Research Paper

The Metafictional and the Mimetic: Redefining Realism

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***Abstract: Metafiction** is a form of fiction that emphasizes its own constructedness in a way that continually reminds the reader to be aware that they are reading or viewing a fictional work. Metafiction is self-conscious about language, literary form, and storytelling, and works of metafiction directly or indirectly draw attention to their status as artifacts. Metafiction is frequently used as a form of parody or a tool to undermine literary conventions and explore the relationship between literature and reality, life, and art.*

Although metafiction is most commonly associated with postmodern literature that developed in the mid-20th Century, its use can be traced back to much earlier works of fiction, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's <u>Canterbury Tales</u> (1387), Miguel de Cervantes's <u>Don Quixote</u> (1605), Laurence Sterne's <u>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman</u> (1759), William Makepeace Thackeray's <u>Vanity Fair</u> (1847), as well as more recent works such as Douglas Adams' <u>The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy</u> (1979) and Mark Z. Danielewski's <u>House of Leaves.</u> Metafiction, however, became particularly prominent in the 1960s, with authors and works such as John Barth's <u>Lost in the Funhouse</u>, Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" and "The Magic Poker", Kurt Vonnegut's <u>Slaughterhouse-Five</u>, John Fowles' <u>The French Lieutenant's Woman</u>, Thomas Pynchon's <u>The Crying of Lot</u> 49 and William H. Gass's <u>Willie Master's Lonesome Wife.</u>

***Key Words:** Solipsistic, Narcissitic, Metafictional, Mimetic, Cliff-hangers, Window-sill, Suggogate, Realism, self-consciousness, Self-reflexive, language.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The term 'metafiction' was coined in 1970 by William H. Gass in his book ***Fiction and the Figures of Life***. Gass describes the increasing use of metafiction at the time as a result of authors developing a better understanding of the medium. This new understanding of the medium led to a major change in the approach toward fiction. Theoretical issues became more prominent aspects, resulting in an increased self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty. Robert Scholes expands upon Gass' theory and identifies four forms of criticism on fiction, which he refers to as formal, behavioural, structural, and philosophical criticism. Metafiction assimilates these perspectives into the fictional process, putting emphasis on one or more of these aspects.

Most Writers of metafiction employ more than one of the techniques that have been discussed thus far in order to draw their reader's attention to the processes by which a fictional world is constructed and read, but in The French Lieutenant's Woman, John Fowles exploits most of these self –conscious techniques in order to raise complex questions about the relationship between artifice and reality. Fowles not only parodies conventional forms and narrative techniques , but he also draws his reader's attention to evolving linguistic structures, employs an intrusive narrator who denies his "authority" as an omnipotent god, includes multiple endings, and even makes of his title character a modern text to be read by the male protagonist; as Linda Hutcheon notes, The French Lieutenant's Woman is a kind of summation of metafictional techniques. "I Though practitioners of these self- conscious techniques are frequently denounced as Solipsistic, Narcissitic, and elitist, Fowles clearly aims for a larger audience than most of the other writers discussed thus far, and this novel's presence on the New York Times Bestseller List for over a year suggests that he reaches that audience. Despite its popularity , However , The French Lieutenant's woman is the subject of a number of critical controversies, most notably over the parody of Victorian narrators and the dual ending, a situation which prompts William Nelles to note " That a best- Seller, Which presumably causes no serious problems for the average reader, should be a source of confusion for literary critics suggests that our theories are failing to account for certain narrative possibilities. "2 A study of the ways in which Fowles used metafictional techniques

to affect his narrative and authorial audiences differently can perhaps help us to understand why this novel has found both a popular and an academic audience.

II.   THE SELF –CONSCIOUS MIMETIC NOVEL: THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

As Hutcheon notes, early readers of The French Lieutenant's Woman stressed its parody of the Victorian novel from and the thematic function of the theories of social evolution and existential freedom , but they either "denounced the self – conscious coyness of Fowles himself "3 in the metafictional chapter 13 and the double ending, or ignored these metafictional touches as though they were somehow extrinsic to our understanding of the text—" a boring red herring," as Walter Allen calls Fowles, experimentation. 4 Readers who wish to read this text as though it were indeed a product of the nineteenth century or as though it were a simple parody of the novel form are , it seems to me , misreading the clues Fowles gives us about the relative positions of his narrative and authorial audiences in relation to the events and characters depicted in the narrative and fail to distinguish between the narrator in the novel and the author of the novel.

