Irnerio in *IWNT* makes a very pertinent comment regarding the 'reading habit' of human beings. The comment has to be evaluated both literally and metaphorically. In reply to a question as to what he reads, he expresses the following opinion:

> I've become so accustomed to not reading that I don't even read what appears before my eyes. It's not easy: they teach us to read as children, and for the rest of our lives

> we remain the slaves of all the written stuff they fling in front of us. I may have had to make some effort myself, at first, to learn not to read, but now it comes quite naturally to me. The secret is not refusing to look at the written words. On the country, you must look at them, intensely, until they disappear. (43)

Irnerio's aversion is not only to the things written on paper, but also the other writings that propel the society. This is evident in his attitude to the structures of meaning around. Such non-conformism can be the outcome of a profound desire to escape everything that is institutionalised. Opposed to Irnerio in their views and attitudes are the other disciplined readers like Ludmilla and the Reader. They are ready to toe the line drawn by the society in issues like love, courtship and marriage because they are well–read not only in the novels but also the meaning structures that support them.

Professor Uzzi-Tuzzi of the Department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages and Literature makes some significant pronouncements on the theory of literature. As the Professor of a dead language, he is an anachronism in himself and also stands out from the rest of the readers by way of his radical views. He states that he is least bothered about the incompleteness or fragmentary nature of a literary work. On the other hand, he believes it to be a natural condition of books. What gives him the conviction in this matter is the peculiarity of books in the Cimmarian language. All the books in that language are unfinished. As he says, "they continue beyond. . . in the other

language, in the silent language to which all the words we believe we read refer. . ."(60). The other language referred to here can be the second order of sign system. It is that system which confers meaning on the individual works of literature that one reads.

In such a scheme of affairs, reading is an activity of paramount importance. The text is not envisaged as a complete structure of meaning, but something that sets the ball rolling. Professor Pierre Bayard's (Paris University) recently published book, *How to Talk About Books Which You Haven't Read* is a concrete proof of the validity of the argument. The book has already made its impression in Europe, and is getting translated into dozens of languages. The author confidently states that by going through book covers, reviews and gossips about authors, one can take part in a literary discussion. Prof. Bayard, who teaches literature, says that he often lectures students on books which he has never read, in fact, not even glanced through. Mr. V. Gangadhar, while reviewing the book in *The Hindu* Sunday Magazine (April 8,2007), asks the question, what superhuman ability is there in literary critics who review books of six hundred to eight hundred pages every week without failure? Finally, it seems, professor Uzzi-Tuzzi stands justified.

IWNT negates many precepts of authorship put forward by conventional literary criticism. The text looks like an embodiment of Roland Barthes' proclamation of the death of the author. For one thing, it is not easy for the reader of *IWNT* to attribute it to a single author and find a unitary meaning for it, as it was the practice of

critics in Pre-Barthian times. The multivocal nature and the labyrinthine structure of the text abort any such attempt. Calvino himself is present in the text and his name is mentioned in the first sentence. But what is peculiar is that he is only one among the authors who have authored the fragments of novels incorporated into the macrotext. The parody of anterior texts and past masters complicates the matter further. More importantly, the critical comments that are made by the self-reflexive form construct the author in new attire, depriving her/him of much of the power and glory that was due earlier.

Some of these postulations are highly detrimental to the image and authority attributed to the author in traditional criticism. In chapter five of the text, in connection with the business activities of Cavedagna the publisher, a new concept of authorship is forwarded:

> This is the moment (in the history of Western culture) when self-realization on paper is sought not so much by isolated individuals as by collectives: study seminars, working parties, research teams, as if intellectual labour were too dismaying to be faced alone. The figure of the author has become plural and moves always in a group, because nobody can be delegated to represent anybody. (79)

A touch of humour is evident in the presentation, but it also speaks for the changed idea of authorship. This is only one of the author-portraits in the text. Another possibility is put forward by Ermes

Marana in defence of his counterfeiting missions and it echoes a similar idea that attaches less value to the individuality of authorship. Marana declares confidently that the name of the author on the jacket of the book is insignificant because we do not know as to which books will survive the onslaught of time. Some books may remain famous but their authors will be anonymous. Yet other authors' names will survive but their books may not, as it happened to Socrates. Such a prospect seriously undermines the idea of authorship.

Silas Flannery's diary jottings reveal some important characteristics of an ideal authorship that he dreams of. Flannery perceives the presence of the individual within him as a highly detested and unwanted element:

> How well I would write if I were not here! If between the white page and the writing of words and stories that take shape and disappear without anyone's ever writing them there were not interposed that uncomfortable partition which is my person! Style, taste, individual philosophy, subjectivity, cultural background, real experience, psychology, talent, tricks of the trade: all the elements that make what I write recognizable as mine seem to be a cage that restricts my possibilities. (135)

Flannery's desire is to erase everything that helps others to pin him down as an individual. Creative writing, as far as he is concerned, contains tremendous potential and the individuality of the author plays a minimal role in it. At another point in his diary, Flannery

entertains the hope of total effacement; when he will be able to use the verb 'write' in the impersonal form as if to say "Today it writes" just as one says "Today it rains" (139).

Lotaria and her study group register another departure from the conventional notion of authorship. Lotaria has got a peculiar way of approaching novels; a text is nothing but "the recording of certain thematic recurrences, certain instances of forms and meaning" (147). So Lotaria subjects the books to an electronic reading and the machine tells the frequency with which certain words are used. In this method, based on the sample reading of a fragment of a novel in which words like 'blood', 'cartridge', 'belt', 'commander', 'sentry', and 'shots' are used nineteen times, Lotaria jumps to the conclusion that it is by all chance a war novel.

This has to be read alongside Ermes Marana's attempt to devaluate the power and authority of the author by problematising the concept of originality. Marana's organization, OEPHLW, has devised a method to help the writer out of a writer's block. After scanning the beginning of an incomplete novel, the computers would be able to finish it easily as they are programmed to develop all the elements of a text with perfect fidelity to "the stylistic and conceptual models of the author" (95). In another method, a team of ghost writers, who are experts in Silas Flannery's style in all its nuances and mannerisms, will step in and finish the work. They are capable of polishing and completing the half-written works to such perfection that even the

hardcore fans of Flannery may not be able to challenge their authenticity.

The author here becomes an impersonal agent who brings the various stock elements of literature into play without any claim regarding originality or individuality. This is a definite departure from the critical tenet that every author has an unmistakable stamp of originality that cannot be replicated or imitated. Incidentally, this seems to be an echo of the critical postulations that Calvino has made in his essay "Cybernetics and Ghosts". He envisages a computer programme that is capable of solving the mystery of literature:

> Having laid down these procedures and entrusted a computer with the task of carrying out these operations, will we have a machine capable of replacing the poet and the author? Just as we already have machines that can read, machines that perform a linguistic analysis of literary texts, machines that make translations and summaries, will we also have machines capable of conceiving and composing poems and novels? (229)

A prospect in which the machine can replace the author deprives it of much of its glamour and privilege. Madeleine Sorapure comments on the author construct in *IWNT*:

> Both Italian and American critics have helped to identify part of Calvino's project in *Traveler* (sic) by interpreting the novel as a destruction of the all-powerful Author of traditional fiction and as a document that invests renewed

> power in the activity of reading. Clearly, a demystification of authority is part of Calvino's larger accomplishment: the demystification of any metaphysical ideal located outside of time and impervious to the surrounding disruptions and disorder. (703)

IWNT tries to answer many of the fundamental questions about reading: What is reading? Why do we read? and how is meaning created out of the written words? Many of these questions are answered in the 'literary symposium' that is held by the various readers in the library. It is quite fitting that the "tempest–tossed vessel" comes to the library. The library here stands for everything that has been written so far. The library is Borges' favourite metaphor for the world and the book. Almost all the readers who spoke there agreed on one thing; reading of a book is not something that can be separated from what one had read earlier. Reading is a continuous process in which the anterior texts exert their influence. Secondly, it does not start at a particular point and come to an end with another. The play of signifiers in a book does not set it apart from the sea of signifiers around. So the beginning, or the end of a book is not the most important thing about it. The sixth reader in the library says that the promise of reading is enough for him:

> The moment that counts most for me is the one that precedes reading. At times a title is enough to kindle in me the desire for a book that perhaps does not exit. At times it is the *incipit* of the book, the first sentence . . . In

> other words: if you need little to set the imagination going, I require even less: the promise of reading is enough. (202)

As it is stated elsewhere in the text, the flow of events or signifiers does not have a break point to give it a beginning or an end. Something that happens in the present is a continuation of the past events. Our reading of the present is guided and directed by our experiences in the past. In other words, reading is a continuous process and meaning can never be final. The same principle is true of stories. This intertextual principle is stressed by the fourth reader. He makes his stand clear:

> Every new book I read comes to be a part of that overall and unitary book that is the sum of my readings. This does not come about without some effort: to compose that general book, each individual book must be transformed, enter into a relationship with the books I have read previously, become their corollary or development or confutation or gloss or reference text. (202)

Years of reading experience has made him a seasoned reader, and that has made him not to draw lines between books. His reading is a part of the continuum, part of a macrotext that is the totality of everything he has read.

All the other readers in the library hold opinions that are opposite to that of the Reader, the protagonist. In other words, all the

newfangled ideas of reading and writing cannot persuade the Reader to give up his craze for traditional narratives. He has been desperately searching for a text that would tie all the loose ends together and give satisfactory answers to the questions raised in its course. The lack of narrative closure and mood of uncertainty disturbs the Reader's mind.

His decision to marry Ludmilla may make amends for the damage done by an unconventional narrative by ensuring narrative closure and conclusiveness to the events. It is the sudden reminder from the seventh reader that opens the Reader's eyes to that possibility. If all the norms have been flouted in the microtext, the macrotext of life can restore them. As for the correspondence between the story and life, the comment made by the seventh reader makes it amply clear.

Meaning in metafiction, as the metafitionist argues, is the result of a vast network of signifiers. The individual text is only a cog in the wheel dating back to the early days of storytelling. Self–reflexive fiction takes a critical look at the long tradition of storytelling. *IWNT* parodies the folk tradition with an intention to invoke its history. The very beginning of the text is strongly reminiscent of the narrative set–up of those old tales. The detailed instructions at the outset, ensuring the physical comfort of the reader while reading, remind one of the comfort given by the protective physical closeness of a grandfather or grandmother. The happily ever after ending of the text, in keeping with the conventions, reinforces the folk element. Critics who are familiar

with the Italian story telling tradition have commented on the influence of Italian folktales on Calvino.

Reading is invested with far more significance than the transmission of messages through the medium of language. Even though meaning is not inherent in it, the sign acquires meaning as the result of an elaborate network of signification. Meaning-making in language is to be seen as a microcosm of the wider meaning machines by virtue of which human beings make sense of the social system around them. The reference, "the novel to be read is superimposed by a possible novel to be lived" (30) occurs in the context of the parallel readings that the Male Reader and Ludmilla are going to undertake. Words like 'story' assume wider connotations in such a context.

Both the Reader and Ludmilla are notable for their attitude towards reading. They construe reading in terms of an unproblematic activity. They are adamantly insensitive to the ideological systems that are at work behind the narratives. Ludmilla, especially, desires "a condition of natural reading" (76). Her aversion to fiction that tries "to impose a philosophy of life" (76) is symptomatic of her refusal to look at the discursive context of the story.

Whereas Lotaria and her study group are sensitive to the manifold implications of a text, Ludmilla would like to be blissfully unaware of it. She explains it as follows:

> 'The novel I would most like to read at this moment', Ludmilla explains, 'should have as its driving force only the desire to narrate, to pile stories, without trying to

> impose a philosophy of life on you, simply allowing you to observe its own growth, like a tree, an entangling, as if of branches and leaves. . . .' (76)

The Reader is in perfect agreement to such an organic view of reading. The traces of a reading that is wilfully blind to the discursive forces behind it are evident here. As far as Ludmilla is concerned, it is a matter of policy not to look into these aspects. One of the basic aims of metafiction is that of making the reader sensitive to the 'constructed' nature and discursive contexts of fiction. It can be seen that Ermes Marana's counterfeiting mission has got a similar purpose. It holds out certain important principles for readers like Ludmilla. He has declared war on ideas like originality, authenticity of the work, and the belief that the author is the guarantor of truth in literature. Above all, he tries to eliminate the traditional author who claimed to be the 'source' of the whole discourse. By making the author less important through his mystification and counterfeits, he tries to propose a new theory of the text.

But the principal readers proceed in an entirely different direction. They have been together all along, desperately seeking answers to the questions that baffle them. Those questions were regarding the authorship and authenticity of the novels that they were unable to finish. They are birds of the same feather, their cognitive energies are channelised in the same direction, and so are the libidinal energies as we see later in the text. In the midst of confusions regarding the authenticity of the novels entangled with each other,

Lotaria reads from the disputed copy of the novel and it is indicative of the degree of affinity between them. "You exchange a quick glance, you and Ludmilla, or rather, two glances: first questioning, then agreeing. Whatever it may be, this is a novel where, once you have got into it, you want to go forward, without stopping" (64).

This kind of harmony is evident between Ludmilla and the Reader throughout their readings. Lotaria has ideas that are exactly opposite to those of the Reader and Ludmilla. Ermes Marana belongs to another category. His earnest efforts are aimed at leading Ludmilla through the correct reading trajectories, but the role that is assigned to him is that of a scheming villain who comes in between the hero and the heroine, the Reader and Ludmilla.

Every reader who figures in *IWNT* is well-defined in terms of the expectations she/he has regarding a creative text. On the basis of this, it is also possible to form a comprehensive idea of their attitudes. Ludmilla, in this sense, is a reader who is thoroughly traditional in her readings. In novels, she looks forward to "a world where everything is precise, concrete, specific" (28). As an individual, she believes in a world that is well organised and stable in every aspect. Or in other words, that world has an unquestionable order that has been there for centuries, such an approach does not allow any scope for a possible re-reading or a fresh look at the things. Ludmilla conceives literature as an unproblematic reflection of the world outside. Language is a transparent medium that creates the world for her.

Perhaps the most explicit comment on the question of meaning in literature and life occurs in chapter seven. It occupies a position that is in many ways similar to the chapter thirteen of *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* There, the narrator comes up with a sudden revelation, turning the realistic narrative on its head, that the characters he had been talking about were a figment of his imagination, Even though the realistic narrative has been sparingly used in *IWNT,* the impact of the subversive discourse is similar. The discourse in chapter seven involves almost all the major characters in the text like the Reader, Ludmilla, Irnerio, Marana, and Silas Flannery. The whole chapter is a novel in itself, another micro text, when their relationships are discussed in terms of a novel plot. Gradually and unobtrusively, the semiotic chain that awards the status of a novel to a text is unraveled and every stand is examined for what it is. The tone of the narrative is humorous at many points. Every process that is associated with a conventional narrative is revealed before the eyes of the reader.

At the very outset, the text exposes the scheme of affairs in which characters and events are shaped up into an intelligible and sensible narrative in a man-made system of semiotic chain:

> What are you like, other Reader? It is time for this book in the second person to address itself no longer to a general male you, perhaps brother and double of a hypocrite I, but directly to you who appeared already in the second chapter as the Third Person necessary for the novel to be

> a novel, for something to happen between that male Second Person and the Female Third, for something to take form, develop, or deteriorate according to the phases of human events. Or, rather, to follow the mental models through which we attribute to human events the meanings that allow them to be lived. (113)

The direct correspondence between meaning in life and meaning in a system like literature is hinted at in this statement. The 'mental models' referred to here are the structures of meaning through which human beings make sense of their lives. But what is to be underlined is that they are not 'given', but 'costructed', according to certain commonly accepted rules of the narrative. The macro narrative of life probably serves as a model for the micro narrative of the text.

The address to the Reader and the Other Reader reveals some of the practical considerations in conventional fiction. The narrator's treatment of the Other Reader reveals it all before the extratextual reader. The manner in which Ludmilla's textual position is described is rather tongue-in-cheek. It lays bare the dynamics of character-delineation in fiction. On the other hand, it also throws light on the role models that are copied from fiction to life. In this sense, it deals with the inter-dependence of the 'mental-models' that are implied in life and fiction. Metafiction points out that these 'mental models' are by no means final and natural. Going by the standards of conventional fiction, Ludmilla is an indispensable part of the narrative. She is the new centre of orientation that dictates the future

course of the Reader's life. When the text parodies or flaunts the conventions of writing, the whole drama of characterisation is enacted before the reader:

> This book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read: this is why he was not given a name, which would automatically have made him the equivalent of a Third Person, of a character (whereas to you, as Third person, a name had to be given, Ludmilla), and so he has been kept a pronoun, in the abstract condition of pronouns, suitable for any attribute and any action. Let us see, Other Reader, if the book can succeed in drawing a true portrait of you, beginning with the frame and enclosing you from every side, establishing the outlines of your form. (113)

The humorous tone employed is justified when seen against the background of the role assigned to Ludmilla. Her character shares the matrix of female characterisation in fiction; it can be called either 'love interest' or 'romantic interest'. In spite of all the intellectual attributes that are given to her, she is assessed on the basis of a first-hand examination conducted in her kitchen:

> Observing your kitchen, therefore, one can create a picture of you as an extroverted, clearsighted woman, sensual and methodical; you make your practical sense serve your imagination. Could a man fall in love with you,

> just seeing your kitchen? Perhaps the Reader, who was already favourably disposed. (114)

It is an example of anti-climax when the narrator moves from books as an index of personal assessment to the kitchen. A detailed analysis of the kitchen finally convinces the observer that she is an "extroverted, clear sighted" woman. The reader as well as the narrator heaves a sigh of relief as the textual responsibility of finding a 'love interest' is solved. Here the reader is led by the conventions of reading that he has probably learned from the wide world outside.

The manner in which the Male Reader tries to comprehend the illusive character of Ludmilla sheds much light on the character of the reader himself. After making a comprehensive 'reading' of Ludmilla's kitchen, he 'reads' every object in the house in order to have a better picture of Ludmilla because he believes that "they assume meaning as elements of a discourse" (115). The heavily loaded language points to the existence of a semiotic system behind every such reading. Altogether, the "signs" spread over Ludmilla's house are seen as part of the attempt to "concentrate signs into a kind of dense script" (115).

Once the characters who become a part of the combinations of events are introduced, the narrative attains the status of a discourse. The text is candid about these developments in print when it says that "for a second-person discourse to become a novel, at least two you's are required" (117).

A semblance of action is introduced in the sequence of events when Irnerio steps into the plot. The Reader looks 'reads' him as an

unwelcome intruder between him and his love interest. The relationship between the non-reader and Ludmilla is of serious concern to the Reader, because he is already in the position of the hero. The plot thickens further when Ermes Marana makes his appearance. Irnerio and Marana are vying with each other for winning Ludmilla's attention. Finally, the confusions are solved and the reader emerges victorious. He wins Ludmilla's hand and it results in their physical union that is described in terms of reading. The 'erotic model' stressed by Linda Hutcheon is materialised here. All these textual developments are witnessed by the extratexual reader and she/he is sensitized to the ways in which a narrative comes into being. The running commentary helps the reader to understand the discursive context of such a narrative.

Arbitrariness of literary conventions is an important theme in radical metafiction. Fiction follows a set of conventions that are identified with the essence of its form. As it is a historical phenomenon, something that has evolved through the centuries, readers generally do not become sensitive to the arbitrariness of these conventions. Moreover, it is taken to be a true reflection of an objective reality outside. By problematising a well–established literary convention, the metafictional text points not only to its arbitrary nature, but also to the absence of a similar pattern in what is generally agreed to be the objective reality outside. A comment in the seventh chapter of *IWNT* raises a lot of questions in this regard. When

the text comes to a situation similar to the much talked about 'writer's block', the narrator says:

> But how to establish the exact moment in which a story begins? Everything has already begun before; the first line of the first page of every novel refers to something that has already happened outside the book. Or else the real story is the one that begins ten or a hundred pages further on, and everything that precedes it is only a prologue. The lives of individuals of the human race form a constant plot, in which every attempt to isolate one piece of living that has a meaning separate from the rest--for example, the meeting of two people, which will become decisive for both--must bear it in mind that each of the two brings with himself a texture of events, environments, other people, and that from the meeting, in turn, other stories will be derived which will break off from their common story. (122)

The comment sheds a lot of light on the arbitraries of literary conventions.

Ermes Marana, the translator-cum-counterfeiter has an important position in the textual design of *IWNT*. It is his spirited efforts to produce the fake and apocryphal versions of the novels published in various languages in various lands that sow the seed of confusion among publishers, readers, and critics. From one point of view, there is nothing unnatural or outrageous about Marana's

missions because basically he is a translator. The very fact that translations have got acceptance in the world of letters vouches for the legitimacy of Marana's efforts. A translation, in many ways, is a transcreation. There are no exact equivalents of words in two different languages. Such a fact undermines the originality claims of a work of literature. Secondly 'veracity' and 'truthfulness' are not the hallmarks of great literature. In this sense, Ermes Marana is not the villain of the piece, but one who makes an earnest effort to make people like Ludmilla and the reader open their eyes to the true nature of literature. But from their traditional point of view, Marana's efforts amount to sacrilege.

The trickster figure in the world of letters introduces himself as a representative OEPHLW, Organisation for the Electronic Production of Homogenised Literary Works. At a later stage, he is identified with *Apocryphal Power*, another organisation probably founded by him. This organisation has its operations in countries all over the world and has developed amazing techniques in spreading the counterfeited works of literature. The reason why Marana started his illusionary trick was his jealousy of the invisible author who stood between him and Ludmilla. It was not simply a matter of personal interest to him, but an earnest attempt to convince her about the nature of reality, as he perceived it.

But Ludmilla's passion for reading, channelised in an entirely different direction, was not to be influenced by Marana's interventions. She went on reading the books of her favourite author

fervently and assuming them to be 'the precious life blood' of its creator. Marana's 'good intentions' and the peculiarities of Ludmilla's readings are better outlined by Arkadian Porphyrich, who had interrogated Marana on the charge of counterfeiting:

> 'For this woman', Arkadian Porphyrich continues, seeing how intently you are drinking in his words, 'reading means stripping herself of every purpose, every foregone conclusion, to be ready to catch a voice that makes itself heard when you least expect it, a voice that comes from an unknown source, from somewhere beyond the book, beyond the author, beyond the conventions of writing; from the unsaid, from what the world has not yet said of itself and does not yet have the words to say. As for him, he wanted, on the contrary, to show her that behind the written page is the void; the world exists only as artifice, pretense, misunderstanding, falsehood'. (188-189)

Their respective attitudes regarding literature and the nature of representation are evident here. For her, it conveys a truth "beyond the conventions of writing", but for Marana, its essence lies in "artifice". But finally, Ermes Marana concedes defeat not only before the 'obstinate readings' of Ludmilla but also the power of reading that had disarmed her. In this sense, Ludmilla and the reader are birds of the same feather.

Marana's missions, even though it may seem to be diabolical and unjustified at first, have got a sound theoretical basis. As he

expounds it, "literature's worth lies in its power of mystification, in mystification it has its truth; therefore a fake, as the mystification of a mystification, is tantamount to a truth squared (142)". He also says that, "the author of every book is a fictitious character whom the existent author invents to make him the author of his fictions" (142). He strongly contests the theory of originality in literature and is out to prove that the author is not the force that guarantees truth-value to it. All his efforts are directed towards one goal, that of driving away the authors who may come between him and Ludmilla. He cannot bear the sight of Ludmilla lost in the novel written by someone else. Because of his devotion to Ludmilla, he dreamed of a "literature made entirely of apocrypha, of false attributions, of imitations and counterfeits and pastiches" (127).

But Ludmilla's perspective on writing and her expectations makes it clear that Marana's efforts are doomed to failure. Metafiction does not allow readers the luxury of an innocent reading. But Ludmilla always looks forward to "the unsullied pleasure of reading" (77). When the readings run into problems because of the lack of a complete text, the reader plans to visit the publisher with the complaint. But Ludmilla refuses to accompany him on principle because she draws a clear distinction between those who make books and those who read them. She would like to remain on the latter side. Precisely, this is what happens to the reader as soon as literature is demystified and revealed for what it is.

Behind the author is a shaman called Mr. Cavedagna who does the entire tightrope walking for the publisher. He is the one who with an uncanny sense, chooses and promotes the commercially viable one from the hundreds of manuscripts that flow into a publisher's office. A conversation that the reader overheard on entering his office brings it out all. Cavedgna was talking to an aspiring author regarding the fate of her/his manuscript:

> Remarkable sense of language, heartfelt denunciation, didn't you receive our letter? We're very sorry to have to tell you, in the letter it's all explained, we sent it some time ago, the mail is so slow these days, you'll receive it of course; our list is overloaded, unfavourable economic situation. Ah, you see? You've received it. And what else did it say? Thanking you for having allowed us to read it, we will return it promptly. (77)

The manuscript in question was not worthy of consideration, but the unpleasant truth is expressed in euphemistic terms. The Reader comes to know all the tricks about publishing; mainly the play of economic forces that go into the making of a novel. It is to be noted that the Reader does not lose faith in his classic theory of the text. Ludmilla is even more steadfast in her allegiance to the classic theory of the text. For all his ingenuity and tricks, Marana finally becomes a martyr to the strange power of reading. Ludmilla has been trying all the while to evade the snare of fiction that was spread around her. He was trying to show the void behind the written page, but she sticks to

her transcendental view of the text; a voice that comes from an unknown source, "beyond the conventions of writing (189)". When Marana fails in his effort to win Ludmilla over to the 'Faith of Apocrypha', he concedes defeat with these words: "In reading, something happens over which I have no power" (189).

The shifting perspectives in which Marana is seen in the text is noteworthy. In the early stages of the narrative, Marana is seen as a villain, or a deranged mind on a counterfeiting mission. His attempts at falsification have been seen as symptomatic of his jealousy. He cannot tolerate a writer gaining influence over Ludmilla. But it is Arkadian Porphyrich, Director General of the State Police Archives in the Republic of Ircania, who gathers more valuable information about the real motive behind his operations. His real intention was to open Ludmilla's eyes to the real nature of the written page. In that sense, Ermes Marana had a sound theoretical basis for his mission, even though he was unsuccessful in it.

The metaphor of the labyrinth appeals to Calvino because it resembles the functioning of meaning structures in the world. Borges displays a similar preoccupation in his novels. The Reader in *IWNT*, engrossed in the question of meaning, resembles a person caught in the blind alleys of a labyrinth. From anothor perspective he looks like a detective, engaged in a futile search for definite and conclusive meaning. Calvino presents that detective in a humorous light. The Reader loses himself in the world of texts, unable to distinguish between the macrotext and the microtext. Perhaps metafiction

insinuates that the text is capable of endless mutations. In the final analysis, it negates almost all the received notions of literature and posits revolutionary ones in its place.

Calvino presents the metaphor of reading; an implicit comment on the human beings' attempts to make sense of the world. In *IWNT,* it is almost impossible to distinguish between the reading of a book and the other readings by means of which we understand people and situations. It is a wonderful achievement of the text that it presents these self-reflexive lessons through the medium of a conventional narrative. The framework of the tale remains that of the grandma's tale, but it works both the ways. In a postmodern gesture of simultaneous installation and subversion, the thread of the old tale is used for the creative and subversive acts. The long journey of the Reader is accompanied by a long dissertation on the history of the narrative, and the theoretical lesson is least intrusive. The postmodern lessons are quite explicit: the hypertextual progress of the tale, fluidity of the narrative and above all, the provisional nature of the truth embodied by it.

Chapter III

History and Story: John Fowles'

The *French Lieutenant's Woman*

Metafiction defies genre distinctions. The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) sets out to write a work of fiction, but ends up mixing it with history. And the conclusion seems to be that both are structures of meaning constructed out of language and the established set of conventions. The structure is founded on the reader's 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The historical perspective is evident right from the first chapter that describes Lyme Regis, a place that is "redolent of seven hundred years of English history" (7). As is typical of a historian, the focus is not only on the things as they are, but as to what happened and what explains its present status.

The privilege of the twentieth century perspective enables the narrator to unearth truths that were practically concealed earlier. The miserable plight of the domestic servants and poor factory workers is not a major theme in historical and imaginative writings of the Victorian age. Except for a few novels and unpublished reports, the workers' problems do not figure prominently. But a reconstruction of the past from the twentieth century perspective displays amazing results; deviations from the mainstream representations. Marx's writings, shedding much light on the sorry plight of the workers, can be taken as an example. The message is too conspicuous to evade

attention; representations, even historical, cannot claim to represent things objectively. History, in the final analysis, is a set of conventions exactly similar to fictional literature.

It is also significant to note that knowledge of the past is mediated more by works of imaginative literature. Fowles constantly invokes Jane Austen, Hardy, Tennyson, and Arnold in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (*FLW*). But finally, he manages to convey 'truths' that were probably beyond their 'reach' or 'sight'. In that sense, intertextuality plays a major role in the realisation of the text.

It is interesting to observe the narrator of *FLW* taking equal care to build up as well as to break the illusionary effect of the text. As for the first objective, he wants to demonstrate the realistic impact of a solid narrative that creates the impression of a transparent reflection. On the other hand, it is also important for the author to destroy that illusionary impact, only to prove that it is a provisional structure of meaning that came into being because of the co-operation of the reader. If he relies on the usual attributes of a Victorian realist novel to create the mimetic impact, the subversive act is accomplished with the help of twentieth century modes of thought like Marxism and Feminism. Naturally, the situations and characters in *FLW* partake of both the centuries and therefore can be looked at from both the perspectives. Marguerite Alexander echoes the same point in *Flights from Realism:*

> In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles uses a Victorian setting and characters modelled on stereotypes

> from the novels of the period; and then problematises the whole process by explicitly and self consciously analysing the characters' behaviour in the light of Marxist and Freudian theory, with occasional reference to post-war French writers like Barthes who are more immediate influence on his own approach. (126)

Even though the text reads like a conventional Victorian novel at a cursory glance, a deeper analysis proves that the Victorian form is only a ploy to problematise the same. The novel shares many features of the Victorian narrative. Charles Smithson is an archetypal Victorian hero in many respects. He belongs to that class of Victorian gentlemen who never had to sweat for their daily bread. Laziness and a kind of aimlessness are the hallmarks of his character. The amateur pursuit of palaeontology is quite fitting to a gentleman of his class. Ernestina Freeman too reminds one of the familiar Victorian moulds of heroines. She is the heiress to a rich fortune and that is the principal reason why Charles tolerates all her pranks and priggishness. Marguerite Alexander says that her social aspirations, iron will and playful manipulativeness conform to the type of Rosamund Vincy in George Eliot's *Middle March* (128).

If Ernestina is treated as the typical Victorian heroine, Sarah gets the role of the 'other woman', a sort of foil to Ernestina. She is everything that Tina is not, shameless about the desires of her body and unmindful of the social stigma. It is a proof of Fowles' ingenuity that Sarah appears as a 'new woman' from another perspective. She

breaks all stereotypes of Victorian womanhood and its representation in fiction. In this sense *FLW* is not only a Victorian novel, but a problematisation of the same entity too. Commenting on the interface of the Victorian and the Twentieth century elements in it, Neil McEwan says in *The Survival of the Novel*:

> *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is quite unlike a realistic Victorian novel. In its capacity to re-create and redefine an older fictional life it is a key to understanding the best of contemporary British novelists whose relations with Victorian fiction and culture, although less conspicuous than here, are often equally intimate and complex. (24)

There can be no doubt that Fowles' relations with Victorian fiction were complex. At the same time, the "re-creation and redefinition" that McEwan talks about is accomplished through complex narrative experiments. The constant shift of perspective in *FLW* makes the reader apply two modes of thought, one Victorian and the other modern. Characters and events appear in an entirely different light when seen through the twentieth century perspective. A single reading of the novel with Victorian artistic standards and value systems in mind would not bring out its full potential. The first few chapters introduce the reader to the characters and setting as in a realistic novel. Suspense is also present at this stage. The triangle love situation involving Charles, Sarah and Ernestina is an example. The reader is anxious to know about the next turn of events: whether Charles will marry Ernestina or fall for the charms of Sarah?

Another Victorian element is the presence of a large number of minor characters drawn from the stock of Victorian fiction. The character of Dr. Grogan, in this respect, represents the newly emerged scientific and rational face of the Victorian society. Yet, the presence of a predominantly realistic narrative does not make *FLW* a Victorian novel. It is a re-working of the novel from the twentieth century perspective, paying attention to the ideological issues at stake.

Fowles makes extensive use of Victorian texts to dispute the realistic claims of the nineteenth-century novel. He falls back upon the canonical texts that were supposed to be honest reflections of the contemporary reality and points to the discursive contexts in which they were produced and received. The texts that are chosen for this analysis are by authors like Dickens, Jane Austen, and Thomas Hardy. The narrator is highly critical of the worldview presented in these novels. Their real significance lies in legitimising a philosophy of life and ideology generated by a particular section of the society that is the middle and the upper classes. It is interesting to note that a considerable part of the realistic narrative in *FLW* does exactly the same thing. But the author does not forget to nullify and subvert the conventional narrative and ideology by bringing them into conflict with the anterior texts and authorial interventions.

The authorial intervention in chapter thirty-five makes an explicit reference to the discursive context and ideology of certain prior textualisations of the Victorian past. The narrator observes:

> The vast majority of witnesses and reporters in every age belong to the educated class; and this has produced, throughout history, a kind of minority distortion of reality. The prudish puritanity we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos. Dickens' working class characters are very funny (or very pathetic) and an incomparable range of grotesques, but for the cold reality we need to go elsewhere to Mayhew, the great commission reports and the rest; and nowhere more than in this sexual aspect of their lives, which Dickens (who lacked a certain authenticity in his own) and his compeers so totally bowdlerized. (234)

The veracity of this statement can be tested by analysing Dickens' *Hard Times,* where the social reformer in him takes on the evils of industrialisation, especially the mindless exploitation of the working class.

Fowles makes use of the Marxian text in *FLW* as a looking glass and demonstrates how a system of representation constructs a reality. Working class movements or leaders hardly found their way into Victorian narratives. If at all they were represented, the treatment was far from sympathetic. A typical Victorian narrative rather steered clear of such elements and tried to present a different worldview. Factory production and large-scale manufacture had introduced radical changes in the economic and social set-up of Victorian England. Along

with it, trade union movements became a common phenomenon as workers were employed in large numbers in factories. It is a fact that these workers were treated as 'factory hands', and wages were hardly sufficient to ensure a decent living. The growing discontent among the working class often led to sporadic incidents of violence and disturbance in the industrial cities.

The living conditions of these underpaid workers were far from human. They were huddled up in small, dingy rooms in subhuman conditions. Long working hours, ill-health and occupational diseases further compounded their misery. It is in this context that Karl Marx's theories on exploitation and labour assume significance against the Victorian backdrop. John Fowles, naturally, uses the Marxist text in analysing the Victorian reality from his privileged twentieth century point of view. Marx and his theories make a palpable presence in the text. The reference to the Jew working quietly in the British Museum Library is not merely coincidental. "Needless to say, Charles knew nothing of the beavered German Jew quietly working, as it so happened, that very afternoon in the British Museum Library; and whose work in those sombre walls was to bear such bright red fruit" (16).

Another method in which Marx makes his appearance is in the form of the epigraphs in the novel. These quotations are related to the theme of exploitation of domestic labourers presented in the Victorian narrative. Yet, Fowles' treatment of this Victorian text is markedly different from the way Marx and his theories were treated by the

Victorian authors. The intertextual dynamism of *FLW* invokes some of those prior textualisations on the theme of exploitation.

Dickens' *Hard Times* is a dominant Victorian text that dealt with proletareanism in the context of the nineteenth century England. Dickens' basic purpose in the writing of *Hard Times* was to analyse the new Industrial culture that became the hallmark of manufacturing towns. Prior to its writing, Dickens had visited the Preston Cotton Factory that was the scene of a lock-out and troubled labour relations. Coketown in *Hard Times* is presented on the model of a typical nineteenth-century manufacturing town that prospered on the hard labour of unfortunate workers who were subjected to ruthless exploitation by the capitalist forces.

Characters like Stephen Blackpool and Rachael represent this unfortunate class of people. Rachael's sister had lost her arms in an accident in the factory. For her, the factory bell in the early morning sounds like death knell. In a way, the social reformer in Dickens was serious about the task of reflecting the sad plight of the Victorian factory workers. Yet, when it comes to the representation of trade union movement in *Hard Times*, Dickens is ambivalent. In spite of Dickens' awareness of the sorry plight of workers, the representation of trade union movement is more in the negative vein.

The chief representative of the working class movement, a factory worker named Stephen Blackpool, not only resists joining the union, but says that "It is a muddle", referring to the activities of the union leaders. Dickens' articles in his journal, *Household Words,* had

established beyond doubt that the strikers were on the side of the victims. But in the novel, they are portrayed as being manipulated by an outsider, a cardboard cut-out of a trade union leader, Slackbridge. This caricature probably means that Dickens was of the opinion that the workers were wrong to organise themselves into unions. Commenting on the representation of trade union movement in *Hard Times*, Bernard Shaw said: "There is a real failure in the book. Slack Bridge, the trade union organizer, is a mere figment of the middle-class imagination. No such man would be listened to by a meeting of English factory hands"(362).The comment amply proves that some kind of an ideological manipulation was present in the Victorian novel form. It is difficult to accept the argument that it was a natural method of representation.

Fowles' method of historiography is to draw the reader's attention to the fate of domestic servants and workers and to conflate the same with quotations from Marx and other writers. Sam and Mary emerge from the matrix of domestic servants that Marx talked about. Even though Charles as an employer is far better when compared with Victorian employers like Mrs. Poultney, it does not bring any improvement in the condition of domestic servants under him. The working conditions of servants like Millie and Sarah are similar to those of the exploited factory hands. The humiliation and suffering that are meted out to domestic servants by Mrs. Poultney drive them to the edge, but they are forced to put up with it in the absence of alternatives. The only alternative that is left to them is that of

prostitution. Fowles presents a graphic picture of that in the form of the other 'Sarah' who entertains Charles in a brothel.

The presentation of this character seems to be a deliberate move on the part of the author to emphasise the fate that awaits Sarah Woodruff once she escapes from the world of Mrs. Poultney-like employers. In that case, the use of the name 'Sarah' to the prostitute is not a matter of coincidence. The narrator says that even though they had different looks, they had something in common. A description of the brothel scene conveys the moral indignation:

> The white bodies embraced, contorted, mimicked; but it seemed to Charles that there was a despair behind the fixed suggestive smiles of the performers. One was a child who could only just have reached puberty; and there seemed in her assumption of demure innocence something genuinely virginal, still agonized, and not fully hardened by her profession. (266)

Sam and Mary, as representatives of domestic servants, are much pampered by the twentieth century narrator. Possibly, with his twentieth-century point of view and the Marxian text before him, he wanted to highlight the conditions of their existence. They are treated as machines by their employers. They had to work for hours without rest. In addition to this comes the moral straightjacket that is imposed by an employer like Mrs. Poultney. What she interprets as promiscuity can be read as playfulness and geniality of sprit by the twentieth century reader. The narrator avows that Charles, as an employer, is

far better than many of the upstart employers who were ruthless and inconsiderate in the treatment of domestic servants:

> Yet though Charles' attitude may seem to add insult to the already gross enough injury of economic exploitation, I must point out that his relationship with Sam did show a kind of affection, a human bond, that was a good deal better than the rigid barrier so many of the new rich in an age drenched in new riches were by that time erecting between themselves and their domestics. (42)

Charles is definitely lenient to Sam as an employer. Yet, it should be pointed out that his treatment of Sam is inhuman by modern standards. For Charles, very often, his manservant is an object of his whims and fancies, and he enjoys teasing him with an obvious feeling of intellectual and social superiority. One situation where Charles teases Sam over his relationship with Mary is an example. Charles threatens to send him back to Kensington. Charles' verbal ribaldry and insensitivity are too much for Sam that in choked voice he replies, "we're not ...orses. We're 'ooman beings" (97).The twentieth-century narrator seems to have taken serious note of the situation in which domestic servants like Sam and Mary are exploited. From another point of view, they justify Karl Marx's writings on the exploitation of domestic servants.

The narrator is indulgent towards Sam Farrow. He is presented as having the ability to adapt himself to the sweeping economic and social changes happening around him. He does everything possible to

realise his dream of becoming a haberdasher of sorts. The possible financial help from Charles is a big step towards the fulfilment of that dream. He plays his cards cleverly on seeing a possible breach between Charles Smithson and Mr. Freeman's family. Sam does not deliver the letter that was addressed to Sarah. The question as to what would have happened if Sam had delivered the letter as instructed, can be taken as another suggested development of the plot. Sam's actions also set him up in contrast to his employer. If Charles is caught up in the whirlwind of social evolution, in spite of his knowledge of Darwin, Sam shows the determination to pull on and he proves it. He tries his best to move upwards in the social hierarchy. A clear indication of this ability can be seen later in his ingenuity in finding a suitable caption, "Freeman's for choice", for the shop.

Probably, the narrator does not directly indict Sam Farrow for his failure to deliver the letter as desired by the sender. On account of the gross exploitation that Sam and his fellow creatures are undergoing, he is seen as 'more sinned against than sinning'. The significance of the Marxian text within the narrative is emphasised. Another indicator of the narrator's interest in Sam as a representative of his class is evident in the way Sam Farrow is intertexually related to Sam Weller of Dickens' *Pickwick Papers.*

The Fowlsian text on the conditions of nineteenth-century working class is distinct because of the intertextual pattern he weaves out of the prior texts and the Victorian narrative. He makes profuse use of the historical and imaginative texts as a background for the

story of Charles, Tina and Sarah. The quotations from Marx can be directly linked to the plot of the conventional Victorian narrative at hand. The epigraph to the seventh chapter is from Marx' *Das Capital:*

> The extraordinary productiveness of modern industry. . . allows of the unproductive employment of a larger and larger part of the working class, and the consequent reproduction, on a constantly extending scale, of the ancient domestic slaves under the name of a servant class, including man-servants, woman-servants, lackeys, etc. (38)

Certain characters and the ideas they represent can be identified with the outdated Victorian novel form. Mrs. Poultney, Mrs. Tranter, Ernestina etc. belong to that group. In contrast is an array of characters that are likely to be identified with the experimental form of the narrative. The most prominent among them is Sarah, Fowles' alter ego in the text. Ms. Ernestina Freeman is everything that Sarah Woodruff is not. That is why the peak of Sarah's emancipation coincides with the high point of formal experimentation in the novel.

Fowles has an interesting purpose in subjecting the stereotypes of Victorian fiction to scrutiny. He invites the reader's attention to the matrix from which these characters have emerged. Sexuality is a topic that occupies the central place in any discussion on Victorian culture. Many of the negative adjectives usually applied to the Victorian era have got something to do with the Victorian response to sexuality. It is a fact that many of the notorious discourses of sexuality were highly

disadvantageous to the womenfolk. Even though the age maintained a sinister silence on the topic of sex, the number of brothels in England was appallingly high compared to the twentieth century.

The Victorian decrees on sexuality were tilted against women. Another result of this patriarchal discourse on sexuality was that it excluded women from any concept of pleasure associated with the act of sex. Sarah in *FLW* subverts many of the Victorian fictions on female sexuality. The carefully planned seduction scene in the novel is a clean statement of this subversive potential. Almost like a subversion of similar scenes in conventional fiction, Sarah takes the initiative in seducing Charles. More striking than the reversal of roles is the boldness displayed by Sarah throughout. She is not ashamed of herself for submitting to the desires of the body. It is shocking to Charles because he had imbibed all the Victorian values. Precisely due to this, the experience is beyond Charles' comprehension. The narrator says, "Charles was like many Victorian men. He could not really believe that any woman of refined sensibilities could enjoy being a receptacle for male lust" (307).

Even though it looks like an anachronism, the impact of embedding a character with obvious twentieth-century features into a Victorian narrative is far-reaching. Apart from having a functional role in fiction, this experimental device reverts the reader's attention to the role that one plays in real life; roles that are dictated by the dominant socio-political currents of the time. That is why a twentieth-century female character has to be different from a Victorian one even in an

issue like response to basic instincts. On Fowles' part, there are enough indications in the narrative to prove that Sarah is pampered. The narrator says:

> She had some sort of psychological equivalent of the experienced horse dealer's skill--the ability to know almost at the first glance the good horse from the bad one; or as if, jumping a century, she was born with a computer in her heart. I say her heart, since the values she computed belong more there than in the mind. She could sense the pretension of a hollow argument, a false scholarship, a biased logic when she came across them; but she also saw through people in subtler ways. (50)

The metaphoric language used here is indicative of the terms in which the author wants to present Sarah before the reader. Another occasion that highlights Sarah's integrity of character in unambiguous terms is the way she responds to the alleged sin of walking alone on Ware Commons. Sarah makes it clear that she frequents Ware Commons for solitude. She is least bothered about the ill-reputation that it may bring.

It is another sign of Sarah's moral superiority to Mrs. Poultney and her likes that she is unfazed by all the gossips about her character and virtues. At the same time, she becomes a willing contributor to the juicy tales that the common folks have concocted about her. Sarah herself is the creator of the 'story' of her association with the French Lieutenant. It is one of the biggest 'true lies' of the

narrative and Sarah makes it clear that she had slept with the man knowing his insincerity and duplicity. The details of the Waymonth inn meeting are so graphic that Charles believes the tale. In Sarah's own words, "I gave myself to him" (152). This woman is definitely beyond Charles' comprehension:

> I did it so that I should never be the same again. I did it so that people should point at me, should say, there walks the French Lieutenant's whore- oh yes, let the word be said. So that they should know I have suffered, and suffer, as others suffer in every town and village in this land. (153)

The duality of vision that enables the reader to approach the same narrative with two points of view, one Victorian and the other modern is a sleight of hand achieved by Fowles. This feature is very much evident in the characterisation of Sarah Woodruff. Her character is so strong that it outshines some of the memorable women characters in twentieth century feminist writings. Apart from her fierce sense of self-respect, she even emerges as a defendant of her own sex. Sarah's spirited defence of Millie, one of the maidservants at Mrs. Poultney's speaks volumes of this quality. The little girl was summoned for a 'gross dereliction'; she had forgotten to water the ferns in the second drawing room. When the mistress starts her 'trial proceedings' in her characteristic manner, Sarah comes to the rescue of the accused and establishes the fact that she was not keeping well for some time, actually she fainted twice in the previous week. Sarah's intervention,

thus, ensures justice for the poor maidservant. Such incidents definitely raise Sarah far above the other Victorian characters in the novel and give her a twentieth-century feminist aura.

From one point of view, the narrative mould from which Sarah emerges is that of the fallen women of Victorian fiction. Born to poor parents and educated above her station in life, Lyme Regis residents like Mrs. Poultney and Mrs. Tranter cannot comprehend her. Their society finds it convenient to brand her as the 'other', the fallen woman who has easily parted with her virtue. The common people like the dairymen call her a 'whore' and yet others give her the less offensive title 'Tragedy'. Fowles is tongue-in-cheek in exposing the moral double-standards of the Victorian society, as Mrs. Poultney is proud of exhibiting such an object of charity before her guests. Mrs. Tranter's visit to Poultney household with Charles and Tina is an example. In the final analysis, Sarah is an embedded character in the Victorian narrative. The author demonstrates the rupture that results from the introduction of a character with twentieth-century features.

Mrs. Poultney stands out from the rest of the characters in *FLW* as the personification of moral orthodoxy and hypocrisy associated with the Victorian upper class. The two main obsessions of her life are dirt and immorality. She has declared a virtual war on the two. Mrs. Poultney is seen at her worst in dealing with the unfortunate domestic servants under her. Servants are supposed to be regular for church services. A failure to attend the mass on Sunday will invite the most stringent punishment. Mrs. Poultney's image as a hard taskmaster in

dealing with the servants is affirmed by a statement made by one of her unlucky employees. "Madam, I should rather spend the rest of my life in the poorhouse than live another week under this roof" (22).

In her dealings with Sarah, Mrs. Poultney shows another depraved side of her personality, her need to make a show of her charity. When Dr. Grogan insists that Sarah should not be made to entertain visitors because of her ill-health and melancholia, Mrs. Poultney finds it difficult to follow the doctor's advice because she wanted to exhibit Sarah as an object of charity before the guests.

The author plans a ruthless exposition of Poultneyism by presenting Sarah as a foil to her. Sarah has none of the negative attributes that her affluent employer possesses, in spite of her lack of education and low social status. The embodiment of Victorian orthodoxy stands exposed before Sarah's integrity of character and moral stature. From the Victorian perspective, she is the fallen woman, but the twentieth-century reader would not fail to see the attempt to glorify Sarah. Sarah makes her observations on the Victorian society:

> I live among people the world tells me are kind, pious, Christian people. And they seem to be crueller than the cruellest heathens, stupider than the stupidest animals. I cannot believe that the truth is so. That life is without understanding or compassion. That there are not spirits generous enough to understand what I have suffered and

> why I suffer . . . and that whatever sins I have committed, it is not right that I should suffer so much. (124)

Sarah's comment on the society around her sheds light on two things. Firstly, it reveals the extent to which hypocrisy and moral orthodoxy have consumed the upper-class Victorian society. Secondly, it is a statement on the poor servant girl's ability to see through the aristocratic men and women who boast of a high moral stature and social superiority.

Mrs. Poultney's attempts to 'tame' and control Sarah are not successful. When she is forbidden to walk on the Cobb, she starts walking on the Ware Commons, much to her employer's horror. The scene where Sarah is dismissed for disobeying the orders of her mistress definitely elevates the moral stature of the poor servant girl, and it shows her employer to be mean and inferior. Sarah insists on knowing the reason for her dismissal, an action that must have been unthinkable for a Victorian domestic servant. It comes as a shock to Mrs. Poultney when Sarah refuses the one-month's salary offered in lieu of prior notice. Sarah says:

> You may keep them. And if it is possible with so small a sum of money, I suggest you purchase some instrument of torture. I am sure Mrs. Fairley will be pleased to use it upon all those wretched enough to come under your power. (212)

It is highly unlikely for a typical Victorian narrative to have such a character. Fowles has a definite purpose in doing it, that of the problematisation of narrative conventions.

A similar pattern of contrast between one set of characters belonging to the upper strata of the society and another set belonging to the lower can be seen in the presentation of couples; Charles and Tina from the upper class, Sam and Mary from the lower class. The former couple definitely suffers in comparison with the latter one. When it comes to courtship and love, Sam and Mary are governed by none of the inhibitions that haunt their rich counterparts. The working class couple cannot claim attributes like good education and refined manners. Yet, the narrator presents their amorous adventures in a robust and sanguine light. They do not recoil from physical contact. Rather, they express their natural feelings spontaneously, because they are unperturbed by the dogma of morality. Their occasional visits to the barn and the Under Cliff are not accompanied by any sense of shame. On the other hand, the relationship of Charles and Tina is lacking in warmth and vigour. They kiss, but with their lips, "as chastely asexual as children's" (75).

Victorian attitude to sexuality is a topic that figures predominantly in any discussion on the age. Typical of other Victorian texts, it is characterised by a high degree of ambivalence and paradox. Sex was a taboo subject for the Victorian. An unnatural distaste for everything vaguely related to sexuality was carried to an extreme point. Historians say that it was considered to be immoral for

a woman to ride a bicycle and for a man to smoke in public. One of the reasons for this prudish response to sex was the dominance of religion. Even though the basic tenets of religion were challenged by science, it paradoxically continued to exert its influence on people's lives. Every speaker at the pulpit contributed to the neurotic response to sexuality. The topic finds an important place in Fowles' self–conscious narrative on the nineteenth century. An enquiry into the way in which Victorian literature responded to sexuality reveals some key findings about the construction of that text. The epigraphs used by Fowles shed light on the alternative perception of the topic.

Like the novelist's treatment of other dominant texts of the time, the text of sexuality becomes a part of the counter narrative working within *FLW*. Probably the author wants to give a clean chit to the 'lesser mortals' in the matter of sexuality. Major characters like Mrs. Poultney and Tina share the Victorian priggishness. In contrast to them; Sarah, Sam, and Mary show no signs of repulsion from sex.

Mrs. Poultney can swear that women do not feel carnal pleasure. If a female belonging to a lower station in life finds any pleasure in it, that can be "out of feminine vanity and feminine weakness" (137). In the case of commercial sex workers, the woman's lust for money overcomes her innate disgust at the carnal. The only possible reason that she can find for Mary enjoying the stable boy's kiss on her cheeks is that she is a prostitute in the making.

A similar feeling of fear of the carnal pleasures is shared by Ernestina Freeman. Her courtship with Charles is looked upon by

Tina as a boost to her feminine vanity. She has imbibed all the muddled Victorian ideas about the physical aspect of love. She considers sex to be a threat to the delicacy and essence of a person like her. The fear of the carnal is carried to the extreme in Tina. For her, having a look at her own naked body in the mirror means a sinful act. It makes her lips move in prayer. On Ernestina's attitude to sex, the narrator says:

> It was not only her profound ignorance of the reality of copulation that frightened her; it was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require, and which seemed to deny all that gentleness of gesture and discreetness of permitted caress that so attracted her in Charles. She had once or twice seen animals couple; the violence haunted her mind. (30)

The feeling of guilt that accompanies Tina's thoughts on sexuality was an experience common to many Victorian subjects, mainly women. But the portrait of Sarah woodruff, the author's alter ego in the narrative, does not conform to any of these familiar Victorian constructions of femininity.