Despite Fowles use of the Victorian novel form, both the narrative and authorial audiences of Fowles' text are clearly situated in the latter half of the twentieth century. Although the narrator begins by imitating the Victorian novel, which itself is frequently and imitation of history or biography, there is never any doubt that he and his reader are contemporaries. Before the end of the first page, the narrator has revealed his position – and his narrative audience's – by referring to the twentieth century sculptor, Henry Moore. But for the reader who misses this clue, he blatantly indicates his temporal distance by issuing his narrative reader an invitation to visit Lyme and test the accuracy of the description , for though the town has changed a great deal, the cob "has changed very little since the year of which I Write. "5 Later, the narrator clearly locates his readers in the 1960s by suggesting that same was a sharp dresser, "Quite as sharp as a 'mod' of the 1960s," (99) and translates for his Narrative audience the Victorian term "gooseberry" into the 1960s term "square" (105).

The frequent use of these kinds of references establishes the reader's distance from the events of the novel and a perspective that is clearly contemporary for the audience of a work published in 1969; but by distancing us temporally from the characters of the novel, these linguistic references also help Fowles to establish a relationship between the narrator and his narrative reader by suggesting that both have knowledge that the Victorian footnote to a twentieth –century edition of an actual Victorian novel becomes part of the test of The French Lieutenant's Woman, With the narrator drawing his reader's attention to the changes in language that have occurred since the nineteenth century. When Ernestina calls Charles a "cad" after the two exchange a series of feeble puns, the narrator intrudes to explain that a " 'cad' in those days meant an omnibus conductor , famous for their gift of low repartee'' (263). But because this exchange takes place soon after Charles spends the evening drinking and pursuing a prostitute, Ernestina's Pun has ironic implications for the twentieth – century audience. Similarly, the narrator frequently reminds his reader that contemporary assumptions may not be applicable to events depicted in the Victorian novel. After showing Sarah and the young maid asleep in the same bed, the narrator addresses his reader directly:

A thought has swept into your mind; but you
forget we are in the year 1867 … some vices were
then so unnatural that they did not exist. 1
'lesbian' ; and if she had , it would have
commenced with a capital, and referred to an
island in Greece. (128)

In this way, then, the narrator establishes his reader's distance from the world of the novel, not only temporally, but also ideologically: the changes in language reflect the changes in both the conventions of society and of fictional forms.

While critics frequently refer to the parodic nature of the narrative, it is similarly important to remember that the narrator himself establishes this intertextuality for the narrative audience. He frequently refers to hardy, Dickens, Arnold, and a number of other Victorian writers, and as Ernestina and Charles stroll on the Cobb in the first scene, she shows Charles "the very steps that Jane Austen made Louisa Musgrove fall down in persuasion" (13). The narrator likewise tells us that Sarah reads a great deal of literature, "Which served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen as by any empirically arrived at; seeing those around her as fictional characters, and making poetic judgments on them'' (48). But we are also told that Sarah is a keen judge of people, "or as if jumping a century , she was born with a computer in her heart" (47). In this way, Fowles shows that Sarah's experience reading literature has been beneficial, providing her with a greater understanding of those who occupy the world of The French Lieutenant's Woman, and he thus establishes the value of conventional literary forms even as he parodies them. Charles, "the scientist, the despiser of novel" (15) has failed to learn that fiction is a means of understanding the world around him, a lesson which the events of the novel are designed to teach him. Although

the narrator has not yet broken the illusion that he is writing a historical biography, he does establish for his narrative audience the relative.

Perhaps the narrator's most ironic reference, one that points out the differences between nineteenth and twentieth- century novel conventions, is to the sentimental cliff-hangers common to Victorian serial novels. At the end Sarah stands crying at the window, but the narrator refuses to employ the convention so frequently used by the Victorians.

I will not make her teeter on the windowsill; or sway forward, and then carpet of her room. We know she was alive a fortnight after this incident, and therefore she did not jump. Nor were hers the violent action; but those produced by a profound conditional, rather than emotional, misery—slow welling, unstoppable, creeping like blood through a bandage. Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come? (80)

Rather than emphasizing the plot by making the question of whether Sarah lives or die a matter of suspense, the narrator emphasizes existence and being as questions much more suspenseful. The final lines, then, indicate a question which the narrative audience, the audience aligned by the "we" with the narrator, expects will be answered by the nest chapter. And because the novel has established a pattern in which scenes showing the characters in action are followed by scenes in which the authorial audience too might to reveal Sarah's nature. What then, is the consequence of the self –conscious intrusion of the narrator?

The narrator tells his narrative audience what Fowles' authorial audience has known all along, that "this story I am telling is all imagination" (80) a comment that should not however, come as a complete surprise to this narrative reader, since he has just established that he would not make Sarah teeter as Austen mode Louisa fall down the steps in Persuasion. He denies that he has "disgracefully broken the illusion" (82) that he is writing about real people suggesting that his narrative audience must now read the French Lieutenant's Woman as a fiction , a novel , rather than as history or biography. But he is a modern writer of fiction and can no longer pretend to have the same godlike control over his characters that Dickens or Austen had over theirs: "The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority." (82) Since Sarah would not reveal her motives, he cannot violate her integrity or her freedom – as a character and reveal them for her, and the narrator would have his narrative audience "share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind" (82).Yet this chapter distinguishes Sarah from the other characters; she is not only more modern in relation to the Victorian world the narrator has described, but she also represents a modern fictional construct. The narrator allows himself to explain and probe the minds of his Victorian characters—Charles and Ernestina—but he must respect Sarah's freedom as a modern character.