Sarah's elaborate preparation for her seduction of Charles is a pertinent example. It is the result of a series of dramatic events that she had planned. The sprained ankle is a masterstroke of fiction that Sarah created. She displays consummate ease in weaving a web of stories around her. Every detail of the incident, including the bandage on the leg had been planned by her. Moreover, when it comes to the

final scene of physical union, the woman takes the initiative, encouraging the confused man to act. After the incident, Sarah has no regrets about it because she willed it. She is not ashamed of her sexuality as Ernestina is. In this sense, Ernestina and Sarah are poles apart.

We see no trace of guilt in Sarah Woodruff. Such a boldness and candour in a matter like sex is shocking even to her partner, Charles. The narrator's explanation is that he was a member of a society that envisaged women as having no carnal desires. Charles is nonplussed by the realisation that he was only a plaything in Sarah's hands in the whole series of developments.

In this sense, Sarah looks like a character in a twentieth-century feminist novel. She does not belong to the group of other women characters in the novel. The narrator, through this counter-discourse, is driving home the conclusion that every section of the Victorian society cannot be accused of prudery. Society and its discourses play a role in bringing a particular reality construct into existence. Patriarchy had a role in defining female sexuality down the ages.

The attempt had been to reduce women into objects of men's sexual gratification and reproduction. In keeping with these objectives, patriarchal discourses have decreed that a woman derives no pleasure from the sexual act. Twentieth-century feminist texts have categorically proved the role of the ideology behind such

discourses .That ideology served the interest of the male members of the society. What is astonishing here is the seemingly innocuous nature of a discourse in legitimising a provisional truth as the universal truth. Interpretation of female sexuality in the Victorian society is a good example of a context in which female body is dubbed as a receptacle for male lust. Her identity is constructed in terms that were beyond the control of the woman. Twentieth-century texts on female sexuality have successfully tried to debunk many of these myths.

Sarah's assertion of sexuality is antithetical to the Victorian notion of female sexuality. The Victorian cult of womanhood had raised woman to an imaginary pedestal of purity and innocence. A character like Ernestina Freeman personifies such an idol of womanhood. The fact that she cringes at the mention of sex is ample proof that she has assimilated the Victorian values on female sexuality. Secondly, it problematises the representation of female sexuality in nineteenth-century fiction, which was supposed to be a true reflection of an objective reality. Sarah plans the meeting with Charles in a meticulous manner. The prime concern is her own pleasure. After the incident of seduction, she has no regrets and says, "I wished it so" (305). On the other hand, it is the man who is filled with remorse. It would be impossible to find a woman character with such a candid attitude towards the physical dimension of love in the whole of Victorian literature. Sarah, in that sense, deconstructs many of the stereotypes of Victorian literature. From the perspective of an

average Victorian reader of fiction, she is the French Lieutenant's woman, a social outcast. At the same time, seen from the twentieth century Fowlsian point of view, she stands for an alternative reality, one that was suppressed beneath the dominant reality constructs of the period. Fowles' virtuoso performance lies in presenting the realities simultaneously.

Fowles adopts a peculiar strategy in highlighting his propositions about the textuality of history and fiction. The author banks a great deal upon the realistic Victorian narrative in the text. No attempt has been made to disturb the smooth and uncomplicated flow of the solid narrative, a typical Victorian text involving Sarah, Charles, and Mrs. Poultney and the like. The subversion of this narrative, shedding light on its provisional and contingent nature, is achieved with the help of a parallel commentary that appears mainly in the form of extraneous texts like epigraphs and occasional authorial interventions. The implication is that the reality out there is much more complex than it seems. A narrative with specific conventions and a supportive ideology cannot reflect it as it is.

Chapter sixteen, which is remarkable for many reasons, presents an example of Fowles' skill in bringing various texts into conflation. Some of these texts are non-literary. One instance is an incident that occurs after the engagement of Charles and Ernestina. It is a quiet evening when Charles is in the company of his wife-to-be. The scene is typical of many Victorian novels. Charles is sprawled across the sofa and Ernestina sits nearby, reading a copy of Mrs.

Caroline Norton's "The Lady of La Garaye". Fowles' description of the scene is sarcastic:

> And those evenings! Those gaslit hours that had to be filled, and without benefit of cinema or television. For these who had a living to earn, this was hardly a great problem. When you have worked a twelve-hour day, the problem of what to do after your supper is easily solved. But pity the unfortunate rich; for whatever license was given to them to be solitary before the evening hours, convention demanded that they must be bored in company. (100)

Apart from the tone of satire and derision involved, it also reaches out to comment on the irony of the situation as those who work a twelve-hour day are very much a part of the same household. But the likes of Sam Farrow and his sweetheart Mary are blissfully unaware of all the talk going on elsewhere in England about the emancipation of the working class. The quotations from Marx, included as epigraphs, do not directly concern with the fate of these domestic servants. But from a broader perspective, it is an attempt of deliberate conflation.

The irony of the situation becomes all the more clear in the light of Ernestina's choice of the book for that quiet evening. The poem by Mrs. Norton had all the elements of a conventional sentimental plot. The lady of the title was the wife of a French Lord who, after a crippling accident in her life, founds a hospital. As the narrator vouches, the poem was immensely popular among the women during

that decade. The poem, obviously, strikes a sympathetic chord with Ernestina. Her choice of the poem and its substance assume new meanings; when Fowles, more like a historian than a novelist, introduces the question of women's rights alongside. It was a major historical text of the period. Even though the nineteenth-century men and women did not feel the palpable presence of this new current of ideas among them, later readings of the period give considerable weight to the largely unorganised attempts at challenging the sexual politics. Here, the Victorian text on women's rights is not to be taken simply as written documents on the subject. In addition to the books, pamphlets, and public speeches dealing with the question, the textuality of the subject may also mean its presence in the public consciousness.

Fowles uses it both ways in his narrative. On the one hand, it appears in the form of references to quotations from writings and speeches related to the issue of women's emancipation. On the other hand, seen from the twentieth-century perspective, it is possible for the reader to assign the status of a text to the totality of ideas on woman's rights during the period. This text, like that of Darwinian theory and orthodox morality, had played a major role in giving shape to the historical reconstruction of that period.

Fowles' reference to J.S.Mill's advocacy of women's voting rights, coming immediately after Mrs. Caroline Norton's "The Lady of La Garaye," demonstrates the complex ways in which they are related.

> Ah, you say, but women were chained to their role at that time. But remember the date of this evening: April 6th, 1867. At Westminster only one week before John Stuart Mill had seized an opportunity in one of the early debates on the Reform Bill to argue that now was the time to give women equal rights at the ballot-box. (101)

Fowles is being impish in bringing the text of Victorian women's liberation movement to cast its shadow on the celebrated Victorian cult of womanhood. In addition to the ridiculously strict code of morality, Victorian society tried to control and manipulate the feminine subjects by raising them to a high pedestal of domesticity. It prescribed highly conventional roles to women with an intention to curtail their self-expression and self- realisation.

The portrait of Ernestina Freeman embodies many of the Victorian standards prescribed for women. Her attitude to the question of voting rights for women is typical of a Victorian girl who has assimilated the values of Victorian society. The narrator says that Ernestina giggled at the previous week's cartoon in *Punch* mocking the movement for franchise (100). She, unfortunately, is a member of the "sad majority of educated women, who maintained that their influence was best exerted from home" (101).

Ernestina's choice of the book for that quiet evening raises many questions about the role of literary texts in propagating and validating many of the social constructions. Even though the author of "The Lady of La Garaye" was a woman of liberal leanings, the poem

exhibits none of those ideas. The role model that it prescribed for women is at the best a shadow of Florence Nightingale. On the other hand, the whole responsibility for the choice of the subject matter and the method of treatment cannot be fixed on the writer alone. What is interpreted as literature during a particular period is largely a product of the dominant discourses of the time. In this sense, Fowles' comment on the supposedly feminist and liberal leanings of the poet further deepens the irony. If a literary text is to find its way into the canon of the time, it should follow the existing literary standards in terms of subject matter and treatment. Literature, in this sense, is not free from the dominant ideological currents of the period. Here, the emphasis is on the content of literature. At another point in the text, Fowles tries to problematise the technique of presentation in literature by suggesting alternative endings. The statement on the content of literature is an oblique comment on the way reading habits are shaped up by the discourses of the period. Ernestina is touched and she sheds tears on reading about the charitable activities of the lady who was crippled in an accident even though she never nursed a sick cottager in her life.

In generating such unusual paradigms of meaning, Fowles' practice is not to put a copy of J.S. Mill's pamphlet into Ernestina's hands. But the technique is that of generating intertextual readings by introducing a Victorian non-literary text with far reaching connotations. J.S. Mill's text, which envisaged an actively different role model for Victorian women, is not a part of the realistic narrative

in the macrotext. Without these interventions and extra literary texts, *FLW* would have been a typical Victorian narrative that conforms to the social and literary ideologies of the period.

As a work of historiographic metafiction, *FLW* erases the distinction between history and fiction. Both of them are extremely porous genres that share many of the conventions. Elements of traditional history find an entry into Fowles' narrative and it challenges the transcendental status of history. The description of Lyme Regis that occurs in the first chapter of *FLW* contextualises the whole narrative. It is set in the historical Lyme Regis that breathes the spirit of Jane Austen and Hardy. The characters in the Victorian narrative appear more like representatives of certain social forces than individuals. Charles Smithson, for example, is a member of the decaying gentlemanly class. In his amateur interest in palaeontology and characteristic laziness, he represents his class, and thereby resembles the protagonist of a historical novel.

At the same time, certain elements in Charles, for example, his attitude to women set him apart from the stereotype of Victorian gentleman found in the historical and fictional narratives of the time. The quotations and excerpts from various Victorian texts, strewn all over the narrative, make the narrative read more like history than a novel. Once the levelling of these two hitherto distinct discourses is achieved, the narrator demonstrates the constructed nature of the Victorian narrative through calculated frame-breaks and self-conscious games.

FLW is a canonical text among the works celebrated as historiographic metafiction because it signifies an important moment of the interface between history and fiction. By challenging many of the absolute claims of history, Fowles brings it down to the level of a narrative. Traditionally, history has been associated with an empirical search for truth. In Aristotelian terms, the historian spoke about what has happened while the poet dealt with what could or might happen. But the New Historicists and Postmodernists have proved history to be a discursive structure.

An important critical assumption of historiographic metafiction is that history is available to us only in textualised form. The existence of truth-embodying transcendental systems has been challenged by radical theorists. While trying to debunk the myth of the absolute, metafiction analyses the sub-texts that go into the making of the grandnarrative of literature. A current of ideas, or a new popular movement of the time, may find its way into the literary text. *FLW* has plenty of such texts that help historians to comment on that age. Marxian philosophy, Darwinism, and Feminism are some examples of the historical texts that figured in the discussion on the Victorian age. The publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 was a cataclysmic event that had shaken the very foundation of Victorian society and thought.

The theory of natural selection, when applied to the social sphere, accords no importance to moral principles in judging human actions. Adaptability to the changed circumstances is the sole

criterion that decides the survival of the person/group/species. Orthodox Victorians were afraid that Darwin's theory may reduce life into a formula of cut-throat competition, devoid of any concern with providence or moral principle.

Fowles, on his part, incorporates the Darwinian text into his Victorian narrative. The author does the same with other Victorian topics like the status of women, Marxism, orthodox morality etc. But he leaves enough room for these texts to be analysed with the twentieth-century mindset of the readers. This brings into light many of the acts of omission and commission. Moreover, the illusion-breaking mechanism planted into the Victorian narrative always reminds the reader of the constructed nature of the narrative. Novel, as the metafictionist illustrates it, is a totality of linguistic and literary conventions. The Victorian novel, in this matter, followed realistic conventions to extreme perfection. The underlying philosophy of the nineteenth century novel envisaged an objective reality and its unproblematic reflection in the narrative.

When the narrator in *FLW* is present with his authorial interventions and the meta-commentary of epigrams and comments, it never allows the reader to lose herself/himself completely in the 'realism' of the narrative. It is in this context that the deliberate anti-realistic devices assume significance. Susana Onega comments aptly on this phenomenon:

> Analysing the game of frame breaks in the novel, however, it is easy to see that Fowles's real aim in writing it was

> not so much to write a Victorian novel out of time, but rather, in line with contemporary metafictional practice, to build an illusion only to destroy it, to show us its provisionality, its intrinsic fictional character, thus making us reflect on the Victorian literary conventions of realism and recognize it for what it is: a provisional frame created by the combined work of the author and the 'willing suspension of disbelief' of the reader. (95)

FLW has numerous examples of the frame-breaks that Susan Onega described. Interchangeable use of the conventions of history and fictional narratives is one of the striking features. It challenges the reader's received notions of the genre. Apart from the overt authorial intrusion in chapter thirteen and the alternative endings, other instances of frame-breaks include the frequent address to the reader, unconventional elements of the plot and elusive characterisation. As indicated earlier, an important result of these deliberate frame-breaks is that instead of losing herself/himself in the realism of the narrative, the reader becomes alive to the running commentary on the ongoing process of textual construction. The frequent changes of perspective as well as multiple focal points on characters and events finally establish the narrative to be a man-made provisional artifice.

While discussing the interface of history and fiction in Timothy Findley's metafictional work, *The Wars*, Dona Palmateer Pennee says:

> The effect of this conflation of roles and of history and fiction is not, however, simply to render the narrative

> unreliable or history untrue or fact irrelevant. Instead, the effect is that we are prompted to revise our attitude, to think about the discursive and textual dimensions of perception and cognition and to personalize history and make it useful and meaningful to the present, the "here," the locus of meaning, and the now of the consistent present tense in which the narrator speaks and the reader reads. (43)

The comment becomes relevant here because a similar strategy is employed by the narrator of *FLW* with an objective to contest the view that the text is a finished product. Outwardly, the theme of the text is a typical nineteenth-century tale of upper-class life. But the author destabilises the text by making it a part of the 'how' and 'here', the locus of meaning. As the twentieth-century meaning is constantly invoked, it largely renders the meaning of the text provisional. As he zooms in and out, every character and incident in the Victorian narrative undergoes radical changes in relation to the twentieth-century perspectives. Interestingly, this 'zooming effect' is further removed in time when a twenty-first century reader takes up John Fowles' twentieth century work on Victorian 'reality'. When such a reading takes place, for example, the reader will have not only Freud, but the latest readings on Freud for a better understanding of Dr. Grogan. The shift of time and perspective is deliberate on the part of the playful author. An authorial intervention in chapter thirty-eight is as follows:

> Perhaps you see very little link between the Charles of 1267 with all his newfangled French notions of chastity and chasing after Holy Grails, the Charles of 1867 with his loathing of trade and the Charles of today, a computer scientist deaf to the screams of the tender humanists who begin to discern their own redundancy. (257)

In such a scheme of affairs, the genealogy of Charles Smithson does not end there. It should be again carried over into the twenty first century in the form of a nuclear scientist or a corporate honcho.

Another favourite activity of the narrator is that he appropriates the role of the historian. Traditionally, teleological perspective was associated with historical narratives. Here, the author not only makes profuse use of the so-called historical materials like footnotes, quotations, historical personages, but also comments on his narrative from the historical 'now'. Referring to the Undercliff that gave many anxious moments to Mrs. Poultney, the narrator says:

> There is not a single cottage in the Undercliff now; in 1867 there were several, lived in by gamekeepers, woodmen, a pig herd or two. The roedeer, sure proof of abundant solitude, then must have passed less peaceful days. Now the Undercliff has reverted to a state of total wildness. The cottage walls have crumbled into ivied stumps, the old branch paths have gone, no car road goes near it, the one remaining track that traverses it is often

> impassable. And it is so by Act of Parliament: a natural nature reserve. Not all is lost to expedience. (62)

Such a commentary is surely in the manner of history, rather like the history of a place. When Fowles introduced Lyme Regis as the locale of the story, he had echoes of Jane Austen and Hardy to fill the gap. Here he tries to contextualise the Undercliff of the Ware Commons. The setting for the action in the novel thereby becomes a part of 'now'. Ultimately, it challenges the reader's sense of genre distinctions.

Perhaps the most ingenious feature of *FLW* is the invention of an author-figure that breaks stereotypes and definitions. This trickster figure exposes the process of meaning-making in the novel. At certain points in the narrative, especially while presenting the Victorian narrative, he appears as the unobtrusive narrator. Yet, there are occasions when he behaves in a manner completely unlike that of a traditional Victorian novelist. In chapter seventeen, for example, he expresses his ignorance about the meeting between Sam and Mary saying, "Whether they met the next morning, in spite of Charles' express prohibition, I do not know" (117).

The lack of consistency is obvious from the fluctuations in the tone adopted by the narrator. A penchant for the comic seems to dominate his attitude. It borders on the comic when the narrator says that the cockney maidservant Mary's great-great-granddaughter is one of the celebrated younger English film actresses. Another situation occurs in chapter thirty-six where the narrator claims to have purchased the same Toby jug that Sarah Woodruff had

purchased. Moreover he testifies that the jug was cracked and re-cracked in the course of time. These intrusive comments, more comic than serious, baffle the reader.

Linda Hutcheon says in *Narcissistic Narrative* that "one of the best metafictional examples of extended thematised allegory of the shared creative process involved in writing and reading is to be found in John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*" (57). The comment is fully justified by the long colloquy between the implied author and reader in the text. From the very beginning of the novel, the narrator makes it a point to address the reader on issues that crop up from time to time. These authorial intrusions are so consistent that, as in a typical Browning monologue, the presence of the reader is acknowledged throughout. The ultimate result is the foregrounding of meaning-making process. The text rejects the notion of the literary text as a finished product. On the other hand, it is a long and strenuous journey for the reader in making sense of the literary text. The author is there, by the side, to guide the reader and to instruct her/him.

The author-reader relationship in *FLW* is a complex one. The address to the reader on the first page sets the tone for the colloquy that takes place in the rest of the text. Here, the author is in a mood to give credit to the intellectual endowments of the reader. The tone of address and the register used presupposes a sophisticated reader who can keep pace with the narrator in his changing moods. See the description of Lyme:

> Primitive, yet complex, elephantine but delicate; as full of subtle curves and volumes as a Henry Moore or a Michelangelo; and pure, clean, salt, a paragon of mass. I exaggerate? Perhaps, but I can be put to the test, for the Cobb has changed very little since the year of which I write, though the town of Lyme has, and the test is not fair if you look back towards land. (7)

But the same voice that attributes a knowledge of Henry Moore and Michelangelo to the reader also tries to snub him at moments. The tone is always ambiguous. One does not know whether she/he is being taken for a ride.

In that sense, the implied reader of FLW resembles Charles Smithson, who is the victim of uncertainties and contingencies. It is the narrator who subjects the reader to gruelling tests. On the other hand, in Charles' case, it is Sarah, the author's alter ego in the text that performs it. Charles Smithson had not comprehended the real meaning of evolution, nor could he understand the shade of elusiveness in Sarah and that made him look like a clown. Similarly, the reader is baffled by the cruel cat-and-mouse game that the author plays with him. For one thing, the reader's journey with the narrator is far from comfortable. Even though it is flattering to listen to the sophisticated tone that he adopts, it often proves to be intellectually challenging. The constant shift of time and topic, the rather erudite nature of the epigraphs, and the fluidity of characters make the reader gasp for breath in the uphill journey. Finally, with all the

received notions regarding the conclusion of a novel, the endings in *FLW* confuse the reader.

The realistic assumption of Victorian fiction pretended that it reflected an external reality as it was. The narrative was regarded as a transparent medium that enabled an unproblematic reflection. Naturally, the framing devices remain as unobtrusive as possible. But in metafiction, the effort is to make the narrative conventions and the language of representation as obtrusive as possible. One common method employed is that of thwarting the expectations of the reader by not conforming to the accepted conventions of fiction. The alternative endings in *FLW* are good examples of frame-breaks. It makes the reader sensitive to the game that she/he is involved in and its rules. Secondly, it prods them to think about the connection between life and art exploited in the fictional artifice.

One abrupt break that jolts her/him out of the smooth flow of the narrative may make the reader reflect on the status of the external reality and its relation to the novel at hand. A deeper analysis of this relationship will definitely throw light on the ideological nexus involved. It can also be seen that a particular literary convention that gains popularity during a period is a typical product of the dominant ideology of the time.

It is only in the twentieth century that such experimental narratives which problematise the reality construct cropped up. Nineteenth-century fiction with its unobtrusive presentation of realism, never tried to raise such skeptical questions. Analysing the

new phenomenon of unconventional endings in twentieth-century fiction, David Lodge tried to answer some of those questions that throw light on the life-art connection:

David Lodge's analysis (See *Working with structuralism*) rakes up the issue of the relationship between the narrative form and the ideological backdrop from which it springs up. The starting point for Lodge is the ubiquity of twentieth-century novels that flaunt the inconclusive endings. He reasons that it is largely a product of the radical worldview that had toppled the prevailing orthodox values. He reasons that theoreticians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries felt the neat endings of stories to be a falsification of reality. It was a period of declining belief in orthodox Christianity. Lodge observes:

> In the more thoughtful mid-and late Victorian novelists, therefore, we see a tendency towards more and more open, less and less cheerful endings, as the Christian metaphysic loses its authority. When George Eliot wrote to her publisher John Blackwood in 1857, at the very outset of her career; 'Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation'. She was expressing reservations about the conventional ending of Victorian fiction that surely stemmed from her own loss of Christian faith. (*Working Structuralism* 150)

The argument is that Victorian fiction was the product of an orthodox world view that was dominated by the theological explanation of the world. In such a scheme of affairs, divine providence functions as a grandnarrative. In accordance with it, the early Victorians never felt themselves exposed to the vagaries of an uncertain fate and equally cruel natural world. On such occasions, they were protected by their faith. Biblical teachings had assured them mental peace and a sense of security. The world view came to full circle with a divine providence at the centre. Uncertainty must not have been a popular theme in literature. Naturally, the narrative form of Victorian realism could not imagine a story with the loose ends untied.

David Lodge's theoretical formulation, in a significant manner, points to the provisional nature of literary conventions. Moreover, it is inextricably bound with the dominant ideological currents of the time. In its essence, such a critical formulation challenges the transcendental claims made by a literary form. Apart from the ordering devices, other aspects of fiction like characterisation and thematic concerns also speak of ideological influence.

Fowles experiments with multiple endings in *FLW.* It is to the eternal charm of his masterpiece that its flexible form offers possibilities generally unexplored in conventional fiction. Every ending suggested in the text is capable of imposing new readings on the novel. These readings talk about different ideological underpinnings. One of them, apart from the alternative endings suggested at the end, is the equally plausible ending presented in

chapter forty-four. Most of the commentators talk only about the other two endings, but this one exists as a serious possibility in the text. Even though the narrator dismisses it as a thoroughly traditional ending, it makes telling comments on the fictionality of the Victorian narrative.

Here, Charles, after his meeting with Sarah the enchantress, decides to go ahead with his marriage to Ernestina, very much against a contrary impulse within his mind. The basic objection to the decision is the gentlemanly streak in him, the unwillingness of a lazy dilettante to get himself muddied in the day-to-day boredom of the world of commerce:

> He had done the moral, the decent, the correct thing, and yet it seemed to betray in him some inherent weakness, some willingness to accept his fate, which he knew, by one of those premonitions that are as certain as facts, would one day lead him into the world of commerce, into pleasing Ernestina because she would want to please her father, to whom he owed so much. . . he stared at the country side they had now entered and felt himself sucked slowly through it as if down some monstrous pipe. (288)

Knowingly or unknowingly, Charles is becoming a part of the natural force that Darwin discussed. It is a question of social survival, however painful the decision might be. It is another proof of Fowles' narrative skill that this ending is carefully woven into the text.

Moreover, seen in the context of technical aspects, this is a thoroughly traditional, 'happily ever after ending' that had its sway in fiction:

> Charles and Ernestina did not live happily ever after; but they lived together, though Charles finally survived her by a decade (and earnestly mourned her throughout it). They begot what shall it be--let us say seven children. Sir Robert added injury to insult by siring, and within ten months of his alliance to Mrs. Bella Tomkins, not one heir, but two. This fatal pair of twins was what finally drove Charles into business. He was bored to begin with; and then got a taste for the thing. His own sons were given no choice; and their sons today still control the great shop and all its ramifications. (292)

Even though the narrator humorously comments that it was not a 'happily ever after ending,' it creates no ruffle in the immediate society around. Moreover, it frees Charles from the heartburn caused by Sir Robert's marriage to Mrs. Bella Tomkins. The deal that is given to Sam and Mary is no less generous.

As for the theme of Darwinism, Charles' decision to forsake the fatal attraction of Sarah in favour of Ernestina indicates his adaptability to the changing social and economic conditions. Charles, as a perfect representative of the gentlemanly class that doted on the glories of the past proves himself to be fit for survival. He swallows his pride while deciding to indulge in a profession like commerce that was once looked down on by his class.

At the same time, it should be observed that such a hopelessly traditional ending would betray the promises made to the reader by an apparently radical novelistic format. An ending in which Charles abandons Sarah and marries Tina, would be antithetical to the implications of the self-reflexive comments and ironic tone used by the narrator so far. The achievements may crumble if the narrator decides to give in to the "sold narrative comforts" (McEwan22) of Victorian fiction. "The lack of consonance" (295) that the narrator refers to is a direct result of the disparity between the novel form the content. From the socio-political point of view, Charles' marriage to Ernestina, marginalising the fallen woman Sarah, upholds the values of the Victorian society. In the final analysis, what is essential for the status quo of the local gentlemanly class would be a big setback for the novel form.

On the other hand, the ending suggested in chapter sixty gives a sudden elevation to Sarah from the status of the fallen woman that she had in the traditional ending. Here, Charles had broken off his engagement to Ernestina and spends a lot of money and energy on finding the whereabouts of Sarah. He had inserted innumerable advertisements in newspapers, but in vain. But finally, he comes to know about her through his solicitor. A remarkable thing about the events is that Charles finds her in the household of D.G. Rossetti, the controversial Pre-Raphaelite poet. Even though one group of critics abused his school of art as the fleshly school, it is a fact that they had a woman at the centre of their poems and paintings. Quite in keeping

with the changed circumstances, Sarah sports a new look indicating her mental makeover:

> And her dress! It was so different that he thought for a moment she was someone else. He had always seen her in his mind in the former clothes, a haunted face rising from a widowed darkness. But this was someone in the full uniform of the New Woman, flagrantly rejecting all formal contemporary notions of female fashion. Her skirt was a rich dark blue and held at the waist by a crimson belt with a gilt star clasp, which also enclosed the pink–and-white striped silk blouse, long-sleeved, flowing, with a delicate small collar of white lace, to which a small cameo acted as tie. The hair was bound loosely back by a red ribbon. (379)

The unconventionality in dressing is only one aspect of the New Woman image that Sarah has attained. Her association with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is an important factor in this regard. It has challenged the artistic and moral standards of the period. Sarah's espousal of these values is only a foregone conclusion in the overall context of the novel. She is no longer 'the damsel in distress' who has to be rescued by Charles Smithson's generosity. On the other hand, it is Charles Smithson, 'the knight in shining arms', who fares badly at the moment. The narrator has obviously no sympathy for Charles:

> He had come to raise her from penury, from some crabbed post in a crabbed house. In full armour, ready to

> slay the dragon--and now the damsel had broken all the rules. No chains, no sobs, so beseeching hands. He was the man who appears as a formal *soiree* under the impression it was to be a fancy dress hall. (381)

The language used here makes a dig at Charles' intention to save her gracefully from a presumably miserable condition. But Sarah's response and the situation he finds her in is just the reverse. In many ways, the meeting between Sarah and Charles is different from the passionate reunion between lovers portrayed in literature and film.

An analysis of Sarah Woodruff's transformation would not be complete without a reference to the new intellectual endowments that she flaunts. Her association with the Rossetti household is probably responsible for the blooming of her character. She is frank to admit that she was mad enough to force herself upon Charles on the earlier occasion. It sheds light on her intellectual acumen when Sarah attributes the incompatibility between them to "an inconsistency of conception" (383), a term borrowed from Ruskin's writing. As a feminist prototype, Sarah spurns the offer of marriage and possible conjugal happiness by talking about the ideal that she has found for herself:

> I do not wish to marry. I do not wish to marry because. . . first, because of my past, which habituated me to loneliness. I had always thought that I hated it. I now live in a world where loneliness is most easy to avoid. And I have found that I treasure it. I do not want to share my

> life. I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage. (385)

Such a declaration of emancipation is shocking to Charles Smithson's notion of womanhood and it coincides with the high point of Sarah's evolution as a Fowlsian character. Yet, the narrator lets the reader and Sarah down when he works out a melodramatic union between Sarah and Charles. Sarah seems to lose all the integrity of character that she had exuded in the narrative till that point. In that sense, she does not fulfil the promises that she had made. At the same time, this ending, improbable though it seems in the overall context of the novel, is highly advantageous to the character of Charles Smithson. May be, this is the only context when Charles appears in a winning situation. 'The knight in armour' was finally successful in saving 'the damsel in distress', even though she was not convinced about the necessity of his intervention initially. Yet, the author-figure does not want to be held responsible for such an improbable and jarring ending because he is ready to give credit to the reader's freedom by introducing a more plausible ending after it.

This device, again, reveals the artificiality of the literary convention. The final union between the couple is described in a language that smacks of melodrama:

> At last she looked up at him. Her eyes were full of tears, and her look unbearably naked. Such looks we have all once or twice in our lives received and shared; they are

> those in which worlds meet, pasts dissolve, moments when we know, in the resolution of profoundest need, that the rock of ages can never be anything else but love, here, now, in these two hands' joining, in this blind silence in which one head comes to rest beneath the other; and which Charles, after a compressed eternity, breaks, though the question is more breathed than spoken. (393)

The narrator parodically exposes the style of much romantic fiction. But his tongue-in-cheek commentary also draws the reader's attention to the fall it may mean for Sarah as a character. It construes Sarah as a weak woman who gives in to the 'feminine' urges within her. Whatever integrity and freedom she had achieved as an amanuensis to that illustrious artist are abandoned.

The last ending, probably the most authentic one against the backdrop of the experimental nature of the text, is arranged under the active supervision of the Barthian author figure with a Frenchified beard. He apologises for introducing a character (Lalage) at the end of the narrative, in violation of the established customs. But this ending, in which Charles walks away from Sarah from the brink of a possible reunion, seems to be the most authentic one. For one thing, it leaves things in a fluid state of affairs, not trying to impose a contrived happily ever after ending. This is the kind of ending, even though it stands problematised in the context, that is suggested by a

benevolent author-figure, with freedom as his first principle, not authority.

Secondly, it seems to be consistent with Charles' characterisation in the rest of the novel. Charles comes to the conclusion that "from the first she had manipulated him. She would do so to the end" (397). He was at a loss to understand the world around and its functioning. He did not understand the meaning of evolution in spite of his amateur interest in the natural sciences. So he is not likely to fully 'understand' the new woman Sarah. His revolt at the sight of this Sarah may be symptomatic of a deep-rooted patriarchal mindset. Charles Smithson is a loser right from the beginning, and his ship is tossed from one shore to the other.

The most violent and the jarring of frame-breaks occur in the thirteenth chapter of the book. It comes immediately after Sarah is reprimanded for walking alone on Ware Commons. The narrator confronts the reader with a confession about the functionality of the narrative. This confession follows a melodramatic realistic scene in which Sarah sheds silent tears over her unlucky fate. Two enigmatic questions are posed at that point: "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?"(84). In answer to these questions, the narrator speculates:

> I do not know. This story I'm telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my character's mind and innermost thoughts, it is because

> I'm writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and voice of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the term. (85)

This statement has the potential not only to problematise but also to theorise on the innovative form that is introduced in the process. If the narrator betrays the readers, he has got an explanation for it; he was following a universally accepted convention. The basic thrust of Fowles' historiographic metafiction is on the provisionality of such conventions. Novel, or for that matter history, is the result of an elaborate system of conventions to reflect an outward reality. Metafiction carries the argument to its logical conclusion to point out that the external reality itself is construed in various ways. An unproblematic external reality is not proposed.

No novelist was supposed to break the suspense or illusion in the middle. Self-reflexive comments incorporated into the text serve the same purpose of revealing the constructed nature of the fictional artifice. The God-like author who stands exposed here is, no doubt, the omniscient author of nineteenth-century realist fiction. Fowles also quarrels with the underlying philosophy that conferred a God-like status to the author of conventional fiction. What the author presented in the form of the contingent medium had the privilege to be

glossed over as a true reflection of the reality. Readers, generally, did not care to look into the provisionality of the system of representation that lent legitimacy to the reality construct. Fowles adds a disclaimer to almost every Victorian narrative convention that he adopts.When he presents a character like Sarah, she shares many of the characteristics of a Victorian governess. But with a definite objective to subvert the Victorian narrative, Fowles introduces certain elements into Sarah's character that may encourage a reconsideration of stereotypes in realist fiction.

Another implication of the authorial intrusion in chapter thirteen has to do with the question of life and fiction. By all accounts, metafictionists do not make any clear-cut distinction between an external reality and its reflection in fiction. In traditional novel criticism, there is a dichotomy between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' that is reflected in fiction. Linda Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative* points out it as one of the paradoxes of traditional realism. In such a scheme of affairs, the imitation of the real can only be inferior to the real. Hutcheon says, "Fowles in breaking down the dichotomy, works to establish a different moral and human connection between art and life for the novel genre" (59).

The way Fowles achieves this in *FLW* is interesting. For one thing, the illusion-breaking statement in chapter thirteen throws much light on the self-reflexive form of fiction. The narrator says:

> I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more,

> real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these characters of my mind, any more than you control--however hard you try, however much of a later-day Mrs. Poultney you may be--your children, colleagues, friends or even yourself. (86-87)

The narrator here introduces two figures unsuccessfully trying to extend one's control over other's actions or their characters. One is the narrator himself handling his characters, and the other, a modern day equivalent of Mrs. Poultney. The novelist, however best he may try to, cannot claim any definite pattern for his characters because a well-defined and universal entity called a character is absent in the poststructuralist era. A character, like the subject, is a product of the discursive context. In the absence of a definable essence for human nature, the creation of well-rounded characters with textbook correctness is an impossibility. Fowles illustrates the same principle through Sarah's character. She remains an enigma to everyone who comes in contact with her. It is appalling to Mrs. Poultney that Sarah does not conform to any of the standards prescribed for the Victorian single women. Charles Smithson is the worst affected of her 'victims'. In a society where women fear the least possibility of suspicion cast over their moral character, Sarah weaves stories around her. Charles receives a deadly blow when he realises that Sarah was a virgin.

Attempts to explain the character of Sarah within the framework of traditional realism may take the reader back to the narrator's rhetorical questions at the end of chapter twelve, "Who is Sarah and out of what shadow does she come?"

In the final analysis, Fowles' *FLW* appears to be a case of creative metafiction. His intention is not only to debunk the truth claims of literature, but also to draw attention to the dark shades of fiction and history in which 'lesser mortals' like women and workers were discriminated against. *FLW* is a metafictional text with a feminist orientation. Representative conventions are exposed as arbitrary structures of meaning. Fowles is successful in demonstrating the 'textuality' of history. The conflation of texts, historical as well as fictional, is an extremely fruitful textual practice. It is also significant to note that the author has chosen the Victorian novel as the example of his metafictional reversionary practice. Chapter thirteen of *FLW* should be considered a virtuoso performance in the history of metafiction.

Chapter IV

The Reader as Detective: Charles Palliser's Betrayals

Betrayals has a captivating opening. The first chapter of the novel is in the form of an obituary published in *The Daily Scot* by Professor Ritchie on the death of his colleague Prof. Herbert Dugdale, immuno-toxicologist at Glasgow University. This serves as a fitting preface to the long series of betrayals and deceptions in the text. It also speaks volumes about the treacherous base of language. In a cursory analysis the write-up reads like an ordinary obituary but a careful analysis reveals that it is a venomous attack on the dead man. The language used is heavily loaded and it conceals all the malice and bitterness that the writer had against Prof. Herbert Dugdale :

> Happiest when fronting a team of talented and hard-working colleagues, Dugdale was seen at his best when publicity was required. He was not one to shun the limelight nor overtly self-effacing when it was a question of sharing with others the credit for an important discovery, and this quirk often poisoned his relations with fellow researchers. Outside his band of fiercely loyal subordinates, many found his style of leadership somewhat rebarbative. Never one (as he often boasted) to

> suffer fools gladly, he had a ready and sharp tongue, which some called venomous. (2)

The seeming simplicity and transparency of language are proved to be non-existent. The writer had only bitterness and enmity towards Dugdale. The very opening of the text throws the gauntlet to the reader. She/he is going to tread on dangerous ground. From another point of view, this is a prelude to the murky atmosphere of a whodunit that is going to be presented to the reader. Moreover, Professor Dugdale and immuno-toxicology are vital links connecting to the series of mysterious murders in the text. *Betrayals (BS)* is really confusing as far as the plot is concerned. The theme of betrayal runs through the whole text. It tries to betray the reader by deliberately misleading her/him. Every teller and every story tries to evade discovery by the reader. As far as the murderers are concerned, there are acts of self- betrayal that result in detection.

Palliser's *BS* is a 'writerly text' that presupposes a highly erudite reader. It does not communicate adequately to a reader who is not thorough with the long history of the genre. At the same time, it also tries to outsmart the reader at every juncture. This is a new author-text-reader configuration in which all the three are engaged in a hide-and- seek game. There is a murder mystery at the centre of the text, but that is entirely different from the mystery in a conventional detective story. The reader finds ten different narratives getting entangled by the principle of intertextuality. Apparently, these stories

have got nothing to do with each other, but the macrotext makes sense only in their coming together.

BS launches a serious attack on the traditional notion of originality in literature. As in Calvino's *IWNT* it is flooded with apocryphal versions of the stories. The real is indistinguishable from the copy. Plagiarism is not seen as a punishable crime, but a kind of non-serious literary game. The stories are accompanied by a group of authors, real as well as imaginary. Palliser himself appears in a slightly disguised form in the long line of authors. Scant attention is being paid to genre distinctions. Historical figures and incidents are juxtaposed along with fictional ones. In fact, there is a surprising degree of similarity between Italo Calvino's *IWNT* and Palliser's *BS*. One of the comments on the blurb of the text says "*Betrayals* defies categorisation, but if it were to be grouped alongside anything, it might be Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*". (*The List*) The highest degree of similarity is in the way these texts quarrel with the traditional notions of reality and representation. The content and the method of presentation are planned in such a way to challenge all the traditional notions of fiction.

In a sense, *BS* has many features that qualify it for the label of an anti-novel. Flouting the conventions of fiction, it begins with an obituary and ends with a book review. In between them are events; historical, fictional, and a combination of both. Apart from the murder mystery, there are scandalous affairs of plagiarism, correspondence between two authors, satiric pieces on a

poststructuralist school of thought, a series of oral tales and so on. All these threads meet in the detectives; one an academician, and the other an amateur.

BS is a work of metafiction because it tackles the question of reality and its relation to fictional representation. The metafictional theme of *BS* is more complex than that of *IWNT* because it deals with the postmodern reality characterised by the invasion of the visual media. It plays a major role in mediating reality for the contemporary people. Images and information flow into the drawing room from all parts of the world. Television and computer have become an integral part of modern woman's/man's reality perception. The media intervenes and interferes in that reality. Postmodern thinkers like Baudrillard have successfully theorised on the new reality by the term 'hyper reality'. The detective plot in *BS* is made complex by the whodunits telecast on the television. Horatio Quaife and his friend Sholto MacTweed are regular viewers of the programmes. Finally, *BS* presents a situation in which the distinction between the real and the unreal is blurred and almost non-existent.

Overt self-consciousness in *BS* manifests in various ways. One of them is an overriding concern with the 'story'; the narrative at its simplest form, as grandma's tale, an anecdote related over a warm cup of coffee or a tall tale. The making of the narrative is a serious concern for the metafictional enterprise. Storytelling is as old as humanity. The earliest example of story telling probably goes back to the days when man led a precarious existence in the forest. Even in

those nomadic days, when they gathered around the campfire to seek protection from the bitter cold and wild animals, the story played a role more significant than that of entertainment. Probably it also served the purpose of embodying the spirit and tradition of the tribe.

The twentieth century approaches in the field of narratology and critical theory have made serious efforts to study the 'story'. The intentions of the teller and the circumstances in which the story is told also assume significance in this context. The seeming innocuousness of the story is taken to be deceptive. Oral tales have become subjects of serious academic studies in recent years. In this sense, 'the story of the story' is a recurrent theme in metafiction.

'The frame story' or 'the story within the story' has been highlighted in *BS*. As in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Arabian Nights*, the text has a storytelling session in which a group of people tell their tales by turn. The narrative framework presented in the chapter titled "Wrong Tracks" is quite similar to the framework of *The Canterbury Tales*. In Chaucer, the pilgrims on the way to St. Thomas Becket's shrine tell the tales to avoid boredom and also to entertain each other. The stories that are told shed light on the disposition and character of the teller. An analysis of the tales also helps in gathering information about their socio-economic background.

In "Wrong Tracks", a few passengers are stranded in a railway carriage on a day of heavy snowfall. The important members of the group were: an old lady named Mrs. Armytage, a retired Major, a silent young woman in the company of Mrs. Armytage and a

clergyman. The situation almost resembles a horror story and there is a brooding atmosphere of terror and mutual suspicion. It is significant to note that the stories told by the passengers are somehow intricately linked to their present conditions in life. The metafictionist wants to foreground the complexity and seriousness of the stories. Storytelling is not an innocent act of entertainment. In "Wrong Tracks", the storytellers are known to each other in past situations that are beyond the knowledge of the reader.

The passengers in question were unable to proceed ahead because of a dispute that arose among the employees of the railway company. The situation finally leads to the death/murder of Mrs. Armytage. The framing story itself is a murder mystery. In this context, the stories told by those passengers deserve special attention. The conditions laid down for the telling of the story shed light on 'the story of the story'. The first suggestion came from Mrs.Armytage that they should have a 'ghost' since all Christmas stories had one. The Major disagrees to this and considers a 'surprise' or 'twist' more important than the 'ghost'. A condition that they all agree on is that the stories should be 'true'. The treatment of the oral tale here foregrounds its conventions. Even grandma's tales have their conventions. The most important one is that the listener should not ask any questions. Unlike the adult, the child is not accustomed to the 'rules of the game' in the story as well as in the bigger story called life.

The first story told by Mrs.Armytage begins with an introduction that it was told to her by her aunt many years ago when she was a girl. The crux of the story is a house party that took place in the highlands of Scotland. Some scandalous happenings at the party result in the breaking of an engagement. It also appears that the narrator's aunt had an active role in the events leading to the snapping of relations. She says that the story was a typical piece of Scottish history with a ghost at the centre. The presence of the ghost has something to do with an incident of adultery and a murder that took place in that house a few years ago.

Mrs. Armytage's story is a kind of puzzle that leaves many gaps and silences. It breaks the conventions of storytelling too. A sense of conclusion is not to be found in it. Above all, an important clue to the other stories in the text is deliberately left vague. That clue would explain the reason for the rivalry between the Major and Mrs. Armytage. Their relationship is also important in unraveling the Killiecrankie mystery. The driver of the train, even though a minor character, assumes significance as he is distantly related to Sholto MacTweed of the chapter titled "An Open Mind". In this new form of intertextuality or intratextuality, the elements of these stories are closely linked and hold the key to the murder mystery. What awaits the reader is a really daunting task of making meaning out of these intertextual patterns. The text also attempts to relate these stories to 'the real story' of Jack the Ripper. The title of Mrs. Armytage's story is "The Masque". It appears that the narrator was trying to hide behind

the mask of Mona, one of the characters in the story. The Major's observation, after the story, that the narrator had been so carried away at times as if she was present on the scene of action also points to the lack of transparency. He was also curious to know whether Mona had married Rudolph. At this, the narrator really seems perturbed. The observations by the listeners function like a critical symposium.

The Parson's tale, like Mrs. Armytage's, is full of gaps and uncertainties. The narrator makes the best of efforts to distort the truth and fix the responsibility on someone else. But he betrays himself through the slippage and gaps in the story. The critical symposium held after the storytelling also points to the self-betrayal. The Parson vouches at the very beginning that he had heard the story from a district magistrate who had served in Africa. It was about a young anthropologist who had gone to prepare an ethnographic monograph on a tribe in the remote interiors. The area was under British protection and the tribe was untouched by civilisation. The dramatic incidents in the story centre around the disappearance of the sacred part of that tribe's idol. The object was a kind of fetish or totem, which the tribe believed, gave them potency in battle. The blame was laid on the anthropologist's assistant, a boy from another tribe. According to the savage customs of tribal justice, the accused will have to confess or face ritualistic mutilation and ultimate death. Strangely enough, the first step was to cut off the tongue of the accused. As the helpless boy was put through the spine-chilling

process, the anthropologist seeks the intervention of the district magistrate. The enquiry initiated by the district magistrate with an intention to help the boy is unable to do so because of certain dramatic turns in the story. This tale is another cornerstone of the textual artifice in *BS.* Apocryphal versions of the story are seen in other sections of the macrotext.

The pilgrims' tales are 'true stories' based on first-hand experiences or the experiences of people who are close to them. It is also remarkable that every tale is manipulated in one way or the other to protect some people or their interests. Some of those stories become confessions in a slightly disguised form. Bound by the condition of truthfulness, the teller comes out with a strange mixture of fact and fiction. 'Fiction' plays its role to disguise the 'truth'. On the other hand, the teller gets a sense of relief similar to religious confession. 'Telling as confession' is an important thematic proposition woven into *BS.*

The statement, "But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Ronald Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word"(85) occurs in the much hyped thirteenth chapter of *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* One of the reasons why this authorial intervention has been celebrated as a supreme example of metafictional self-consciousness is that it has welcomed the hitherto invisible critic to the centre-stage of fictional artifice. Traditional realism, in this sense, was not candid enough to admit that the involvement of the reader or critic is essential for the meaning-making

process. The critic is only a glorified version of the reader. It also means that the critic is not the only person authorised to comment on the configuration of meaning in the text. Meaning is open to endless possibilities and the critic represents only one of them. Metafiction does not hesitate to acknowledge this legitimate influence. Marguerite Alexander's comment, in the context of the earlier referred chapter thirteen of *FLW,* stresses the same point. She says that "Fowles' tribute to Barthes may be said to mark a new development, in that creative writers have traditionally been wary of acknowledging the influence of critics on their work" (4).

In the case of *BS,* the influence of the critic on the work is a major thematic feature incorporated into the text. It must be stated that *BS* goes one step forward to engage in serious literary criticism; an interesting scene in which the text theorises on itself. The amount of literary criticism in *BS* is sufficient to earn it the label of 'anti-theory fiction'. It launches a bitter criticism of the style and method of poststructuralist psychoanalytic literary criticism. Anti-theory Fiction is a sort of violent reaction to arbitrary theories in criticism and the readings based on them. For example, a situation in which Barthes' theories on reading and culture are carried to an extreme point. The spurt in the number of theories and theorists has a bewildering effect on the students and academics. Australian writer Brian Castro's novels belong to the anti-theory camp.

The base of anti-theory ideas in *BS* is in the chapter four entitled "The Medicine Man". The author of the chapter is Dr. Graham

Speculand, senior lecturer in the Department of English Literature at Glasgow University. He is an ardent advocate of 'theory' in literary criticism. He says:

> Few of my colleagues were interested in the exciting new ideas, loosely known as 'Theory' (or critical Theory or Post –structuralism, or Deconstruction), which were sweeping through what used to be called the Humanities but were now being called 'cultural studies'. I am referring, of course, to the work of thinkers, sometimes called the 'Parisian Post-structuralists', such as Derrida, Lacan, Foucault and Barthes. (56)

Speculand claims to have been working for several years on 'A theory of Pleasure' in relation to reading in an attempt to account for the question, why people read? And in this, he was following the implications of some of the theoretical works of Roland Barthes on reading as *jouissance.* Mr. Speculand was impressed by Barthes' use of the sexual metaphor in the context of reading and was also glad about the fact that Barthes was attacking the traditional 'commonsense' notion of the text as having some sort of definable meaning. The traditional reading would limit the free-play of signifiers by exercising the authority. But Mr. Speculand's enquiry was with reference to another crucial question regarding the author-text-reader paradigm:

> But there was, I thought, a crucial question that needed to be answered in relation to the text-act--that is, the act

> of reading; who is the dominant partner--the text or the reader? And how is this relationship established? And if the reader submits to some degree of authority, how can this be pleasurable? (57)

It is in this quest that Dr. Speculand comes under the influence of theories formulated by the mysterious Galvanauskas, a leading figure in the psychoanalytical tendency identified with the "post-Freudian Hermeneutics of Desire"(57). The controversial academic has recently shifted his base from Paris to Glasgow. He has founded an institute for advanced studies in psychoanalysis and literary theory.

The day-to-day affairs of the institute are taken care of by Galvanauska's wife. The peculiar method by which Dr. Galvanauskas interacts with his students is called seminar-therapy. Those desiring to attend the sessions were required to pledge absolute obedience to Galvanauskas. Nobody was permitted to take down notes or use any sort of recording devices. Rarely did the participants speak during those sessions. Sometimes even Mr. Galvanauskas remained silent. When Dr. Bentley of the department of philosophy falls out of favour with the master, Dr. Speculand gets a chance to be a member of the inner circle of the institute. Galvanauskas is a paranoid, who imagines that the whole world is conspiring against him.

The portrait of Galvanauskas becomes a convenient ploy for satirising many of the poststructuralist schools of thought, mainly that of psycho-analysis. The language used in the chapter parodies the style of poststructuralist theoreticians. For example, the rules

and regulations at Galvanauska's seminar therapy are described in this way:

> Another unusual rule was that until the moment when Galvanauskas left, nobody could leave the room during the session for any reason at all including the needs of nature. Anyone who did so was banned from ever attending another session because; it was a fundamental desire of the Id to destroy Galvanauskas by silencing his flow of speech and, in effect, 'evacuating' him. (64)

The language has obvious satiric connotations. It is trying to ridicule the Parisian theories in psychoanalysis and literary criticism. Dr. Speculand also gets involved in a project of editing Galvanauskas' transcripts. It was a secret mission undertaken by none other than Madame Galvanauskas and the ultimate aim of the project is all the more ridiculous. In Speculand's own words, "my rewriting of the transcripts, then, involved a process of revision in which ambiguity, ellipsis, equivocation ,and even obfuscation were to be privileged over clarity, explicitness and logicality" (75).And finally, Dr. Speculand is accused of the 'idiotism of lucidity':

> She told me that Galvanauskas believed that out of rivalry and hostility towards him, I had attempted to emasculate his texts. Her task, she said, had for many years been to preserve the complexity and opacity--the 'necessary obscurity' as she called it --of his ideas. By clarifying and

> unveiling them to the uninitiated I had made them seem shallow and confused. (80)

Metafiction makes extensive use of the critical discussions incorporated into it. The obscurity and arbitrariness of many poststructuralist theories are notorious. Some of those theoreticians exult in the aura of obscurity attached to their writings. Galvanauskian reading of a story is another example of parody. The style and content of the article obviously remind one of those fashionable theories. Galvanauskian reading of the inherent conflict in the story is as follows:

> This arises from the challenge and betrayal involved in the relationship between the anthropologist and his boy-servant. Galvanauska's reading stressed the struggle of wills between master and servant and pointed out how the boy had been asserting his authority in defiance of his master: The boy has been late serving dinner--he has tried to starve his master. The boy has worn his master's long gown--he has been trying to usurp his master's place. Finally he has stolen the crucial part of the idol in a blatant bid for power over the tribe and over his master. He has taken nothing less than the signifier of authority. (291)

Galvanauskian reading of the story lays down an important theoretical formulation regarding the act of reading. According to him, both the text and the reader occupy positions that can be described as

'phallic' (master) or 'emasculated' (victim). The contest for authority between a phallic reader and a phallic text is also a possibility. The emasculated reader experiences a kind of pleasure in yielding to the authority of the phallic text, while the emasculated text surrenders everything to the reader immediately and without any struggle. The 'phallic reader' attempts to conquer the text by forcing it to make a 'voluntary sacrifice' which means that his authority is accepted. On the other hand, the phallic text tries to entrap and betray the reader by various strategies like deceptive silence, equivocation, ambiguity, and ruthlessness. Even though the presentation of the theory is satiric, it applies to many of the textual strategies employed in *BS*.