But this chapter does more than merely repeat what the narrator has already established as the most significant difference between nineteenth and twentieth-cenury "morality," that the modern age has replaced the nineteenth century's emphasis on duty and convention with an emphasis on existential freedom. This metafictional chapter both distances the narrator from Fowles and the narrative reader from the authorial reader. While the narrator seems close ' to Fowles when he suggests that all novelists" wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is"(81) , he is clearly distant from Fowles when he suggests that "a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator; a planned world (a world that fully reveals its planning) is a dead world." (81) While the narrative reader accepts the narrator's refusal to violate Sarah's freedom as a defense of the mimetic illusion that operates in most Victorian and modern novels that the characters are independent of their creator Fowles reveals his own plans explicitly in the text through the narrator's explanation. In the text through the narrator's explanation. In other worlds, though the narrator's plan to reveal Sarah's character is rejected with an explanation the narrative audience accepts, the author's plan to reveal the rejection is not. Which Fowles may agree with his narrator about the relationship of created worlds to the real world, he and his narrator clearly disagree about the independence of characters and the importance of the well – constructed world. Similarly, the narrative audience who accepts this mimetic illusion is distanced from the authorial audience who, like its author, approves of well –planned fictional constructs and recognizes that chapter 13 does indeed fulfill, though with a twist, the established pattern of the novel. The authorial reader thus sees chapter 13 as a revelation of Sarah's character—she ceases to be viewed by this audience as a mimetic character and becomes important for her function as an enigmatic, modern fictional construct.

As the narrator becomes increasingly distant from the author, eventually appearing a 1a Thackeray as a character in the narrative and thus clearly becoming a fictional construct himself, the authorial audience's experience of the text becomes increasingly metafictional. Which the narrative audience remains interested in what Charles learns from his relationship with the more modern Sarah, the authorial audience becomes increasingly concerned with How Charles reads Sarah, that is, with how Sarah functions to make Charles develop. Though Hutcheon argues that Sarah's use of artifict makes her the "narrator's impresario persona" and the narrating novelist's suggogate," she insists that "despite appearances, it is Sarah who is the named protagonist of the novel. " 6 Sarah is indeed an artist figure, but she is more closely connected to the author than

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to the narrator, concerned with the effect that she elicits from Charles by revealing her fiction making strategies to her reader; and despite the narrator's naming of Sarah as the protagonist—an irony clearly intended to be perceived by Fowles' authorial audience—Charles is the character who has the greater mimetic reality in the text, the character to be affected by Sarah's fiction –making. Sarah represents not only the modern age, but also the modern text that achieves freedom from convention through its flaunting of artifice, and Charles is both a man on the verge of entering the modern age and a "dramatized" reader on the verge of understanding that modern text. Sarah, as we have seen, judges people according to the standards of fiction and indeed treats her own life as though it were a fiction, creating for herself a romanticized autobiography, and autobiography as real as but other than the one that was. Though she originally adopts the persona of the herself of the conventions of her day, she seed tht Charles is both a reader who can be manipulated by her rhetorical strategies and a reader valuable enough to share in her idealized fictional world.

Sarah thus flatters Charles by telling him that he is the first person to whom she has told her story, and while Charles senses her uniqueness, he cannot yet understand her. The narrator tells us that Charles, upon hearing her story, thought, "here, if only some free man had the wit to see it, is a remarkable woman"(147). The authorial audience recognizes that though Charles uses the word free to mean unengaged, the irony is that he is clearly still not free enough of convention to understand the significance of her decision to give herself to the French lieutenant in order to be mistress of her own destiny. When Charles responds to her story with typical Victorian cant, Sarah uses artifice to indicate the falseness of his reaction: "She reached up and touched a branch of the hawthorn. He could not be sure, but she seemed deliberately to press her forefinger down; a second later she was staring at a crimson drop of blood" (146). Sarah's act encourages Charles to view her ambiguous note, which promises that if he does not come to her, she will never trouble him again, as a possible suicide threat and makes him feel somehow responsible for her existence.