As far as the text is concerned, the struggle on its part is not to part with meaning. A reader who approaches it with the conventional ideas regarding meaning will definitely be disappointed. The very fact that the text is broken into various fragments may affect the smooth and unproblematic construction of meaning. The situation is made worse because of the stumbling blocks before the reader. One character in a story appears as the author of another one. Characters walk in and out of stories. Intertextuality is at its peak when stories and incidents cross each other at unexpected junctures. Another reason why the Galvansnskian episode is central to the text is that it harps on the theme of betrayal:

> The boy's 'betrayal' in stealing the idol's part constituted a challenge to his master's authority, for everything is at stake in this act of blasphemy. The idol--representing

> power, authority and control--stands in for the anthropologist so that by detaining the idol the boy has challenged authority by an act of betrayal of his master. It is an act of double betrayal since the theft endangers the anthropologist's work amongst the tribe. (293)

If this is an act of betrayal at the theoretical level, a similar kind of betrayal is seen in the text's treatment of the reader. The reader has a tough time searching for meaning in the labyrinthine text of *BS*. What come to the rescue of the reader are certain involuntary acts of betrayal on the part of the text, in which it drops hints that may lead to detection. This act of betrayal in which the text betrays itself is a serious thematic concern as demonstrated in the stories told by the Major, Mrs. Armytage and the Parson. Even though they try to conceal the truth, it is revealed at a crucial point by way of a silly mistake. This has to be read in the background of the murders in the text. One serious theoretical formulation regarding these murders is that the killing is an act of confession on the part of the murderer and she/he leaves behind an important clue that may lead to detection.

High-brow/low-brow distinction in literature has been a topic of heated debates among theoreticians, especially postmodern critics. It is a part of the equation that what is branded as popular is generally looked down on by the advocates of serious stuff. 'The popular writers' accuse that ' serious writers' deliberately try to be obscure and dull, but always run away with honours and awards when it comes to formal recognition. They also say that classification of literature into

'popular' and 'serious' is unnatural and untenable. Being popular should not be a disadvantage. They lament the fact that popular writers never find their way into academic discussions and university curriculum. Postmodern theorists have commented on the high-brow/low-brow dichotomy and claim that a levelling of the distinction has taken place in the postmodern era.

BS engages in serious literary criticism by making a popular author reveal the tricks of his trade. It also presents the novel book as caught up in a network of market-driven forces. The eighth chapter titled "A Nice Touch" contributes much to the deconstruction of the transcendental myth of the realist novel. It has the structure of an epistolary novel, correspondence between an established author and a less successful one. A saga of betrayal and plagiarism is unfolded in this correspondence. On getting chapters of Drummond Gilchrist's forthcoming novel, Cyril Pattison, the successful author of books like *Quintessence* and *The Sensation Seeker* makes the comments. It is no coincidence that the name 'Cyril Pattison' sounds like that of Charles Palliser. The titles of novels attributed to Cyril Pattison sounds like Palliser's novels. Palliser's published titles include *Quincunx (1989)* and *The Sensationist.* (1992) Palliser is reflecting his own image in the text. Another author figure in the novel is called 'Charles Pettifer'.

On the other hand, the correspondence between the two authors presents an exhaustive literary symposium on the elements that go into the making of a successful whodunit. When Drummond

sends finished chapters of his manuscript to Pattison for comments, he is pleased to oblige. The focus of their correspondence is on the novel as a commercially viable product in the market. Pattison is not ashamed of discussing the market strategies that make the book a bestseller. First and foremost, the success of a whodunit depends on suspense. Cyril Pattison enlightens Drummond in response to the first chapter of the manuscript:

> I tend to feel that a whodunit needs to pretty quickly bait the hook that catches the reader. You need the reader to suspect that there's a 'corpse in the closet' as Hitchcock once put it. So I'm a bit concerned that by the end of the chapter we haven't had either a murder or an enigma. I know it can be part of the game to keep the reader guessing and then have, a corpse suddenly fall out of the cupboard, but I think there's a danger of overplaying that haul. (208)

Their correspondence gives the reader an opportunity to see if these conditions are followed in Drummond's novel or the way in which it progresses. The plot of the original novel unfurls through Pattison's critical comments on it. Farquhar Jones, described as something of a modern Quixote is the hero of the piece. He dreams of being a big name in Hollywood through his screenplays. The plotline, as usual, involves treachery, deception and revenge.

The involvement of two literary agents in the muddle makes the matters turn worse for Pattison. It also turns out that with their co-

operation, the amateur writer Drummond has been betraying Pattison. The charge of betrayal is entangled with plagiarism here. Drummond's plan was to publish his novel incorporating Pattison's letters of criticism into it. Published in such a form, it would be a highly self-reflexive one, an experiment that is unprecedented in the history of fiction. Pattison threatens to sue the other author for the charge of plagiarism. Above all, it would be scandalous for Pattison to be involved in such a project because he is a strong advocate of the realist illusion in fiction. Drummond, on the other hand, is out to "deconstruct the fictionality of the realist illusion" (226).

Drummond's novel, in the form of a whodunit interspersed with expert critical comments from Pattison, will be a new example in self-reflexive fiction. The running critical commentary throws light on every development in the text that is placed alongside. The ultimate impact is that the author and the text appear in stark light without any claims to the transcendental status. Drummond's novel, in that sense, performs the same function of *BS*. In the final analysis, the Chinese box structure of multiple plots create a major crisis in understanding for the reader. The overall format of *BS* is that of a whodunit and the author Cyril Pattison resembles Charles Palliser.

Pattison also discusses other factors that make a successful whodunit. The relationship between the author and the reader is also significant. According to him, the reader expects the writer or the text to outwit her/him all the time. In effect, meaning is the runaway culprit that always gives the slip to the reader/detective. The work of

fiction, as it is seen through Pattison's eyes, is very much a product that is written according to the laws of market economy. The text has to prove its U.S.P in order to survive in the market. He attaches no transcendental value to the work or the act of creation. The role of the media as well as that of reviewers is significant in deciding the fate of a work. Pattison finds it quite normal to introduce a bit of sex into the text in order to bait the reader. However, his description of a popular novel is the other side of the traditionalist criticism of bestsellers in the postmodern era. The astonishing success of Harry Potter novels has made traditional critics cry foul and their main charge is that they cater only to market needs.

Another trick of the trade exposed by Cyril Pattison is the high drama behind nominations and awards. In a casual manner, he mentions that his latest title has been shortlisted for a prestigious award. But an honest review that he had done works against him. "My friend on the jury said one of the other judges had it in for me because I once reviewed him unfavourably. What a narrow, bitchy world it is. I almost despair at times" (223-224). Humorous, though the comment is, it brings the fictional artifice further down from the pedestal on which it was placed in the realist tradition.

The chapter titled "The Catch" serves a purpose exactly similar to that of "A Nice Touch", exposing "the literary mafia" (219) behind the written word. The implication is that the fate of a book is not only determined by its 'intrinsic worth', but also by certain other factors like the author's influence and her/his political clout. It is there that

the literary agent steps in. The agent takes the credit for having launched the work properly. Finding an agent who can do the work for her/him is the first task before the author. Cyril Pattison is quite aware of this fact and he is candid about it in his letters to Drummond Gilchrist. An agent's displeasure can make the author vanish from the literary field. The readers witness it when two agents team up with Drummond against Cyril Pattison.

Marketing a novel is not an easy task. The process is exactly similar to that of a consumer product. Jeremy Prentice-Aubrey Sackville story deals with all aspects of the book trade. Jeremy is an immensely popular writer who has established a name for himself in thrillers. Sackville, on the other hand, is a high-brow writer and fiction reviewer for *The Daily Scot.* Jeremy never finds a space for himself in the so-called 'quality newspapers.' Jeremy says that "Sackville's work is much too bookish for my taste and for the tastes of most ordinary people. He writes books that are much more about other books than they are about the real world" (243). The plot deals with the enmity between the authors. Even though it is intertextually related to other chapters, it can be read as a short novel in itself. By means of a mise-en-abyme structure, the story of Jeremy and Sackville is repeated in another plot as Chatterton and Bellamy story.

Jeremy Prentice, as a representative of pulp fiction authors, is a bitter critic of 'serious' writers like Sackville. He makes some accusations against his adversary:

> He is part of the 'Eng Lit' mafia. If your face fits and you know the right people and do the right things then you're a serious literary writer. Even if all you've published is a so-called 'sensitive' first novel or some portentious [SIC] little sheath of love poems. If you're successful in the sense that ordinary book reading members of the public purchase your product in not inconsiderable quantities, then there's no way you'll ever win a literary prize or be reviewed in the so-called 'serious' papers. I'm delighted to say, at that time I'd never even been shortlisted for a literary prize, let alone won one. If you merely write books that millions of people buy and get thumping good entertainment from, then you're a lowbrow, a pot-boiler. Either you're not reviewed at all or else you're reviewed in a tone of condescending superiority. (250)

Jeremy's charge is something that 'pulp writers' have been making for a very long time. At one point, Sackville answers these questions about the popularity of his books by saying that he got his knighthood "for contributing to literature, not helping the balance of trade" (251). It is also notable that almost all established authors of popular fiction find reference in Jeremy's self-defence in a slightly disguised form. He says that he had "already overtaken Jack Sheldon and Robert Forsyth, and this financial year I was going to beat Sidney Higgins and Frederick Ludlum" (241). They are real-life authors and the disguise results from the shuffling of surnames. Malapropism committed by

Jeremy throughout the chapter cannot be accidental. The examples are; 'veracious eater' (247), 'vociferous reader' (243), sedimentary job' (284).

The basic thrust of the chapter is in presenting the novel as a product in the market, that requires "product- placement deals" (266) and business networks. The role of the media is also significant in giving the necessary boost to the novel. For that sake, an upcoming novelist needs the right contacts. If the "reviewer–ringmasters of the literary circus" (242) are not in one's favour, the work may go unnoticed. Once the writer is established, she/he is typecast as having certain unmistakable characteristics. It is very much like the brand-name value attached to the consumer products in the market. Here, a cabinet minister-cum-novelist (Mr. Bellamy) is approached by a novice and he has got a manuscript. The Youngman assures that the manuscript has all the features of his titles. The same idea occurs in the story within the story in "The Catch":

> Chatterton said he was sure that the cabinet minister would insist upon a thorough rewrite of the manuscript in order to give it the inimitable quality of a Bellamy title. In fact, he would probably want to do this personally. He was sure that Bellamy would not abrogate his ultimate responsibility for the text because it was his name on the title- page and that, ultimately, was what his readers were buying: the Bellamy brand-name. (254)

BS presents multiple examples in which authors are successfully duplicated. This is something that diminishes the significance of the author. Traditional criticism envisaged style to be the unmistakable mark of the author. It is the ultimate result of a particular author's turn of phrase, choice of words and above all, the method of treatment. Here when Chatterton produces a work that can be easily attributed to Bellamy, it is a revision of the status of the author. Chatterton has carefully reproduced Bellamy-like theme and style. The idea deconstructs the received notion of literature. It also presents literature in a different light, stripping it of its transcendental status. The theory supposes literature to be the end-result of painstaking study and patience. Calvino stresses the same idea in *IWNT* and other writings in the form of his idea of 'Literature Machine'.

The chapter titled "The New Surgeon at Oswald's" further carries out the debunking and problematisation of the myth of classical literature. It is a manuscript forwarded to a publishing firm and the same is subjected to editorial reviews and comments. Self–reflexive fiction has its focus on the ontology of the fictional artifice and it reveals the semiotic structure that endows fiction with meaning. In a deeper analysis, it also enquires into the economic and social conditions that support the structure of literature. The economic principle behind the publishing business is intricate and intriguing. But these less savoury aspects never come out in the open when a work of fiction is celebrated as a 'classic' or 'runaway success with the readers'. Reference is not usually made to the factors that

made the publication of that work an economically viable project. A radical metafictional work like *BS* brings all those details to the foreground.

Economic forces, in this sense, are key players behind the publication business. Fiction loses much of its transcendental aura and glamour through this exposition, yet the metafictionist does not regret it. One of the important principles is that in normal circumstances, only works that satisfy the standard taste in the literary market manage to find publishers. If necessary, the author will have to make compromises at times to toe the line drawn by the publisher. It also demands that the book should neatly fit into the genre descriptions already accepted.

The editorial judgments on "The New Surgeon at Oswald's" say that in its present form, it is not fit for publication. At the same time, they look forward to it as a "potentially very commercial proposition (43)":

> This manuscript, by an author that I understand we haven't used her work before, shows a high degree of literary competence but is unacceptably marred by its wholly inappropriate ending which seems to come from a novel of quite different genre. In this part of the market one simply cannot afford to confuse genres. (43)

The commercial viability of the work also lies in its conforming to the conventions of that genre. Going by the editorial comments and the manuscript, it is obvious that the specimen at hand is a mixture of

two genres, the detective fiction and the Gothic fiction. The framework of the story, another apocrypha, is that of the notorious Whitechapel killings in which women of the street were targeted. The name of the victim in the story, Mary Kelly, is that of the last victim of Jack the Ripper. Moreover, the surgeon who commits the murder of nurse Mary calls himself Jack. So the manuscript reads like a detective novel in parts, but the ending, as the editorial comment stresses, is a bit off the mark because it reads like horror fiction. "Call me Jack, he said gently. They were now just inside the trees. The foliage rustled gently in the warm breeze. At that moment the moon passed behind a cloud" (52).

Descriptions like these make it closer to a work of horror fiction. In that sense, the author of the manuscript has committed a serious mistake of not paying attention to the specific conventions of a genre. This interesting manuscript also contributes to the reality/fiction debate in *BS* because the name of the author is given as Lavinia Armytage. She is a major character who figures in the Killiecrankie mystery, in the main framework of the text. She dies in mysterious circumstances and the riddle at the centre of the novel springs from that incident. This is a unique phenomenon because the victim in the main story figures as the author of a similar story. It adds to the complexity of the Chinese-box-structure and poses a serious challenge to the reader's perception of reality and fiction.

The name Mary Kelly instantly reminds the readers of Ripper killings. The serial killer in the manuscript is in the guise of a

surgeon, Dr. MacQuarrie, who is notorious for his cruel treatment of nurses and theatre assistants. Mary Kelly is one of the nurses working with Doctor MacQuarrie. The classic whodunit of Jack the Ripper finds an apocryphal version here. It is also interesting to note that one of the theories put forward by Ripperologists is that the criminal was a doctor adept in the art of performing surgeries on the human body.

Apocrypha undermines the concept of originality in literature. When a story has different versions with minor differences, the very idea of 'the real' is problematised. Jean Baudrillard's theory of postmodern reality underlines the loss of the real in a forest of simulations. *BS* shows a violent rejection of the idea of single authorship and originality. The text, as a whole, is a mise-en-abyme structure of simulated plots. In some cases, the kernel remains the same, but the story sports different exteriors. One obvious example is that of the story titled "The Trap". It has many features of an oriental tale and reads as if taken from *Arabian Nights*; a cruel sultan, harem slaves, concubines and a spicy story of adultery. The plot centres around an act of betrayal by one of the bodyguards kept by the Sultan. He kissed the Sultan's favourite concubine. What helped the sultan to detect the trespass was an intricate building structure, a marvel of engineering skill that enabled him to see the happenings in the gallery of the apartment from his justice chamber. Water in the pool of his chamber reflected the gallery. It was in the pool that the Sultan noticed the bodyguard kissing the woman. What made the

execution of justice difficult for Sultan was the fact that the rest of his bodyguards tried to protect the guilty one. All of them were to be executed. When the process of justice was on, the delinquent guard was curious to know about his fate and that trapped him.

The doctor's story in the chapter titled "Accusation" is an apocryphal version of the oriental story. The plotline of the story is exactly similar to that of the earlier one. In place of the Sultan is a magistrate. When he finds out about his wife's adulterous liaison with a man, he adopts an ingenious method of detection. This story has a secret passage and a mirror instead of the pool. One major difference is that the magistrate is more merciful to the guilty man. The self-betrayal, as in the first case, comes in the form of curiosity in the delinquent. It would be highly unnatural for a traditional text to have multiple stories that would undermine the concept of originality. The metafictional text, on the other hand, lets the stories cross each other in their manifold avatars. The constituent elements of these stories may vary in an unending game of combinations.

The attack on the reader's reality construct is consistent and deliberate. The text insinuates that the border between fact and fiction is porous and delicate. As already discussed, Cyril Pattison, the author who figures in "A Nice Touch," resembles Charles Palliser. A phrase attributed to Auberon Saville is given as an epigraph for the text, "alas for both his victims and his readers." The same Auberon Saville appears in a slightly disguised form as Aubrey Sackville, chief fiction reviewer for *The Daily Scot.* Another instance is the

acknowledgement page where it is customary for authors to express their gratitude to people who have helped in one way or other. Here, the dedication is for people like William Herbert Dugdale, Graham Speculand, Angus McMaster, Sholto MacTweed, Ramsay McCoo, Drummond Gilchrist, Jeremy Prentice and Auberon Saville. The following note reads:

> Thanks for your help with the novel--unwitting though it was. Don't read 'your' chapter out of sequence or you'll be even angrier with me. Read the chapters in the right order and then decide who has been betrayed by whom. Thanks also, to Ruth, Judy, Frank, Ronald, Marcus, Shira, and Chris.(Acknowledgement)

People whose full names are given, are 'characters' figuring in different fragments in the text. As far as one's commonsensical judgment is concerned, they are not 'real-life' characters. On the other hand, the people mentioned in the second part like Ruth and Judy seem like individuals close to the author. But Palliser makes no distinction between these two sets of people. The attempt, once again, is to blur the real-fictional divide; the honours referred to here are awards like Booker prize and Whitbread. Newspapers like *The Guardian* and *The Mirror* are also are introduced in various contexts.

At the centre of *BS* is a postmodern rewriting of the traditional detective fiction. The text, as a whole, revolves around the Killiecrankie mystery. Another series of murders take place in the Glasgow city. At the same time, these episodes are linked to two

historical cases of crime. Bible John killings and Whitechapel killings. Both the cases remain an enigma to detectives even now. Sholto MacTweed is obsessed with crime and detectives. He has made an exhaustive study of Bible John Killings. Whitechapel killings also get a lot of attention in the text. By an ingenious move, the text speculates that the criminals in these two unsolved cases have got links with Killiecrankie and Glasgow killings. One possibility is that the Major in the story might be Jack the Ripper. The mixture of the 'real' and the 'fictional' has got serious implications for novel theory.

Postmodernist art pays no attention to the real-fictional divide. The aura of 'truth-value' that was there around biography and history is challenged. The mixture of fact and fiction in *BS* points in the same direction of postmodernist rebellion. When Bible John killings are related to Killiecrankie and the contemporary Glasgow murders in the text, it does not completely defy rationality and logic. Nothing has been known about the killer in the Bible John case so far and investigations are still on. Some investigators are of the opinion that the criminal is still alive. He called himself John, beyond that his identity remains a mystery to this day. He killed three ladies in Glasgow in 1968 and 1969. The ladies were picked up from the same dance-hall in the Barrowland in the East End. He told them Bible stories while they danced and took them to somewhere nearby and strangled them. The stories abounded that he had killed many more women by changing his *modus operandi* or that he had moved to another part of the United Kingdom.

On February 22, 1968, Patricia Docker was found murdered at Barrowland Ballroom. She was strangled. Leads were scarce and the public had largely forgotten about her death until a repeat killing on August 16, 1969. Jamima McDonald was found in an abandoned building strangled with her own stockings.

The third victim was killed on October 30. Twenty nine year old Helen Puttock and a friend had paired up with two men with the name 'John' at Barrowland. Puttock's friend described the man as well-dressed and gentle. The other John had left separately and the second one made some strange remarks and Biblical references. The killer, victim, and her friend took the same bus home.

Puttock's girlfriend felt comfortable leaving her alone with John and she got down at her station. Puttock's body was found at another bus stop the next day. Police are still on the look out for the murderer. A possible suspect emerged in late 2000 but no arrest was made. The police are still optimistic and announced recently that the D.N.A. samples taken from the scene of a crime committed in Glasgow in 2003 allegedly provides eighty per cent match with samples taken from Puttock murder case and the speculation still continues. However, Bible John killings are meticulously interwoven into the plot of *BS* by way of the crime serials telecast on *BBC*. In this sense; it makes a serious statement regarding the new reality construct in fiction.

BS treats Whitechapel killings in the same manner, adding to the complexity of the reader's reality perception. "Jack the Ripper" is

the popular name of a serial killer who murdered a number of prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888. The name originated from a letter written by someone who claimed to be the killer. The killings took place within an area of one mile and affected the districts of Whitechapel, Spitafields, Aldgate and city of London proper. He was also called the Whitechapel murderer. The five prostitutes who are believed to be murdered by Jack the Ripper are: Mary Ann Nichols (murdered on Friday, August 31, 1888), Annie Chapman (murdered on Saturday, September 8, 1888), Elizabeth Stride (murdered on Sunday, September 30, 1888), Catherine Eddowes (also murdered on the same date), and Mary Jane Kelly (murdered on Friday, November 9, 1888). It is the last victim, Mary Jane, who figures as a nurse in the chapter titled "The New Surgeon of Oswalds" in *BS*.

Being the classic whodunit, Whitechapel killings occupy an important place in the textual structure of the *BS*. Strangely enough, it is almost identical with the serial murders in the chapter titled "An open Mind". Secondly, one of the speculative theories in the text point an accusing finger at the Major as the Jack responsible for Whitechapel killings as well as the murders of prostitutes happening in Glasgow at the time of the novel. The final result of this strange mixture is that the reader is not able to tell as to which is real and which is unreal.

On the other hand, Whitechapel killings are perfect examples of the real verging on the fictional. Seen from a historical point of view,

it was the media coverage that gave the series of murders their mythical status. The first element of fiction in the killings is that it is still unclear as to how many women have been killed by Ripper. It is generally accepted that he murdered only four. At the same time, there are others who fix the figure at seven or more. The next element of fiction surrounds the Ripper letters. It is commonly accepted by the experts on the case that none of the letters purported to have been written by the Ripper were in fact written by him. A letter dated September twenty fifth and received on the twenty seventh by the Central News Agency was the first to be signed "Jack the Ripper". The Whitechapel murderer may have written the letters but there is no evidence to suppose that he did it and the police are also of the opinion that these must have been the handiwork of a journalist. A recently discovered document speculates that a journalist from the Central News Agency, Tom Bulling, was the writer.

However, in mid-October1888, George Lusk, who was the head of a vigilance committee on Whitechapel received a small parcel. It contained half a human kidney and a letter from a person claiming to be the killer. It stated that it was a part of the kidney he removed from the victim Eddowes. Speculation is rife on this aspect too. There are more factors that make the incident verge on the unreal. The method of killing is definitely gruesome and at the same time stranger than fiction. He came from nowhere, acted violently and vanished into thin air. Another element is the 'fictional' identity of the killer. The incidents were bizarre than fiction, but very much a part of what is

accepted as 'history' or 'reality'. But the mysterious nature of the incident, including the fact that the best of sleuths in the world have not been able to solve it, makes it a part of what is generally known as 'fictional' rather than the 'real'.

Another interesting fictional dimension to the case is the fictionality of the victims. The background of the last victim, Mary Jane, has attracted a lot of curiosity as that of the identity of the killer. Most of the victims were known by their fictional identities. They lied about their identity and the reasons for becoming prostitutes. Researchers conclude that Mary Kelly also belonged to this category. The police were absolutely clueless when they tried to confirm some of the things that she had told her friends and neighbours. Kelly had stated that she was a patient at an infirmary in Cardiff. The press investigated into it and could find no evidence. It is exactly difficult to say as to what was true and what was false about Mary Kelly. The readers find a similar stuff in *BS*, something that verges on the territory between the real and the fictional.

As already explained, *BS* is all about murder mysteries and sleuths. Corpses and skeletons tumble out of every cupboard. Freemasons and Masonic symbols are abundant. There are chances that every other man one comes across in the novel may turn out to be a murderer. Parallel to the activities of the detective is that of the reader, a person engaged in deciphering the hidden signs and pursuing the murderer/meaning. There is an inherent similarity between the activity of the reader and the sleuth. The reader is

engaged in a hermeneutic activity that depends on the correct interpretation of signs. Linda Hutcheon, in *Narcissistic Narrative*, comments on the role of the detective reader:

> The logical deductions demanded of the reader place him more often, however, in the shoes of the detective himself, be he an active investigator or an arm-chair wizard. False trails may be laid for both of these interpreters but the evidence discovered must be shared by the sleuth with the reader; it is not fair for Watson in the Sherlock Holmes to withhold details from the reader, for instance. (73)

The reader in *BS is* on his toes right from the beginning. The murder mysteries in the text are hard to crack because they are all mixed up together. To complicate the matters, the real and the fictional find a place in the some text. Sholto MacTweed's diary jottings hold the key to the mysteries, but it is extremely esoteric. Sholto tries his best not to part with the truth, and finally, it ends on an ambiguous note when the whole blame falls on Horatio Quaife. But the reader, going by the hidden signals in the text, comes to her/his own conclusions regarding the culprit. But for the police, there is clinching evidence to put the blame on Horatio. One letter that he had written to Sholto in another context works decisively against him. "I'm sorry I killed so many people. I was obsessed with the idea of the perfect murder. But what can I do now?"(167). The letter was signed in Horatio's name, but the name of the addressee was not specified.

The detective plot is a favourite structuring device because of its highly self-reflexive form. The form is heavily laden with rigid conventions. Borges and Umberto Eco found it irresistible because of these properties. Postmodernism subverts the conventional structure of a whodunit plot by reworking it. The elements of a conventional plot such as suspense and eventual detection are often discarded in postmodern whodunits. In that sense, they turn the hermeneutic code upside down. Regarding the old detective story, Patricia Waugh said that it "celebrates human reason: 'mystery' is reduced to flaws in logic; the world is made comprehensible" (82).Just as metafiction subverts the search for meaning in a conventional story; here the hermeneutic code is problematised by making detection impossible or ridiculous. Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957) subverts the convention by not offering a resolution to the enigma. The text invites the reader's attention to the creation of the mystery or the functioning of the hermeneutic code. Sometimes the answer to the mystery is offered at the very beginning and thereby it makes a mockery of the search.

The overall textual design of *BS* is meant to be a parody of the detective story. The character of Horatio Quaife is a satiric portrait of an academician obsessed with detective fiction. He is well-read in the theories of murder mysteries and the one that influences him most is the theory by Gavin Oscars. He propounded the theory that the fatal slip or error that functions as the incriminating evidence is a deliberate act on the part of the murderer because he wants to be

caught. Horatio has also devised an elaborate point system for evaluating murders:

> One point for knowing the victim well. Another point for disguising the murder as suicide or accident. Another for an irrefutable alibi. And another for communicating with the police. We don't know about his alibi, but otherwise Jack scores, at most, only two out of three. Say ninety per cent for the first and another ninety for the third. A hundred and eighty out of a possible three hundred. Sixty per cent overall. Not that brilliant. (129)

In accordance with his point system, Horatio does not have a high opinion of Jack the Ripper's gruesome murders. In his scheme of affairs, poisoning is a "very inelegant method" (158). By an irony of fate, Horatio becomes a scapegoat for all the 'perfect murders' committed by Sholto MacTweed. He has been nursing a grudge against Horatio for his alleged disrespect to the reality principle. He made his accusation as follows.

> It was a matter of plagiarizing from reality. He had taken material from actual history and then distorted it for his own purposes. And then to my amazement, he said: well, so what if I did? I was writing a novel, not a work of scholarly history! (166)

The accusation is with reference to Quaife's work on the Killiecrankie mystery. The author liberally made use of the information available to him from historical as well as non-historical sources. The mixture of

the 'real' and the 'fictional' amounted to sacrilege for Sholto. At another point in his diary, he wonders as to "what liberties with the truth he might be taking in the name of fiction" (168). In Sholto's eyes Horatio had to pay a heavy price for this offence.

In another stroke of parody, this postmodern text ridicules the conventions of detective fiction. When Oscar Wilde makes his appearance in the play within the serial, he propounds a Wildian theory regarding the motive for murder. He talked "about murder for murder's sake and the idea of a murder committed for no other motive than to kill with style and elegance and daring in such a way as to make the police look stupid" (164).Finally, Horatio Quaife, the author, is arrested on charges of multiple murders and the reader continues the search for meaning. Even though he was innocent, the academician-turned detective is arrested on the charge of murder. The logic of a normal whodunit story turns upside down in *BS*.

Structurally speaking, "An Open Mind" is the most important chapter in the text. It holds the key to a proper understanding of *BS*. The murder mysteries in the text converge at one point in Sholto MacTweed and Horatio Quaife. Sholto's character is satiric to a certain extent. Horatio's academic qualifications and reputation are no match for his amateur interest in the field of crimes and detection. The whole of this chapter, the lynchpin of the text, is in the form of his dairy jottings. A hardcore detective fiction buff, he thinks that he has got the calibre to solve unsolved mysteries. But the external reality

exerts tremendous pressure upon Sholto's reality concept. He is a staunch realist with his feet firm upon *terra firma.*

Sholto has only contempt for 'crime stories' that are fictional. In his opinion, it is a sheer waste of time to read stories that are fictional:

> I hate the way 'crime' covers 'True Crime' and 'Crime Fiction'. It makes me very angry. I just can't understand why people want to waste their time on reading things that are made up when there's so much interesting factual material in the world. (96)

It is his obsession with the 'factual material' that drags Sholto into problems. He sets out to investigate the Killiecrankie mystery precisely because he has a 'factual' link to it; his great grandfather Hamish was the driver of the train that was carrying the ill-fated lady and her co-passengers. But the pervasive influence of the alternative realities around him gives a serious jolt to his traditional sense of reality. According to his principle, what is seen by the eyes cannot be false, that is why he believes everything that he watches on the television.

"An Open Mind" with its juxtaposition of the 'fictional' and the 'real' makes a statement from the very beginning. Historical events like Whitechapel killings and Bible John killings are presented along with cases that are presumably fictional. Historical personages also get a similar treatment. Oscar Wilde and Sherlock Holmes rub shoulders with Biggert and Craigie. This fiction–life interface is complicated by the simultaneous presentation of multiple frames.

Murders are committed in the city of Glasgow in reality and in the T.V. soaps popular during the period. Especially, there are two programmes that make a serious impact on Sholto's reality construct. The first one is a popular crime serial called *Biggert.* The events of the plot take place in and around Glasgow. Biggert is the chief detective officer. Esmeralda is a young detective who works under him. The play within the show is titled *The Importance of being Jack* and Oscar Wilde and the Prince of Wales are characters in it. The other serial called *Gargunnock Braes* is about life in a small Scottish village. The plotline centres around a disputed parentage, child molestation and similar sensational themes.

The nature and significance of these events are made clear quite early in the text. Horatio Quaife, the academician, approaches these developments from a perspective entirely different from that of the gullible, unsophisticated Sholto. The tension between these two perspectives is pervasive in the whole chapter. Regarding his habit of watching the popular serials on television, Horatio talks to Sholto and this is what he records in his dairy:

> Then he said: You're probably wondering why I watch Gargunnock Braes. (which I was) It's actually a complex text about appearance and the endless play of signs and so on. He said something about 'semi-optics'. Then he started on about someone called a Echo--now there's another funny name!--who is also a whodunit-writer and as well as that is something called a semi-optician. (166)

As Horatio tries to make it clear to Sholto, the whole of "An Open Mind" is about semiotics and representation. Umberto Eco and Borges are hiding behind every corner.

From one perspective, it can be asserted that Sholto's reality concept is flawed and outdated. For one thing, he makes a clear distinction between the real and the fictional. Sholto clings on to the values of the old world, and in this sense, he resembles the Reader in Calvino's *IWNT*. The original always assumes an elevated status in Sholto's scheme of affairs and naturally he looks down on the copies. Sholto cannot come to terms with the proposition that the boundary between the real and the fictional is porous and elusive. Secondly, his epistemological sense is pre-postmodern, and he yearns for the original and cannot accept simulations.

Sholto's dairy jottings give enough proof of the feeling of displacement that he suffers from. He is the resident neither of an old world nor of the postmodern world of virtual reality. The immediate reason for Sholto's sense of displacement is his exposure to the visual media. His exposure to the serials *Gargunnock Braes* and *Biggert* changes his perception of reality beyond recognition. Another factor that complicates things far Sholto is his obsession with the detective story. As far as the conventions of the genre are concerned, the final moment is that of revelation and capture. The superior intelligence of the sleuth triumphs, the foul deed is exposed, and the culprit is arrested. This is exactly similar to the way in which traditional criticism conceives of meaning in the text.

One instance where Sholto is confused in his pre-conceived notion of reality and fiction occurs while he is watching television. He is horrified to find that the programme he has been watching avidly was a made-up story. He cannot digest the fact that the actor who plays the role of the detective's assistant in *Biggert* also figures in *Gargunnock Braes*:

> So the *Braes* is all made up, too! They're all actors! (Now I realized what Biggert was referring to when he said Craigie was moon-lighting) I was really disgusted. Frankly, it seems you can't believe anything you see on television. (154)

BS presents multiple frames of reality at the same time. It is a situation in which two popular television serials, a play within a serial, a few historical personages and a few actors criss-cross at different points. The constant shift of focus does not allow the reader to get used to the terms of a particular frame of reality. The actor playing the role of the detective in the serial *Biggert* is extremely frustrated about the way in which his fate is being decided by the scriptwriters. He wants a more substantial role and would not like to lie in a pool of blood in the final episode. He cannot approve of the attention grabbed by Craigie, his assistant. So he suggests a different storyline and even searches for a new scriptwriter who could rewrite it. Biggert the detective is a character in the Pirandellian mode, one who asserts his own freedom. The normal distinction between the real and the unreal gets thinner here.

The contemporary relevance of *BS* lies in the fact that it comments brilliantly on the encroachment of the media upon the everyday life of the people. Virtual reality has come to occupy a status that is by no means inferior to the impact of the 'real world'. Palliser resorts to the use of the popular television soap, a 'reality' that has made its presence felt in the drawing rooms all over the world. *Biggert*, broadcast on *BBC,* has soap in it, titled *Tillieknock Nuik*. A report in *The Clarion* about the illness of one of the actors in the serial *Gargunnock Braes* says:

> Extrovert bachelor Pitendrigh, 66, who has for nearly twenty years played the central figure of Auld Rab in Gargunnock Braes, Scotland's favourite television soap, was said last night to be resting with friends in the country. Auld Rab, whose pre-retirement position as 'jannie' to the village school has won him the affectionate nick-name of 'Scotland's granddad'; has been known and loved by generations of Scottish schoolchildren both in the fictional world of *Gargunnock Braes* and in real life. (183)

A screen-life of twenty years in the drawing room is long enough to acquire the status of 'reality'. The confusion that results from the interpenetration of the real and the virtual reaches the high point when the real-life scorpion killer starts imitating the *modus operandi* of the killer on the television. When 'reality' starts imitating 'fiction', the police decides to use it as a ploy. They set a trap for the killer by

planning a live broadcast of the last episode. The calculation is that the scorpion killer may try to kill Esmeralda, the beautiful detective officer. Once again, the real merges with the fictional and raises doubts as to who is the real target, the actor playing the role of Esmeralda or the fictional character?

At the end of the day, the credit for having solved the knot of mystery goes to the reader. The real culprit, Sholto MacTweed, is nowhere exposed in the text. But the reader puts two and two together and the review that appears in *The Daily Scot* is helpful in reaching those conclusions. It becomes clear that Horatio Quaife, the academician, was made a scapegoat for the ingenious murders committed by his less educated friend Sholto. It is accidental that Sholto, in this rare feat, scores another point by commiting the perfect murder, an idea postulated by Quaife himself. Quaife's attempts to expose Sholto as the maniac murderer fail miserably.

The labyrinthine structure of *BS* is able to problematise the reader's sense of reality. The fictional and the real are indistinct and the merger of the two is complete and perfect. There are a number of stories and some of them are 'real stories', like the Whitechapel killings and Bible John murders. Others are probably fictional, but the reader is not able to say definitely because so strange is the juxtaposition of these stories. Historical elements that lend authenticity to supposedly fictional stories are found in abundance. The same is the case with the author-figures in *BS*. A few of them are well- known historical personages like Kipling, but others are probably

fictional. About the reality status of Horatio Quaife, the *Daily Scot* review says:

> For in terms of murder, the author of *Down on Whores* does not measure up to Christie (Agatha) as a writer, albeit he gloriously outranks Christie (John Reginald) as a killer. And his achievement grows in stature posthumously since to the respectable tally of four, two more victims have recently been added. (286)

John Reginald Christie was a serial killer who terrorised Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. He was hanged for murder in 1953. It is also significant that Palliser himself is present among the long line of authors in a slightly disguised form as Cyril Pattison or Charles Pettifer. 'The play within the soap', and *The importance of Being Jack* are other instances where multiple framing devices meet. It is not only confusing to the unsophisticated Sholto, but also to the alert reader. It freely plagiarises from reality, as the Prince of Wales, Oscar Wilde, Mr. Gladstone, Sherlock Holmes, and Doctor Watson appear on stage. Sherlock Holmes in the play tries to prove that Oscar Wilde is the ripper behind serial killings. Oscar Wilde admitted to the murders and the reason that he gives is even more amusing. He talks about "murder for murder's sake" and the idea of a murder committed for no other motive than to kill with style and elegance.

"An Open Mind" presents an extremely complex kind of reality. Postmodernist thinkers like Jean Baudrillard have theorised on the changes that have come in human beings' perception of reality. The

pervasive influence of the visual media and computers has redefined the old parameters of reality. The coinage 'virtual reality' speaks volumes about this paradigm shift. Reality television is the latest development that links the older reality to the virtual experience. It is an apt image for contemporary times because it contains the elements of both reality and fiction. When the Channel Four programme "Big Brother" became a matter of controversy in January 2007, people all over the world were alive to the kind of real-fictional union that is taking place. The fact that the participants in such a programme are 'living it out there' is clear to the audience. At the same time, the audience also knows that it is a television programme meant for entertainment. Naturally, a confusion arises as to where the 'real' ends and the fictional 'begins'. Observers cannot exactly ascertain as to whether the racial abuse was aimed at the real Shilpa Shetty or the contestant in the program. The role of the media in the construction of reality is a postmodern topic of discussion. An individual in the postmodern world is bombarded with multiple signs from all sides. His condition is similar to that of Sholto MacTweed in *BS*.

In the final analysis, the most remarkable thing about Palliser's *BS* is its similarity to Calvino's metafictional strategies in *IWNT*. Both the novels are overtly self-conscious texts. An intense preoccupation with the 'story' is quite explicit to skip the reader's attention. Intertextuality is an important textual strategy in *BS*. Anterior texts like *The Canterbury Tales* assert their influence on the pattern of meaning. Palliser also introduces many of the postmodern themes

like the low art/high art distinction into the text. Perhaps, the most obvious postmodern influence is in the reworking of the detective story. The detective plot in *BS* is a sharp departure from the conventional detective story. At the same time, it also makes serious observations on reality and its representation. Palliser insinuates that new theories are needed to explain the complex kind of reality that is created by postmodernism. As the stories and their frameworks are repeated, the merger of the electronic media and the everyday world raises issues that are of serious consequences to the art of representation.

Chapter V

Temptation of Meaning: Robert Kroetsch's *The Puppeteer* and *The Studhorse Man*

Linda Hutcheon called Robert Kroetsch 'Mr. Canadian Postmodern' in her *The Canadian Postmodern* and the description befits him. Another equally suitable title for Robert Kroetsch would be that of the archetypal storyteller. Everything that he has written partakes of that primal instinct to share a narrative, from the beer talk and tall tales to the postmodern narratives. But these narratives, for him, are a means of quarrelling with the established conventions of storytelling. He is skeptical of all referential frames and meaning structures including language. A deliberate foregrounding of the question of language and its role in mediating reality is central to Kroetsch's writings.

These concerns, rather poststructuralist and postmodern in nature, manifest in the form of a deliberate playfulness in him. Commenting on the playful instinct in Kroetschian writings, Peter Thomas observes in his book *Robert Kroetsch*:

> Like the resourceful Coyote of Plains Indian mythology, a figure central to his imagination, Robert Kroetsch is difficult to trap. His narratives are ambitiously expansive in theme and varied in tone. Their range of physical

> movement and lexical bravura repudiates the more restricted and tightlipped traditions of social realism. (1)

His playfulness is symptomatic of an organised rebellion against the received notion of literature and language. An investigation into the basic nature of language exposes it as a highly arbitrary system built upon a structure of social sanction. As Kroetsch's novels resist totalising explanations, it is very difficult to make sweeping statements about his literary career. These novels feel the stifling presence of ordering devices in literature like metaphor, plot, myth, and character. They attempt to break away from the conventions and at the same time also make telling commentaries on the act of subversion.

Linda Hutcheon's use of the postmodern label with reference to Robert Kroetsch is based on an in-depth study of his works. The most important reason, according to her, is a deleberate fragmentary tendency in his novels. Secondly, they combine the theoretical and the creative, in an oeuvre that recognises criticism as an extension of the creative act. Another important strand of postmodernism, evident here, is that of a certain parodical tendency, the impulse to give form while simultaneously trying to break it. Intertextuality and parody are not destructive, but acknowledge the continuity of literary tradition. In this context, Hutcheon says that "parody and intertextuality are ways of both asserting and challenging that continuity, both for readers (who must perceive the text's doubleness) and for the author" (*Canadian* 163).

Naming is an issue of serious concern in Kroetsch as is evident from the names of his characters. He presents it as an attempt to fix an identity for somebody/something. In Kroetsch's scheme of affairs, the story is a bigger version of naming. This is one instance where the iconoclastic tendency of the author is evident. It smacks of a refusal to take things for granted. Distrust of the traditional structures of meaning is reflected in his attitude to mythical patterns in literature too. Kroetsch never gives in to the primary meaning of the myth, but explodes it by giving an ironic twist.

The novel *What the Crow Said* can be taken as a typical example of Kroetsch's disregard for the established conventions of storytelling and a genuine interest in the oral tradition. The novel begins with a statement that becomes a manifesto for his fiction:

> People, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang that started everything. How the town came to prosper, and then to decline, and how the road never got built, the highway that would have joined the town and the municipality to the world beyond, and how the sky itself, finally, took umbrage: it was all because one afternoon in April the swarming bees found Vera Lang asleep, there in a patch of wild flowers on the edge of the valley. (1)

It makes a statement about the intention of the novelist, that of investigating the basic condition of storytelling in the course of narration. It subverts all the known conventions of a plot like

probability and coherence, but draws the reader into the vortex of the story. It has the familiar ring of a 'once upon a time' story, but does not follow the other conventions of a folk tale or a grandma's tale. One major conflict in the text is between the 'Gutenberg' tradition and the oral tradition. It employs a large number of devices like the conventions of tall tale and beer talk to undermine the tradition of the written story. Events do not issue forth from what had gone before; characters do not conform to any of the standards of realism. The author's distrust of the language too comes out in the open in the text and its experimental form. Sometimes he even breaks the rules of grammar.

It is very difficult to find a complete text in Robert Kroetsch's oeuvre; they are always texts in the making, with gaps to be filled and narrative potential to be realised. Peter Thomas finds a plausible explanation for Kroetsch's obsession with the novel in the making--his indebtedness to the oral tradition:

> The conventions of such narratives depend heavily upon voice and performance and even audience participation (interjections, scoffs, asides etc). Most of all, the form is clearly *in the making,* a process which emphasizes formulaic conventions of the genre and also a certain license in the telling, whereby the teller responds to random and contingent events. (13)

Peter Thomas' comment sheds light on the umbilical connection between the strong Canadian oral tradition that Kroetsch has imbibed

and the modern novel form. The Canadian oral tradition of the prairies was rich with vital elements like trickster figures, shamanism, folklore and myths. Moreover, it was a living form that changed itself with every performance. The role of the listener in oral culture is almost on a par with that of the teller. Probably, the same principle is translated into an overriding concern with the role of the reader. The story evolves into its complete form only in the presence of that catalyst. In an interview with Geoffrey Hancock, Kroetsch has admitted his indebtedness to the oral culture in which he was brought up. He said, "My father was quite a famous story teller. I could never compete in his presence--may be that is why I went upstairs and wrote" (36). Seen from this perspective, it is not difficult to see the secret behind Kroetsch's 'novels in the making'.

Metafiction deals with the intricacies involved in the production and reception of textual meaning. Calvino invokes the metaphor of reading and writing to comment on this process. Robert Kroetsch in *The Puppeteer (TP)* does it by presenting an author at work. In this sense, *TP* has obvious parallels with Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook.* The author at the centre of the work, Maggie Wilder, says that she is writing the autobiography of her wedding dress even though her husband Henry corrects it to be 'biography'. Earlier references in the novel have already established Maggie's status as an author. She had written stories, and a collection of her stories was significantly titled *Trading Places.* Interestingly, the pun on the title throws light on the metamorphosis that Maggie undergoes in

authoring the autobiography of her wedding dress. It has to do with the exchange of roles that takes place between the author and the character. Jack Deemer was one of the characters in the auto/biography/fiction that Maggie intended to write. But the later developments show Maggie the author ending as one of the characters in Jack Deemer's narrative. Moreover, the text makes no secret of the discursive contexts that make this change possible. Jack Deemer, the puppeteer, is obviously in a position to 'textualise' the people around him in the way he desires.

Maggie's experience as a writer is illustrative of the impossibility of neither possessing nor able to write about a unitary self. One lives in a zone where webs of stories criss-cross. The inevitable consequence is such that the so-called 'self' becomes an elusive concept. Maggie finds it difficult to author the autobiography of her wedding dress. The Puppeteer says, "Maggie sat at her kitchen table. Perhaps, she typed, every autobiography is a decoy. Even that of a wedding dress" (149).

She never adopts the first person address customary of autobiographical writings. At the same time, she makes way for Jack Deemer's first person address in the text. Playing oneself is the most difficult thing for the characters in *TP*. She finds it impossible while participating in the shadow puppet play put up by Papa B. "One of the puppets was asking her simply to play herself and Maggie found the assignment impossible" (122). The same is true of Billy because he also finds it difficult to mimic his own voice in the show. The wedding

dress, in this sense, is an enabling disguise for Maggie. When she puts on that dress, she can hear the story that she always wanted to tell.

Apart from the notable absence of first person narratives, Maggie's 'autobiography of the wedding dress' departs in various ways from the known conventions of autobiographical writings. She makes no claims of truth about the text that she produces. It is more about fiction than about an objective reality or rather a mixture of both. That is why it becomes "the perfect account of the life she had neglected to live" (191). At the same time, many of the conventions and procedures of a biography/autobiography are foregrounded in *TP*. One example is that of the journey down memory lane by Maggie:

> Rows of potatoes then, the green rows in furious white blossom. She recognized the house, hiding behind a blister of shrubs. The potato patch had sprouted a bungalow. And the peach tree wasn't there, the tree she slid down one night to go to meet a boy in the nearby forest. But the boy didn't show, that night, in the dark. The tree was gone now. (20)

The visit to the Deadman Spring had the overtones of a fact-finding mission. Maggie had really serious intentions; to confront the man and ask him questions and to find out "what had happened and why and where" (55). But her plans are upset when Ida and Josie create a lot of fuss around the visit resulting in the loss of seriousness that is expected of such a mission. Another obvious example of the

convention of biography is the interview conducted by Maggie. The interview episode with Bludgett, the insomniac reader, is a significant point. The question-answer episode really smacks of an interrogation. It is at this point that Bludgett, the reader, advises her to go back to writing what she calls 'fiction'.

If Maggie is the author in the text, Thomas Bludgett looks like a representative Reader. The character of Thomas invokes parallels with the archetypal reader in Calvino. Thomas reads everything he can lay his hands on because he is insomniac. He has read Maggie's collection of stories and observes that she never exaggerates things. He says, "On the last page of the last story there is a woman who remembers her wedding dress. She says that one day she is going to put it on again. See what happens" (26). This comment, made by the reader, establishes the connection between the stories that Maggie had written and the autobiography of the wedding dress. The story of the wedding dress proves to be not an easy one for Maggie because it involves her own self. That is why Thomas the reader, advises Maggie to go back to uncomplicated stories. The present assignment and the fact-finding mission are dangerous, according to him. He advises: "I mean, forget it, get it out of your mind, go back to writing what you call fiction. You were safer doing that" (28).

For Maggie, writing is almost identical with waiting. It is a metaphor for her escape from her husband's world, where she had to wait for him for long hours and sometimes days. Then she started weaving stories around her in those "thousand nights" (219). If

conventional fiction desires the invisibility of the author, metafictional texts demonstrate the process by which a narrative comes into existence. The politics of the text is revealed before the reader. The narrative is not a monolithic structure, however the tyrannical conventions of writing may try to impose the rules. Robert Kroetsch's *TP*, in this sense, exhibits a high degree of narrative complexity that is the result of multiple speakers and voices. Lynette Hunter comments:

> The narrator changes: it is no longer evasive but stifling, not juxtaposing devices from a variety of genres but mixing voice and so dislocating the sense of a positional speaker/writer/author. There is no disruption here but rather a braiding together of other voices between which a writer might shuttle. (201)

Chapter eight of *TP is* the high point of such narrative shuttling. It makes the reader conscious of the various filtering devices through which the voice reaches her/him. Here, Maggie's voice is more audible than anywhere else in the novel, thanks to the use of first person point of view. The accompanying choric voice says "she typed". There are also plenty of occasions where Maggie is referred to in the third person pronoun. *TP* has constant shifts in narratorial positions that the concept of linear narrative is violently rejected. However, it is important to note that the narrative gives ample credit to the reader whose participation is necessary in the production of meaning. Consequently, the text becomes a long colloquy between the narrators and the reader.

Robert Kroetsch's image on the Canadian literary scene is that of an iconoclast. It has got much to do with his quarrel with the received notion of ordering a literary text. His novels do not give away meaning, but comment on the process of meaning-making. As he has asserted in an interview with Shirley Newman and Robert Wilson, a totalising narrative is not a desirable idea:

> I think that the novel is my own personal struggle with the temptation of meaning, and it's the reader's struggle too. Some readers were so compelled to impose on it a total explanation instead of allowing the game to happen; I was just interested in temptation again, which is a very old narrative device, of course. (15)

When the textual game is enacted, the author playfully brings in trickster figures to destabilise the entire structure. In *TP*, William Dorfendorf alias Billy is the trickster figure that disappoints the efforts of the textual author Maggie and the editor Jack Deemer to impose their meaning on the narrative. Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped by himself as well as by others. Billy does not leave the impression of a coherent character on the reader's mind. His disguise makes him take different forms ranging from a Greek Orthodox priest to a murderer on the run.

He resists every attempt to 'textualise' him in a neat and well – defined category. The very opening of the novel, "The pizza man. That was her first name for him", indicates the change of form and identity.

His actions are so contradictory that he does not fit neatly into any of the stereotypes of a conventional story. Once he is a villain and the next moment he is a saint caring for the lonely kid in the street. Like the self-deceiving coyote figure of the Canadian folklore, Billy wrote the journal entries that put his neck in the noose. He described in detail, how he fired the rifle and how the dwarf doctor fell out of the canoe into the water. Jack Deemer, in spite of his best efforts to portray him as a villain, admits that he is as innocent as a lamb. The best example of his trickster nature is his metamorphosis from a fugitive murderer into a saint for the people on the Greek island.

As in every postmodernist storyteller, Robert Kroetsch's texts abound in multiple narratives. These stories, looked at from one perspective, qualify to be different realities. Postmodernism does not advocate a single totalitarian narrative that would lend meaning and authenticity to persons and events in the text. It promotes the dialogic and multivocal elements. The absence of a totalitarian narrative makes all the sub-texts valid in their own right. Stories are not dismissed for the lack of truth-value. Postmodernism challenges the notion of a single truth. Every linguistic utterance becomes a text and a clear distinction between fictional texts and realistic texts is not possible.

TP is a platform where multiple stories/realities coexist. Apart from Maggie's story (Jack Deemer's), almost every character has a story to tell. The beginning of *TP* dramatically presents Papa B, like

the coyote figure of Canadian myths. He takes various forms and appears in multiple narratives:

> The pizza man. That was her first name for him. What made him look so silly at first, there on the porch with the rain behind him, was his hat. His tall black hat with its straight sides and its flat top, that and his unruly reddish-grey beard, made him look like nothing so much as a Greek Orthodox priest. (1)

This is how Maggie Wilder's narrative presents the protean character William William Dorfendorf alias Papa B. The description is a fitting introduction to such a character. Unlike in traditional realism, the author is presenting a character in uncertain light, not trying to give details that may help the reader to identify her/him as a well–defined 'character'. The provisionality of the entity becomes all the more obvious when Billy assumes different identities in different stories.

Maggie the author is given to understand that he was born in Canada, and his parents took him to Greece. He spent his childhood in Greece. The crucial incidents leading to the disappearance of the spa doctor happened when he was an employee of Jack Deemer. Dorf has recorded his role in the incidents on that day and explained that he fired the shot on that day to save the young ospreys. But others with their own fictions are not ready to give credit to his argument. In their stories, he is assigned the role of a murderer, seducer and fugitive. The only reason why Maggie often calls him Papa B can be that he cares for and feeds the kid that is left alone at home when her

prostitute mother is away. The high point of Billy's stranger than fiction existence is revealed when the narrator says, "He had other names as well as other lives, her Papa B" (69). The correlation between names and lives is too obvious to skip the reader's attention.

Perhaps a strange character with an equally strange way of telling her story is Karen Strike, the photographer. The novel is rather silent about this mysterious woman who moves around with a cartload of cameras. Nevertheless, the fact that she is employed by Jack Deemer draws her into the pivot of the events. The medium that Karen Strike chooses to tell her story is that of photography. She has all the attributes of a documentary maker.

Her 'documentary realism' is different in context and method from the third person narration of Maggie Wilder and the direct address of Jack Deemer. Unlike in these cases, the person behind the camera is practically absent. Moreover, Karen's photographs are flexible texts, viable to any interpretation. The way Jack Deemer uses the photographs by playing them at appropriate points in his narrative demonstrates the manipulative potential of the photographic text. In this sense, it subverts the truth claims of 'documentary' realism. A significant point of similarity between Maggie Wilder's writings and Karen Strike's photographs is that both the activities mean a resistance to time. It is more effective than 'collecting', in imposing a pattern on the chaos of events. But the text affirms the fact that the objective claim of these media does not hold water. The discursive context of the narrative is important.

Another 'character' that tries to tell its own story is the wedding dress in *TP*. Maggie the author says that she is going to write the autobiography of the wedding dress. Her reason for deciding to marry Henry Ketch, a student of art history then, was her fancy for the wedding dress. Maggie fell in love with the wedding dress in spite of the warning given by women that it had brought bad luck to the first person who had worn it. Ida calls it "double digit bad luck" (52). More significantly, Maggie can hear the story she wanted to tell only when she has the wedding dress on. She assumes a new identity when she puts on that dress. Josie Pavich made the dress when Julie Magnuson decided to get married and she had embroidered various figures on it. People react in unpredictable ways to the wedding dress. When Josie embroidered rainbow trout and mountain streams on it, Fish had asked for "one small detail to be included in the flow and drift of details on the dress" (58). For Henry Ketch, Maggie's husband, the pictures on the wedding dress are annoying. It is obvious that people react in different ways to the story of the dress.

The basic aim of metafiction is the systematic foregrounding of the status of the text. The first chapter of *TP* sets the tone of the activity. Reference to the print on the Japanese calendar on the wall presents the theme of reading and its voyeuristic connotations.

> The Japanese print on the calendar beside the fridge was by Utamaro. In the upper left-hand corner a man read a love letter while behind him his mistress, raising a mirror to cast more light, tried to read over his shoulder, while

> under the verandah a spy read the trailing end of the long letter. (6)

The image makes it clear that reading and writing are not to be considered as innocuous activities. An unproblematic reading is no longer possible. As the feminist critics have demonstrated in modern times, a text has to be judged against its discursive context. The opening of the novel also foregrounds a few of the major thematic concerns. Maggie Wilder's status as an author is highlighted and a sample of her thought process is given .Disguise also figures as a central concern here.

An explicit case of narrative self-reflection in *TP* is the textual politics entailed in Jack Deemer's hijacking of Maggie Wilder's narrative. When Maggie starts narrating the autobiography of her wedding dress, Jack Deemer, the Calgary oil millionaire, is only one of the characters that she has to deal with. To be precise, Julie Magnuson married Jack Deemer with that wedding dress on. Jack finds mention in Julie's self-conscious text as a third party. Yet the most striking of narrative shifts takes place at the beginning of chapter two where Jack makes his dramatic appearance and talks about the reason for his 'humble presence' in the narrative.

> Maggie Wilder is writing this. Reading over her left shoulder, I become a loving supporter, the champion of her need to get the story of her wedding dress down on paper. Now and then I say a few words, joining myself into her train of thought. Sometimes, perhaps just to tease

me, she scrambles a few of my words in amongst her own. (17)

The tone of the statement is quite in keeping with Deemer's first person addresses that are seen elsewhere in the novel. The ironic tone anticipates the shrewdness displayed by the master collector in appropriating and collecting Maggie Wilder's narrative. Jack's presence in the form of direct first person address is intriguing, given the fact that the supposed author of the autobiography does not find similar voice in the text. Maggie Wilder rarely speaks in the first person. It is an obvious violation of the conventions of autobiography.

Jack is an avid collector, who has got articles stocked in warehouses spread all over the world. Collecting is a passion for him. In other words, it symbolises his attempts to impose a temporary stay against time. Transience of life terrifies the Calgary oil millionaire, who boasts of having all the good things of life. From 'collecting', he later concentrates on photography and writing. Karen Strikes, his assistant, moves around with a cartload of cameras with a view to freeze time on photographic frames. As for writing, Jack perceives that it is the most efficient way of fighting time and achieving immortality. The easiest way is to appropriate Maggie Wilder's narrative and modify it to suit one's needs. In this respect, Jack is candid enough to acknowledge his gratitude to Maggie the author, in allowing him to take over her narrative for his ulterior motives. "I' m a collector. Perhaps to collect is to have all and nothing. It is to heap ashes on

one's own head. It is to desire all and to embrace the emptiness. Maggie Wilder, in her own teasing way, came to my rescue" (120).

Jack Deemer's concern for writing, thus, springs from a painful realisation of the futility of 'collecting'. He had already tasted failure and humiliation in his attempts to collect womanhood. Julie Magnuson's escapade is symbolic of women's resistance to the patriarchal and capitalist designs to colonise the body and mind of womanhood. The creative act of writing, on the other hand, will enable Jack Deemer to exert more power over the people around him by 'textualising' them in the way he desires. The undercurrents of this textual politics are the fundamental sources of conflict in *TP.* At the same time, what arouses Jack's interest is a photograph of Maggie taken by Karen Strike:

> In one photograph she lifts herself naked out of the water, into the caress of snowflakes. Perhaps it was right then, examining that photograph that I became interested in the icon, though I had not yet heard of Maggie's husband nor of his obsession. The little patch of sight that remains mine turned the snapshot iconic. Is not each treasured snowflake itself a kind of icon? (113)

It is obvious that Jack looks forward to Maggie as an icon to be collected.

The model of a detective story is a great attraction for metafiction. Kroetsch also employs the detective model in *TP.* It

justifies Linda Hutcheon's comment in *The Canadian Postmodern*, "as the investigation of the nature and existence of lies, the murder mystery is inherently a marker of metafictionality. In other words, it is a readily recognised way of signalling to readers the conventionality and fictionality of what they are reading" (176).

PT shares many features of detective plots. Basically, it is concerned with a mysterious murder that took place at Deadman Spring. What is intriguing is the fact that both the author and the reader play the role of the detective in solving the mystery. Initially, Maggie Wilder the author embarks on a mission to find out the truth about the developments at Deadman Spring, which resulted in the death of Dr. De Medeiros. The fact-finding mission and personal interviews definitely give a detective like appearance to Maggie Wilder. Papa B tells Maggie about a telephone conversation between Inez and Fish, "she told him you are some kind of a schemer who sits around in a wedding dress trying to figure out who killed that famous spa doctor on Kootenay lake" (91). Nevertheless, the later developments in the text drag Maggie into the whirlpool of events and Maggie the author loses touch with the fact-finding mission. That is one of the instances where the conventions of a detective plot are violated.

Chapter one and two are significant in creating a whodunit ambience of terror and mystery. The very beginning of the novel presents Dorf as a murderer, fugitive, and fake priest. Maggie Wilder is as much terrified as fascinated by the man in a long cassock-like dress who made the delivery in the rain from 'Midnight Pizza'. He is

described as wearing a tall black hat with straight sides and flat top. His unruly reddish-grey beard made him look like a Greek Orthodox priest. The time of the pizza delivery is equally unearthly. Maggie notes down the time of the second pizza order on the Japanese Calendar on the wall. It heightens the sense of mystery further:

> She made a careful note of the hour on the Japanese Calendar. That enigmatic detail, printed boldly in red, would help the police discover who murdered her. It was 1.22 in the morning, February 14, at least by that calendar, when she phoned Midnight Pizza and asked for a second delivery. (6)

As discussed earlier, one of the reasons why the detective model appeals to metafictionists is the hermeneutic activity involved in both the jobs, that of the detective and the reader. *PT*, in this sense, is a brilliant exposition of the role of the reader in searching for meaning/evidence. Even though the author, Maggie Wilder, assumes the role of the detective to unravel the mystery, the subsequent developments show Maggie as a collaborator in Jack Deemer's activities. Then the sole responsibility of finding meaning/solving the mystery falls on the reader. To a certain extent, the search for meaning is equated with the search for the dead body of the missing doctor. The dead body is the ultimate clue to the mystery because it would free Dorf from the charge of murder. Until that, Dorf's journal entry pleading his innocence holds no water.

Maggie's job as a detective comes to an end when the vanished doctor reappears in Italy. There occurs the crucial shift that transfers the onus of further investigation onto the shoulders of the reader. The text subverts the conventions of the detective genre and that makes the reader's job more complex. Jack Deemer voices some of the enigmas in his first person address. The question of motive which often functions as the lynchpin of detective fiction is parodied in *TP* on several occasions. Much of the mystery in the text is attributed to the shot fired by Billy Dorfendorf at Deadman Spring, from a gun that belonged to another person. Billy's theory, as he has carefully recorded in his journal, is that he wanted to save the young ospreys. This explanation seems ridiculously trivial, as it does not serve as a reasonable motive for the action. Secondly, Dorf has specifically mentioned it in the journal that he had fired the shot. The question remains unanswered as to why he was hiding as a runaway criminal if he is fully convinced of his innocence.

An important subtext in *TP* that competes with Jack Deemer's dominant text is the puppet show put up by Papa B. Jack's narration picturises William William Dorfendorf alias Papa B as the villain; one of the paramours of Julie Magnuson, one who had cheated his employer,and a murderer who had fired the shot at the dwarf doctor at Deadman Spring. He is trying to evade the long arm of law and Jack Deemer, by hiding behind his various names and false identities. After his meeting with Maggie Wilder, he makes her attic a hiding place. When compared with the other major characters, Dorf is the

least articulate one. He has got a story to tell, his own version of things, and the world is under obligation to give him a patient hearing.

The medium that he chooses for telling his version of the story is that of the Greek puppet theatre. Papa B picked up the art of puppetry in Greece, at Mount Athos, from two old monks who taught him in the isolation of their monastery. Greek puppet theatre, as a medium of expression, is replete with connotations of oppression and the intensely felt need for self-expression. As Papa B himself says, "It was the Greeks, under the tyranny of the Turks--the Greeks figured out how to let the puppets say what couldn't be said" (106). Jack Deemer and his men are out to get Dorf, so he puts up his show in the attic of Maggie Wilder. Maggie, in a sense, becomes a willing collaborator in his efforts to express his story; first by becoming his audience and secondly by getting cellophane, paper, paint etc. She even rummages through books and magazines looking for the profile of a Mercedes, and the outline of a particular kind of gun. Given her status as an author, it is only natural that Maggie wants to help another person in his struggle for self expression. On Dorf's part, it would be the telling of his story "that would let him back into the world" (144).

The puppet show tries to communicate everything that Dorf wanted to tell. It has characters like Inez, Maggie, Julie, and most importantly Jack Deemer along with a Mercedes and a gun. His representation of Jack Deemer is peculiar:

> His version of Jack Deemer had a calendar for a head, a pair of spectacles where one might have expected his private parts. His arms were six, and certainly not human, his fingertips each concealed in a thimble. His legs, attached to the outline of an old fashioned wooden cradle, were rows of dominoes. His eyes were Chinese copper coins, each with a square hole in its centre. (135)

Probably, Dorf wanted to project the inhuman identity of Jack Deemer. In one brilliant moment of merger between reality and fiction during the puppet show, Maggie and Dorf meet in the disguise of Inez and Karaghiosi respectively. The bed sheet that was used as the screen for the puppet show becomes the thin line that separates reality and fiction. Maggie was happy to be a part of the show and happy to shed her other identity. The game of disguise whets her desire and Maggie and Dorf read each other's body as Inez and Karaghiosi. The ease with which these characters enter and exit different identities highlights the fiction/reality theme often found favourite with metafictionists.

From the narrative point of view, the significance of the puppet show lies in its subversive potential as a countertext to Jack Deemer's authoritative text. Karaghiosi, the most popular of Greek shadow puppets, assumes symbolic connotations in Dorf's show. It has descended from the shadow puppets of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires. The central figure is Karaghiosi himself who supposedly represents the struggle of the Greek people, particularly under the

yoke of Turkish occupation. Kara has a humped back, which symbolises the weight of the world. He has a big nose and one arm, three times longer than the other. Most of the stories performed are about Karaghiosi's impersonation and its consequences. It has been suggested that Karaghiosi stands for the history of the Greek people, trying to conform to the laws, customs, values, fashions and politics of Western Europe that had been imposed upon them by the countries that helped liberate them from the Turks.

In this context, Dorf's representation of and identification with Karaghiosi conveys the full significance of his subversive text. If impersonation is the key to Karaghiosi's character, it is true of William William Dorfendorf alias Papa B too. He assumes different identities like that of a monk, a collector's agent, lover and a puppeteer. Most importantly, he tries to identify himself with the cause of the oppressed women in the text. Dorf is distant from the male characters around and is a part of the women's community consisting of Ida, Josie, Inez and Maggie. The last one helps him get the raw materials for puppetry and the other women serve the purpose of an audience. Another trait that draws him close to the company of women is the long skirt-like dress that he wears. Moreover, he feeds them by delivering pizzas at their doorsteps.

In the tradition of Greek puppet theatre, Karaghiosi ends up paying a heavy price for his impersonation. Hence Dorf meets with death. But he undergoes a transformation in his death that the people on that Greek island take him as a saint; probably because he

was trying to save the icons, especially the icon with the face of the God as a woman. Dorf's apotheosis remains valid even in the face of the allegations made by Jack Deemer in his text. It is also notable that Jack Deemer himself talks about Papa B's innocence at certain points.

There are definite signs that Billy Dorf's story, expressed through the medium of puppetry annoys and provokes Jack Deemer. Commenting on Dorf's representation of the events involving Julie Magnuson and the Mercedes, Jack sarcastically says that the story was distorted with crucial omissions. "Papa B skipped all this: His own irresponsibilities were not to be made public" (156).

Of all the themes explored by Kroetsch in *TP,* the theme of fictionality and disguise stands prominent due to its pervasive presence in the text. Many of the characters and events seem to be an extension of the idea of role play. The metafitionist makes telling comments on the absence of a fixed identity. Naturally, the idea of unproblematic reflection of identity is challenged. The conventional realist novelist tries to conjure up a semblance of unity and objectivity around characters in fiction. The metafictionist moves in the opposite direction, trying to explore a fluid entity called character that contains contradictory impulses.

Disguise/fictionality is a major motif in *TP* and the first meeting between the pizza man and Maggie Wilder sets the tone of further explorations. Their first meeting takes place when the pizza man makes his delivery at Maggie's house. Maggie was wearing her

wedding dress. Incidentally, that was the day when she discovered that with the wedding dress on, she could hear the story that she had intended to tell. That was her biography, which led her into contacts with people like Dorf and Jack Deemer. This disguise is an extension of her other self and this doubling will enable her to put on paper the story that she wanted to tell. On the other hand, the pizza man, the protean character, meets Maggie in a long cassock-like dress.

> She was thanking the pizza man, trying at once to give him a tip and to push shut the door, when she saw he had on not only the hat and beard of a priest or monk or whatever, but also a rain splotched blue cassock. Or a shapeless blue sack of a garment that might pass for a cassock. (2)

As for the pizza man, the dress is emblematic of the two identities that he may assume later. The long skirt-like dress speaks of his future association with the women's community and the theory of cross-dressing in the novel. Secondly, the cassock-like dress with its religious overtones forebodes the metamorphosis that Billy may undergo when he is idolised by the people on the Greek island. The meeting also served as a moment of recognition for the characters because both of them notice the other person's dress. The "look of surprise" (2) is indicative of this recognition.

The characters in *TP* are moving in a fluid realm of multiple identities. None of them have got a fixed definable identity in the world in which they inhabit. In that sense, they rebel against the

realist convention of coherent identity. Discussing Robert Kroetsch's postmodern sympathies, Linda Hutcheon states:

> Kroetsch's point is that they never had such individuality or weight: those notions are conventions of both humanist ideology and realist fiction; they are not eternal and 'universal' truths. And yet he can make that assertion only because his texts presuppose our knowledge of those conventions: the postmodern paradox. (*Canadian* 174)

The postmodern paradox that is hinted at by Hutcheon is a hallmark of Kroetsch's works because they install and subvert the conventions. The inchoate identity that he moots for his creations is in violation of the principle of coherence and unity in realist fiction. But at the same time, such a violation presupposes the acceptance of those conventions. As a demonstration of fluid identities, his characters move in an out of roles freely, weaving a web of realities around them. Sometimes, they are more comfortable and at ease while putting on a mask that conceals the identity recognized by most others around. The game of disguise in the attic enables Maggie and Dorf to assume different identities and shed their shame. Probably Jack Deemer is the only character incapable of multiple identities. The ever-watchful consciousness of Jack Deemer records the meaning of disguise in others:

> Maggie hesitated, waiting for my response. I begged her to continue. And yet, she had nothing to tell me that I could not have guessed, for in the years while I was living with

> Julie Magnuson I learned that disguise is a prod to desire. She needed pretence, and I was never the pretender she would have. I was only my blunt and honest self.

Deemer cannot imagine having multiple identities. He is someone who wants to cast the whole world in his image. Multiple identities do not have any significance in his unitary perspective. Another form of disguise is evident in the puppet show staged by Dorf in the attic of Maggie Wilder's house. There, Dorf was trying to tell his story that may allow him to come back into this world. During the show, he imitates people like Inez, Maggie and Karaghiosi in his voice, but has problems in speaking, while playing his own role. "The voice of the monk was almost but not quite that of papa B. Papa B, trying to imitate his own voice, was hesitating" (121). It reminds one of Maggie's inability to write the autobiography of her wedding dress in the first person. She adopts a third person voice probably because she finds it more comfortable.

The Studhorse Man (1969), the most popular of Kroetsch's novels is another example of Kroetsch's concern with stories and the art of telling. This text is a live demonstration of meaning-making; its intricacies like manipulations and coercive ordering. The narrator of the piece is Demeter Proudfoot and he is writing from his bath in a mental hospital about the life and death of Hazard Lepage. But the rules and conventions of a biography are more observed in their violation than in their following. Structurally, *The Studhorse Man* (*SM*) plays on a parody of picaresque narratives and the conventions of

biography. In the traditional sense, the term 'biography' will be a misnomer for Demeter's text because he does more fictionalising than objective recording. It invites comparisons with *TP* because Maggie Wilder starts with an autobiography but ends up with a text that defies all classifications. In both the texts, Kroetsch is able to deconstruct many of the received notions of ordering a text like narrative strategies, mythical patterns and character models. Kroetsch the iconoclast, in an interview with Geoffrey Hancock has stated that, "Some of the conventions of fiction control too much our way of seeing the world" (39). At the best, his novels can be seen as metacommentaries that deconstruct the notion of literature.

The stated aim of Demeter Proudfoot in *SM* is to present a "straightforward account of the life and death of Hazard Lepage" (172). But the text not only defies the conventions of biography, but also adopts those of fiction, history, and scientific writings. Moreover, the final movement of the narrative is towards the autobiography. Demeter ends up talking more about his own life (and Martha's too) rather than that of his chosen subject. The reader witnesses a total disregard for genre distinctions. Another significant act of subversion is in the total formlessness of the narrative. The progress is not linear. The events and chapters are arranged in a manner that defies order. In his Geoffrey Hancock interview, he has stated that "The chapter is another version of naming. Life doesn't come in chapters, after all" (47). Another distinguishing feature of Demeter's narrative is

that it makes no attempt to hide the bias in it. The biographer's malice towards his subject is evident throughout.

This means that as far as narrative self-consciousness is concerned, *SM* achieves two things. Firstly, it dramatises the scene of a biographer slowly hijacking the narrative and placing himself in the position of the subject. What was supposed to be a 'truthful' account of Hazard Lepage's life turns out to be a paean for the virtues of Demeter himself. Secondly, the trickster impulse behind the text turns the traditional narrative conventions upside down. The subversion of established conventions brings the meaning-making into the foreground. The text is a provisional structure and therefore its conventions cannot be taken for granted. A simultaneous commentary is at work in *SM* on this textual dynamics. Aritha Van Herk's comment in the article "Robert Kroetsch: Biocritical Essay" aptly summarises this point:

> *The Studhorse Man* is mostly a story about the act of telling a story. Demeter, the mad narrator (who sees everything reversed), in biographizing Hazard Lepage, is really exerting his control on story/myth by examining himself in terms of Hazard. (Internet source)

The trickster figure of a novelist in Kroetsch has declared a war against the rigid conventions of fiction. The arbitrariness and provisionality of these conventions are exposed by Kroetsch from time to time. *SM* enacts a full-length parody of the Odysseus myth. Martha is the Penelope figure who waits for long fifteen years. But

Hazard Lepage does not conform to any of the heroic ways of Odysseus. The most heroic achievements of his life, as his biographer informs us, are the sexual encounters with the women he meets in the course of his quest. As far as his mission to breed the perfect horse is concerned, it only leads to a test of the virility and prowess of its owner. In place of an ending that is suitable for a hero, Hazard Lepage dies an ignominious death under the hooves of Poseidon. Finally, it also becomes explicit that the scribe's intentions in the writing of the biography were never to make a hero out of Hazard Lepage.

The reason why Demeter Proudfoot starts writing an elaborate thesis/biography/novel on Hazard Lepage is that he had to settle scores with his rival/subject. He says that while finding oneself in a corner, "art would find a neat way out; life is not so obliging" (142). He takes up the pen because he can manipulate his subject as well as the situations with better control in a narrative. Life, as he experiences it, does not allow the luxury of a neat dividing line between good and bad characters. Nor is it easy for him to find a subject that does not try to resist his manipulations. But such attempts are easier in the art of representation.

Demeter's narrative tries to mislead and misinform the reader with its apparent absence of coherence and linearity. But there is a method in this madness. A method that tries its best not only to present Hazard as the villain, but to attribute the heroic qualities to the author himself. The narrator does not lose sight of his objectives.

Seen from this perspective, his propensity for scientific temperament and matter of fact descriptions are not sincere.

Hazard's association with Marie Eshpeter is utilised to the most possible extent by the biographer to establish the "man's unlikely behaviour" (124). Even though Hazard claims that Marie had cast a spell on him, the biographer's account seriously tries to nullify that claim. The charge that is made against the (anti)hero is that the opportunist in him turns every situation to his advantage. Being shot at the back, he makes it a ploy for having a nice time with Marie. The scribe makes a casual observation, "Hazard did heal so slowly is one of the medical peculiarities of the case" (124).

The biographer also takes a lot of pains to have a close watch over Hazard's activities. The reason for staying over at Marie's house is that of the road being "nearly impassable" (125). The next time he says that "quite by accident ran out of gas" (128). The discreet investigations into certain important conditions of his subject's life finally "make out the nature of relationship between Hazard and Marie"(128). Hazard's next sexual encounter, described by Proudfoot, is with Mrs. Laporte, the fifty-one year old housekeeper of the old priest. But in the description, the narrator displays a lot of control and discretion and justifies the same with a comment. "I too would like the preceding chapter to be more explicit. But what can I add that is both relevant and accurate?"(144) It is clear that Demeter takes extraordinary pains to prove that "Hazard Lepage was a man of inordinate lust" (31).

At the same time, he insinuates that these lapses on Hazard's part are inevitable consequences of his character and temperament. But Demeter Proudfoot is everything that Hazard is not. Reason, good sense, and sanity are his strong points. At one point he says:

> Hazard felt much dejected at the frustration his visit to various farms had caused him; in his dejection he resorted to the occasional glass of beer. I seldom touch alcohol recognizing as I do that it only blurs one's precision of thought and feeling. (86)

The text has a number of such examples where Hazard is projected as Demeter's foil. In chapter twenty-two he says, "Hazard always struck me as something of a hypochondriac, he was forever finding ailments where none existed" (109).

Having proved Hazard to be everything that a hero is not, Demeter establishes that Martha, the Penelope figure who has been probably waiting for the studhorse man for the last fourteen years is in love with him. He asserts:

> Finally, in spite of my innocence, I recognized her basic need and fear. She was terrified that she was in love, not with her remembered fiancé, but with *me*, with the flesh and blood youth who was constantly in her presence for I helped her to clean tables and to garden and to feed her horses.(35)

Finally, Demeter also tries to do away with a possible objection to their marriage; he says that "nothing prevents one from entering into

the bond of matrimony with one's first cousin" (114). It has to be stated that in these parts the focus is more on the conventions of a novel than that of a biography. Demeter puts himself in the position of a hero and Veronica plays the role of heroine. Such a projection of his own image into the narrative definitely causes a rupture. The escapade with Veronica is described with all the pomp and splendour accompanying such an episode in romantic fiction.

As far as writing is concerned, Robert Kroetsch wants to start with a clean state. He displays a high degree of contempt for referential frames in fiction. As already indicated, even a basic linguistic habit like naming is of concern to him. He presents it as the first step in the attempt to fix something down. Names are not final or a part of the identity of the characters in fiction. Kroetsch foregrounds the names. The names sit loose on his characters, always reminding the reader of the arbitrariness of the relationship between the name and the named. The names of characters, strange as they are in terms of common customs, speak about the silent attempt to create and hold meaning. Some of the names are notable for being queer, the other ones evoke obvious mythical associations. Examples are: Jeremy Sadness, Mark Madham, Billy Billy Dorfendorf, and Demeter Proudfoot. Kroetsch exposes the naming strategies as an attempt to fix as well as to attribute a sense of coherence to a fluid phenomenon like the person.

It is from the same theoretical premises that Kroetsch rejects the notion of definable characters in his stories. Linda Hutcheon, in

her analysis of the Kroetschian characters says, "Kroetsch denies that the sense of self is even a completed thing, a product; it is amorphous and ever changing" (173). In his critical canon, it would be preposterous to imagine characters in fiction to have well-rounded characters with concrete features. Jeremy sadness, Hazard Lepage, and their likes cannot be defined in terms of an aim in life. They have conflicting impulses within them and need an ordering agent to give a semblance of coherence and purpose to the loose series of events in which they take part.

Calvino in his *IWNT* presents a reader who is frustrated in his search for a conclusive ending to the story. Kroetsch's readers are surprised by the lack of a story, and the surprise gradually leads to shock when it is realised that the text does not conform to any of the basic conditions that make heroism and happily ever after endings possible. In an interview with Shirley Newman and Robert R Wilson titled "*Labyrinths of Voice*", he proclaimed that "We are victims of a story that tell us to be heroes" (173).

The statement is indicative of his attitude to the established tradition of literature. He quarrels with everything; mythopoesy, heroism, and all known conventions of story telling. Heroism can be comforting to the man faced with a chaos of events without any apparent order. But Kroetschian protagonists do not fall for the illusion of heroism. Hazard Lepage dies an Ignominious death under the hooves of Poseidon, giving an ironic twist to the myth of Odysseus. Jeremy Sadness has none of the attributes of a hero; his sexual

impotency, lack of academic competency, and above all, his non-conformism make him an unlikely candidate for heroic status.

A metafictional study of Robert Kroetsch's novels, *TP* and *SM* proves that they resist every attempt at a totalising explanation. These texts make serious statements about the act of meaning making. Kroetsch's distrust of the referential frames in fiction is quite evident in *TP* and *SM*. In the Kroetschian canon, storytelling is not an innocent act, but one that has serious political implications. The medium of the story can be used for ulterior purposes. It is important for everyone to have a 'story'; her/his identity is defined in terms of that 'story'. Jack Deemer appropriates Maggie's story to project an agreeable picture about himself. Even a basic linguistic function like naming is problematised in Kroetsch. In both the texts, the movement is towards a kind of fluidity. They do not answer questions, but challenge the logic of the questions. It can also be seen that the metafictional trends in Kroetsch display more affinity with the narrative strategies of postmodernism. The basic attempt is to problematise the monolithic concept of the story. In the face of consistent self revelation, the truth claims of story become a disputed entity.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The study made in the preceding chapters on the selected novels (Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Charles Palliser's *Betrayals*, Robert Kroetsch's *The Puppeteer* and *The Studhorse Man*) in the light of metafictional theory conveys a very complex picture of representation in fiction. It attempts a radical redefinition of the mimetic principle. Self-consciousness is not an isolated development. Cultural and literary articulations all over the world are characterised by varying degrees of self-consciousness. Metafiction is an offshoot of the landmark events happening in critical and literary theories. The implications of Saussure's linguistic theories are directly reflected in metafiction. Critical postulations of structuralism also had their impression on self-conscious fiction. An overall survey of these texts also highlights the impact of postmodernism on metafictional textual practice.

The last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the present one appears to be a crucial stage in the history of fiction/metafiction; when a new form of reality, just as television had encroached on our private space earlier, seems to be making deeper inroads into human beings' apprehension of reality. Cyber world in union with television is churning out a new model of reality. The greatest strength of cybernetics is in its ability to simulate conditions

exactly similar to the world that it takes as a model. This has to be evaluated against the backdrop of postmodernism. It is characterised by a kind of depthlessness and tries to interpret contemporary reality as a computer screen of blinking images. If metafictionists like Fowles and Kroetsch are not directly influenced by these questions, Charles Palliser gives expression to these ideas. Calvino straddles his times as some of these trends had been foreseen by him.

Metafiction is basically concerned with the question of representation. The pivotal point of the problematisation of representation is in the changed attitude to language. In conventional criticism, 'fiction' has always been pitted against 'truth'. But the judgment of truth-value never extended to the language or the medium in which it was presented. The medium of language and literature were not suspect. But Saussurean linguistics has toppled the realistic claims of language. Language is not a system of positive terms, but a system of differences. Feminist linguists have given concrete proof of the way misogyny is inscribed in language. Linguistic binary like 'black' and 'white' is an example where one term is privileged over the other.

Metafiction capitalises on the newly released energy of these theories. Carrying the same logic to literature, metafictionists have illustrated that fictional artifice does not reflect the reality as it is. It cannot 'imitate' or 'represent' the world but ends up imitating or representing the discourses that are instrumental in 'constructing' that world.

John Fowles' *FLW* is a good example of a revisionary strategy where an age-old system of representation is exposed for what it is. Fowles demonstrates that the nineteenth-century novel was a structure that served the interests of the privileged sections of the society and perpetuated violence against the underdogs like woman and workers. An average Victorian reader could not recognise it to be a man-made system that had a definite role in mediating reality.

Without the twentieth-century vantage point and alternative endings that Fowles implants into the narrative, Sarah would have to be contented with the 'other woman' image. Another injustice is explored when Fowles takes up the representation of working classes in Victorian fiction. His Sam Farrow has more self-respect than Charles Dickens' Sam Weller. By the conflation of texts, he also exposes the duplicity involved in the Dickensian representation of working class movements. Fowles' achievement lies in the fact that Victorian fiction that was once taken to be an unproblematic reflection of reality is debunked.

Calvino's *IWNT* takes a different look at life-art connection. It presents situations where life starts imitating fiction/literature. It is a clear proof of the 'realistic' impact of a provisional structure like literature that slowly assumes the status of reality. Brought up on a steady diet of literature, Calvino's protagonist, the Reader, tries to impose the patterns of literature on life. He was very much influenced by the conventions of writing and reading. When his search for a conclusive ending to the story is thwarted; he desperately searches for

it and makes amends by effecting a happily ever after ending in life. It is a fact that human beings crave for such endings, to whatever extent postmodernism tries to liquidate these meaning structures.

Robert Kroetsch voices similar concerns in his metafiction. His statement, "We are victims of a story that tell us to be heroes" (Labyrinthes173) is indicative of such a mood. The protagonist of *SM*, while engaged in the writing of Hazard Lepage's biography, says "art would find a neat way out, life is not so obliging" (142). Both these statements point to the lack of consonance between life and art. Demeter Proudfoot finds it easier to deal with Hazard Lepage as the subject of a biography than in real life. He can manipulate and corner his subject at his will. The arbitrariness of representative conventions becomes evident in the reality-art interface. Heroism that one finds in literature and myth is not to be found in reality. Maggie Wilder confronts similar problems in the writing of the autobiography of her wedding dress.

The fundamental question of metafiction is the relation of art and life. So, in a study of metafiction, the theory of mimesis that has served the base of fictional representation assumes significance. The initial response, on the part of readers and critics, was to appraise self-reflexiveness as a negation of the artifice of the mimetic tradition, on the logic that exposition of the artifice or the breaking of the illusionary principle meant the end of mimesis. But later, readers and critics alike tried to accommodate metafiction into the existing parameters of novel theory, and recognised it as a legitimate

development of the novel tradition. A careful textual analysis of the above texts makes it clear that metafiction presents a complex picture of mimesis, but does not negate mimesis as the basic principle of the novel.

Readers always appreciated the technical sleight of hand and experimentation in fiction, but had an eye for the realistic stuff. The following comment by Neil McEwan in *The Survival of the Novel* illustrates a case. He says, "one attraction of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, for all but the most austere, was in being intellectually exciting within the bounds of common readability" (21-22). It is to be noted that *FLW* had left its impression as the book of the decade mainly due to the experimentation, the shocking frame-breaks, and the blending of history and fiction. Yet, the reader gives credit to its realistic impacts too. Fowles draws the reade'rs attention back to the 'Sarahs' and 'Poultneys' and 'Sams' in the real world. At the best, he has the intention to highlight the way these people have been textualised. Without reference to the nineteenth-century reality, *FLW* makes no sense.

Kroetsch, to a certain extent, incorporates details that are out of tune with the happenings in real life. Calvino's protagonist, the Reader, is firmly grounded in the real world and his efforts are to affirm the same features in fiction. Palliser alone tries to present deviations from the cold reality by introducing the electronic media. In the final analysis, it can be seen that these texts try to frame the reality out there in the fictional medium. The only difference, when

compared to conventional fiction is that it is accompanied by a commentary on that process.

Radical metafiction, in the practice of authors like Barthelme and Brautigan, has postulated alternative words, where the fictional frame does not follow the logic of everyday world. They claim not much of a relationship with the external world, and register a departure from the known world by means of discontinuity and contradiction. Such an alternative world theory or heterocosm theory does not find favour with the authors selected for this study. It is also a fact that such a heterocosm does not have an identity without invoking relations to the real world, however disputed its objectivity is. David Lodge expresses the same idea when he says in "The Novelist at the Crossroads", "History may be, in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war" (33).

A comparison of the metafictional strategies brings out the amazing kind of affinities between *BS* and *IWNT*. Calvino's protagonist is the Reader who is engaged in the search for a conclusive end to the novel that he has started reading. The quest takes him to publishing houses, authors, and even foreign countries. All in all, the Reader is presented as a laughing stock for having a strange obsession with the closed structure of meaning. He imagines a text that would give definite answers to the question, "what happened at last?" The Reader is not ready to accept the fact that life does not offer such neat and final answers to the question called life. Finally,

the Reader tries to compensate for his futile search for meaning by marrying his fellow Reader and thereby brings about a semblance of conclusion to the story.

Sholto MacTweed in *BS* has a similar realistic hangover. He has got his feet firm on the ground and has contempt for everything that is not 'real'. That is what makes him look down upon the serial telecast on television. The moment he discovers that they are all made up, he feels cheated. *BS* does not answer all the questions that have been raised during the course of the text. It rather ends on an enigmatic note. The academician who is arrested on charges of serial murders may be innocent. But the text does not reveal the name of the murderer. After a careful perusal and interpretation of the textual signs, the reader can come to her/his conclusions. These are some of the thematic and structural affinities that strike the reader at a cursory analysis. A detailed reading unearths common concerns in many other matters, as discussed in chapter four.

Metafiction displays varying degrees of anti-form qualities. The attempt, as a whole, is to destabilise the genre conventions by deliberately fragmenting or breaking them. Conventions like methods of characterisation and plot construction are either parodied or broken. The ostensible aim of Maggie Wilder's writing is an autobiography, but she ends up writing a biography. Conventions of autobiographical writings are disregarded and freely mixed with those of biography. The scribe in *SM* is biased in the writing of Hazard

Lepage's biography. When narcissism creeps into the narrative, the textual politics of appropriation comes out in the open.

The biggest challenge to tradition in *IWNT* is in the form of an elusive concept of meaning. Instead of a conclusive ending, the text proposes ten different reading trajectories. None of them seems to reach a conclusive ending to answer the questions raised. The plotline centres around the efforts of the Reader to make sense of the text. Fowles introduces the most violent of frame-breaks. The impact of the authorial intervention in chapter thirteen is accentuated by the realistic effect of the conventional narrative built up to that point. From that point onwards, authorial intervention checks the progress of classic realism as and when required. The most explicit trait of *BS* that makes it topple the form of a novel in the traditional sense lies in the fragmentary nature. The text consists of ten apparently dissimilar stories. Every story is independent in itself. At the same time, these stories form themselves into a macro text. Again, this macrotext does not answer all the questions. Many loose ends are left untied. There are occasions when the text deliberately tries to mislead the reader. At other times, hints are given by way of slips of tongue.

The author-construct presented by these texts negates many attributes of the all powerful God-like author in conventional fiction. To begin with, the text is not treated as the unique expression of a privileged individual voice. The author-figures in Kroetsch; Maggie Wilder and Demeter Proudfoot, are individuals at the mercy of contingent events. Maggie is not even successful in presenting the

picture as she wanted it to be. Her narrative is appropriated by Jack Deemer. She is not in a position to claim originality for it. Demeter Proudfoot struggles hard to corner Hazard Lepage through the medium of the biography. The text does not have any transcendental claims about the truth uttered by it. The author figure in *FLW* is a much confused individual who tosses the coin to decide on Charles' fate. The freedom of choice has existential connotations here. The narrator in Fowles is remarkable for having a concrete shape, not only in terms of the newfangled theories he has acquired (Robbe Grillet, Roland Barthes et al) but also in physical terms. He is shown as travelling in the same compartment with Charles. The author, ultimately, does not have a role in the textual dynamism. He presents the alternative endings and steps back. The romantic figure of the author, as the individual who invests the text with meaning, is abandoned here.

BS and *IWNT* register a number of similarities in terms of the author-figures postulated. Literature, as it is presented in the numerous literary discussions in these texts, is not associated with the concept of originality. The author, at the best, is an agent who juxtaposes the existing literary elements into a pattern. *BS* has an unsuccessful author imitating the stylistic features of a popular novelist. The young man named Chatterton has so carefully imitated the well established author (Bellamy) that even the hardcore fan will not be able to tell the original from the apocrypha. The reading public generally takes a creative work by an author to be an unmistakable

mark of her/his style and personality. The successful author here accepts the fact that his name is only a kind of brand name and that it can be duplicated. "He was sure that Bellamy would not abrogate his ultimate responsibility for the text because it was his name on the title-page. And that, ultimately, was what his readers were buying: the Bellamy brand name" (254).

Situations like this, where the originality of authorship is devalued are in abundance in *BS*. Calvino, on the other hand, proposes a similar concept in his 'Literature Machine', a computer that is programmed to reproduce the successful formula of literature that appeals to the reading public. Ermes Marana devises an easy way out for an author facing the writer's block. A computer that scans the beginning of the novel would be able to finish the rest of it. Calvino reiterates the same point in his essay "Cybernetics and Ghosts". Marana's justification for his counterfeiting missions echoes an idea of impersonal literature. He speculates that the author on the jacket may not matter in the long course of time. Moving forward in thought to three thousand years, there will be a chaotic situation. Some books will be lost, yet others will be attributed to wrong authors. There is also a possibility that the surviving books will be attributed to a common author like Homer. Calvino imagines an archetypal story-teller who can recollect all the possible stories that are told. Literature is not only devoid of its transcendental role, but also the human face. When a machine like computer can simulate/produce a work of

literature, the creativity and authorial vantage points are not to be claimed by the author.

A metafictional text invests reading with supreme importance. Reading is the final activity that makes the creation of meaning, even though it is provisional, possible. It is no coincidence that Calvino has made the Reader the protagonist of *IWNT*. Right from the beginning, the text also presupposes the presence of an extratextual reader. She/he is a sophisticated reader, going by the expectations of the text. Only a well-read reader can make out the full significance of the fragmentary text. For example, one of the fragments is a parody of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicles of a Death Foretold.* Only a seasoned reader can recognise the association because the reference is implicit.

The reader-portrait is clearer when it comes to Fowles. She/He is consulted at certain crucial junctures in the text. "Dear Reader" kind of address also makes it clear that it expects a highly erudite reader who is not only well-read in the Victorian classics, but also has knowledge of Freud's theories, Darwinism and Existentialism. The author-figure brings the extratextual reader to a kind of private conversation. Sophistication and an extensive knowledge of the anterior texts are the primary qualifications for the reader in *BS*. The complexity of the situation is hinted at in the opening chapter, an obituary from *The Daily Scot*. The textual exercise in *BS* involves a lot of intellectual agility and comprehension skills. At certain points, the novel almost reads like a puzzle. The postmodern narrative strategy of

Robert Kroetsch in *TP* and *SM* also require the presence of an erudite reader. The implied reader concept in metafiction is definitely more sophisticated than that of the reading public. The textual complexity and historical perspective may make it a tough game for the common reader to make sense of metafiction.

As self-reflexive fiction takes a comprehensive look at the production and reception of the text, it cannot afford to ignore the role of the critic in the picture. The critic plays a legitimate role in setting the genre standards according to which the work is evaluated. Fowles admits this role when he says in *FLW* that he was living in the age of Roland Barthes and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Ludmilla and her friends consult Prof. Uzzi-Tuzzi in the Department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages, seeking a way out of the imbroglio. Lotaria and her friends in the university analyse a work in terms of themes as weird as "the polymorphic-perverse sexuality" and "the homologies of the signifying structures" (75). Horatio Quaife in *BS* is an academic critic who probes into the nature of the reality construct around him. The serial that is telecast on *BBC* is important for him because it is a complex text about semiotics. Even though the presentation is satiric, Galvanauskas is an academic critic who theorises on literature. The title of his essay, "Lo(o)sing the Signifier: Silence, Wordlessness, and Desire in Kipling's "The Tongueless Boy"(289) is an example. It is a fact that these metafictionists acknowledge the legitimate role of the critic in the institution of literature.

Metafictional response to 'history' has been influenced by many of the radical theories in the field of narratology and historiography. Recent theories of discourse dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional narratives. History was earlier projected to be an objective account of what happened. Now, it is presumed that history is another system of representation, vulnerable to ideological manipulations. The historical narrative also borrows conventions of representation from storytelling. The changed approach to history is quite evident in *FLW*. For one thing, it points to the objective status that was assigned to history and fiction. Many accounts of the Victorian era were only representations. Fowles introduces a long array of 'texts'; newspaper reports, commission reports and so on, to problematise the monolithic representation of the era.

Another challenge to the received notion of history is in the introduction of historical personages. Fact and fiction merge when the Rossetti family figures in the last chapter of the novel. It is not a casual reference. The Rossettis are shown as exerting a positive kind of influence in shaping up Sarah, the new woman. It is worth noting that D.G. Rossetti and Christina Rossetti were considered the iconoclasts of the Victorian Society for their response to Victorian art and culture. *BS* performs a sleight of hand by introducing Oscar Wilde in a 'play within the play'. In one scene Oscar Wilde is arrested on the charge of serial murders and he talks about 'murder for murder's sake'. Historical events like Ripper killings, Bible John killing and Croydon poisonings are interwoven into the 'fictional' plot.

These developments are of significant epistemological implications for the fictional artifice. Written documents are presented as having more 'authority' in *TP* and *SM*. Jack Deemer appropriates Maggie Wilder's narrative because he wanted to leave a message for posterity. By a reversal of the same logic, Demeter Proudfoot wants to manipulate his subject, Hazard Lepage, through the authority of the narrative. In the final analysis, history becomes a topic of active critical consideration for metafiction.

Metafiction wages a virtual war on the idea of originality is literature. Apocrypha is a common feature of these texts. *BS* has a number of plots with repeated plotlines. Prentice–Ireland story is a duplication of Chatterton-Bellamy story. The framework remains the same and there are only minor differences among these stories. Ermes Marana, the counterfeiter in *IWNT* embarks on the task of problematising originality. He has founded an organisation for the electronic duplication of literary works. The ultimate dream is a world where the original is indistinguishable from the copy. Marana is almost like the alter ego of the metafictionist in the text. The author behind the book is projected as Marana's arch-enemy. Even though he concedes defeat, he was able to create confusion among readers all over the world. The ten fragments in the macrotext are good examples of apocrypha.

Plagiarism is a related concept that is boosted by Palliser. The scandal involving the cabinet minister and an aspiring novelist centres around the charge of plagiarism. It is not a serious crime if the guilty

one can make up for it. Just as Marana's crimes are condoned by the metafictionist, Palliser lets the plagiarists go unpunished. Originality is not a quality that is valued much in the context of *BS*.

High art/Low art discussion is quite active in the postmodern context. Silas Flannery's diary in *IWNT* presents two authors, one popular, and the other associated with the serious literature. The serious writer admires the popular one as much as he is admired by the other. *BS* gives equal importance to the pulp fiction/serious fiction divide. The chapter titled "The Catch" has a situation where the popular writer makes a 'high-brow' charge against the serious one. Names like Jack Sheldon, Robert Forsyth, Sidney Higgins, and Frederick Ludlum indicate the topical relevance of the discussion.

The detective plot is a favourite structuring device for metafictionists, primarily because of its inherent hermeneutic properties. The reader, while engaged in reading, is performing the same task. The fact that Calvino, Palliser, and Kroetsch have made use of this underlines the relevance of the detective plot. Calvino's Reader is in the guise of a detective. Meaning is the elusive character that he is searching for. The search takes him to places that he never thought he would be in. Ludmilla, the other Reader, is cast in the role of an assistant. However, their diligent search ends on a disappointing note.

In *TP*, it is the textual author, Maggie Wilder, who is in the role of the detective. The enigma before her is that of finding the culprit who fired the shot at Deadman Spring. Quite in the tradition of a

fact-finding mission, she goes to the site of the incident and conducts interviews with people. However, Maggie's investigation does not conform to the usual detective plot in the second part. As far as *BS* is concerned, almost all the characters, including the extratextual reader, act as detectives. Horatio Quaife is a semiotician, the most suitable person for a detective's job. Sholto MacTweed is rather like an amateur detective. The most tiresome duty is that of the extratextual reader in *BS*. She/He is at a complete loss as to who is the murderer when corpses and skeletons tumble out of every cupboard. The murderer-detective formula takes another strange turn when the suspicion falls on the author. Horatio Quaife is an illustrious author of some scholarly books. He is arrested on charges of serial murders. Moreover, some of the authors who figure in the plots within the plot also turn out to be murderers.

As structuralism was a dominant influence on metafiction, these metafictional texts appear to have imbibed the spirit of structuralism in certain ways. Structuralism conceives literature as a large structure. This structure is constituted of smaller units that are the individual works. The individual items have their place in an overall structure, but the structure is of greater significance. It also means that meaning is an attribute of things, as the end result of a large chain of signification. Another implication of the structuralist principle is that things cannot be understood in isolation. It is in this context that intertextuality assumes significance in metafiction. The whole structure of *BS* is built on the intertextual principle. The stories

within the story cross at the most unexpected of junctures. These minor stories can exist independently. At the same time, they enter into combinations and create new patterns of meaning. Certain stories, like that of the Killiecrankie mystery, act like lynchpins, assuming a little more prominence than the other stories. The same principle of intertextuality is operative in *IWNT*. The act of reading, sometimes in the non-literary contexts, is the central theme of the fragmentary stories. Certain elements are repeated in these fragments.

An acknowledgement of the influence of anterior texts is central to the intertextual principle. Fowles acknowledges it in *FLW* but subverts the same. His strategy is that of conflating his Victorian narrative with those of established Victorian authors like Dickens and Jane Austen. An echo of Jane Austen's limited domestic world can be heard in the 'Poultney society' in the text. The conflation of texts, anterior and the present one, releases new energies that problematise the transcendental status of such meaning structures. But this strategy is another facet of intertextuality. A text assumes meaning only with reference to the anterior texts and genre conventions. It is in the same vein that *BS* invokes *The Arabian Nights* and *The Canterbury Tales*. The story of Mrs. Armytage's murder as well as the storytelling session takes one back to Chaucer, and the archetypal framework of stories. Apocryphal versions of stories taken from *The Arabian Nights* also serve the same purpose.

Another implication of the metafictional strategy of these texts is the economic perspective from which the novel book is looked

approached. The novel has always been a cultural artifact far above the hustle and bustle of the market economy and monetary transactions. The vocation of a novelist was basically counted as a cultural enterprise, worthy of respect and admiration, and the monetary benefit was the least important thing. In part, such a formulation had something to do with the transcendental status of the book too. *IWNT* not only dwells on the contingent factors that go into the making of the book, but also reveals the play of economics behind it. The Reader runs from pillar to post because he had got a defective copy of the book. A crucial mistake in binding rendered it useless for the Reader. When he approaches the publisher with the problem, Mr. Cavedgna unfolds all the secrets behind the literary myth.

BS debunks the literary myth in a different context. It has the portrait of a very powerful literary agent, Ramsay McCoo who can make or spoil the future of a writer. To a certain extent, the success of a book depends on the role of the literary agent and the media. The literary agent's role is that of baiting the media. Once the book gets media attention, the rest is done for it. Another unsavoury aspect of the 'book business' that is foregrounded by *BS* is the "product placement deals" (266). One of the authors talks about the deals that he has in place with hoteliers, resort owners, cigarette companies etc. to give a boost to their products/services in his book. The high-voltage drama behind awards and honours is also revealed. Some incidents of huge advances and publicity gimmicks are already a part of contemporary literary history. One whole chapter in *BS* is devoted

to the editorial analysis of a manuscript. The report stresses on the commercial viability of the book and makes suggestions for changes that will make the book suitable for the market. Fowles does not go to the extent of Calvino and Palliser in this respect.

In the initial stages of critical formulations in postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon said that she would prefer a term like 'metafiction' to 'postmodernism'. (*Narcissistic Narrative*) The textual analysis of Calvino, Fowles, Kroetsch, and Palliser proves that metafiction and postmodernism are almost indistinguishable tendencies. Metafictional traits are found entangled with textual characteristics that are generally termed as postmodern. An exclusive concern with the 'story' is only one of them. Another feature is the subversion of the same conventions by means of which the text comes into being. The representative conventions of fiction are exploited for representation as well as for problematisation. The movement against meaning is another obvious postmodern characteristic. The structures of meaning are in a state of fluidity. The reader is denied a single orientation of meaning. In the absence of transcendental truth and metanarratives, multivocality and heterogeneity assume prominence. It can be seen that the texts chosen for this study also negate essentialist notions of humanism.

As indicated earlier, the high-brow low-brow discussion is a postmodern preoccupation. The popular comes to occupy the centrestage, dislodging the so-called 'serious'. The phenomenal success of authors like Paulo Coehlo and J.K. Rowling has been

sometimes described as a significant postmodern happening. Postmodern reworking of the detective plot upsets the idea of detection. As it undermines the power of reason and logic, detectives are often at a loss about the conclusion. The inconclusive ending of *BS* is a point. Postmodernism also deprives the book of the aura of a 'cultural artifact'. Commercial viability of books and the play of economics point in this direction. The merger of history and fiction also has postmodernist connotations.

At least for some readers, metafiction would mean a kind of denial of the pleasure associated with reading. For them, an 'innocent reading' that does not look into the making of the text will be of paramount importance. At the same time, the other group of readers may argue that an 'innocent reading' is a near impossibility when cultural articulations are characterised by a high degree of self-consciousness. Calvino presents both the scenes in *IWNT*. Readers like Ludmilla prefer an innocent reading and the breaking of the illusionary principle is not acceptable to them. Ludmilla's sister Lotaria prefers to be on the other side, a kind of reading that exudes a concern with the discursive context of the book. As long as there are books and readers, reading would be interpreted in different ways.

Self-consciousness was the explicit element that drew metafiction into the postmodern orbit. But now the pervasiveness of the postmodern reality/unreality construct has percolated down to every sphere of human activity that it is no longer possible to distinguish between metafiction and postmodernist fiction. The

apprehensions voiced by Brian McHale towards the end of *Postmodernist Fiction* projects such a future. He fears for the future because postmodernist fiction corrupts its readers "by denying external objective reality" (219). The advent of the virtual reality has made fiction move further away from reality.

Fowles represents an earlier stage of metafiction where it becomes a kind of rivisionary practice. Robert Kroetsch's fiction embodies obvious postmodern tendencies and it exists at the level of abstraction. He is not ready to fix it down to the concrete setting of a historical period as Fowles does. Italo Calvino was far ahead of his times in imbibing these postmodern traits. Postmodernism makes us believe that the future of the narrative lies in the hypertext and cyberpunk fiction. Hypertext fiction negates the concept of the closed structure of fictional artifice. Meaning seems to be endlessly differed through every page that appears with a click. It is no coincidence that *IWNT* resembles a hypertextual jungle in its structure. The first story runs into another and so on, the process continues. Calvino did not have the internet technology in mind when the novel was written. Charles Palliser's fiction represents a later stage of metafiction where the metafictional concerns are almost with the postmodern

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