But Charles does not know, until later, what both narrative and authorial audiences do , that Sarah carefully orchestrates her dismissal by boldly walking past the forbidden dairy in front of Mrs. Fairley. But while the narrative reader searches or realistic reasons for Sarah's action, the authorial audience sees it as a function of the narrative's structure. In other words, Sarah's exercise of her freedom-her decision to make Mrs. Poulteney fire her—is more significant in light of its position between two scenes that illustrate the extent to which Charles is incapable of mastering his own destiny—the one in which he arrives at his uncle's estate expecting to be given the house and the one in which he must tell Ernestina of his uncle's upcoming marriage. The narrative continues to progress in this way, alternating scenes which show Sarah's increased freedom with those showing Charles's decreased freedom—not only is Charles losing control of his manservant , but his economic position makes him beholden to Mr. Freeman, Ernestina's manipulative father. The authorial audience recognizes that by juxtaposing these scenes, Fowles shows the degree to which Sarah has achieved freedom through her artifice, while Charles, bound by duty and convention, is unable to imagine a better world.

The authorial audience likewise watches Sarah carefully construct her seduction of Charles. Several chapters before the love-making scene, the narrator shows Sarah unwrapping her packages. She places her new nightgown and places a bandage in drawer. These are the devices by which Sarah will actualize her own fiction and persuade Charles to accept the burden of his own choices. For it is important to remember that Charles chooses to go to Exeter to visit Sarah after fictionalizing a bit himself: imagining a marriage with Ernestina in which they" did not live happily ever after "(264), Charles realizes that if he rejected freedom for duty, if he married Ernestina, "the book of his existence, so it seemed to him, [would] come to a distinctly shabby close" (267). As Charles reads into the future, he enters the open –ended modern text and prefers it to the closed ending of the Victorian novel. But though he chooses to go to Sarah, what he discovers there is a "conventionally" helpless woman, her hair enhanced by the green shawl. And though the audience knows that Sarah has planned this seduction, faked her sprained ankle, feigned her weak stance , Charles is overwhelmed with desire for the powerless female, and the act which takes "Precisely ninety seconds" proves to him that she was a virgin and had thus deceived him. But the authorial audience recognizes that the success of her seduction depends not merely on his having participated in the act, but on his awareness of the deception involved in the act. Sarah is thus like the metafictional text in that she always reveals her fictional strategies, and her reappearance in her indigo dress, without the limp, but with her "old defiance, "makes it clear to Charles that he has been "the dupe of her imaginings" (279) , though his indignant reaction – that he has risked his reputation for her—suggests that he is not yet free. Charles, then, is like the narrative audience in that he believes Sarah's explanation of her use of artifice: "To day I have thought of my own happiness, she would not need to self – consciously reveal her use of artifice, for it would be enough that she achieved her own freedom through it; but like the metafictionalist, Sarah wants to alter Charles's attitudes toward convention by revealing her power to construct alternative realities through artifice.

For Sarah does achieve her own freedom through artifice, and her success as seductress confirms her ability as a fiction maker and makes the story of her shame a reality; that is , she is not only able to imagine another world , but she uses artifice to make that world possible. As she tells Charles the story of her French

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lieutenant, she finds solace in the fact that "I have a freedom [others] cannot understand. No insult, no blame, can touch me" (142). And though her situation in life changes and she gains confidence in her idealized world, Sarah is an essentially static character. Her uses of artifice, however, effect the changes that take place in Charles and help him evolve toward the modern man who chooses freedom over convention. But Charles' development is not without setbacks. Soon after making his choice for freedom in the church, Charles has a vision of "dressing Sarah! Taking her to Paris, to Florence, to Rome!"(287), a vision of possessing her and denying her freedom, and as he writes his letter to Sarah and thinks of her only as an ideal. Charles must therefore continue to pursue, not Sarah, but the ideal she represents; in other words, he must live with the consequences o having chosen Sarah and of his failing to be rewarded in conventional ways (with a romantic ending in which he marries Sarah) for choosing correctly.

Similarly, Fowles' metafictional use of the intruding narrator in chapter 55 and the double ending like chapter 13, function for the authorial audience as Sarah—the modern text—functions for Charles. The effect of the novel like the effect of Sarah's seduction of Charles, depends in large part of Fowles' revealing to the authorial audience his own use of artifice. The fictional narrator who appears in the train compartment with Charles suggests that readers "Judge writers of fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favour of " (317). The narrative audience agrees with the narrator's assessment that fixing the fight would be, on the one hand, futile, since the novel takes place a hundred years ago and its outcome has little to with the twentieth century, and on the other hand, a falsification of the "modern" novel he is writing which denies him the right to fix his characters in a single fate. In order not to give one version more authority by placing it last, he tells us he will decide the structure by flipping a coin. The narrator thus not only grants the autonomy of his characters, but also of his narrative readers, who value the open –ended nature of a novel that allows them to choose the ending. In other words, to persuade the narrative audience of both the value and burden of the increased freedom of twentieth –century man, Fowles creates the illusion that they must bear the burden of choosing an ending. The narrator denies his own god-like stance in order to make the narrative reader assume the responsibility for the ending. As Frederick M. Holmes suggests, through multiple endings Fowles "tries to convey the suggestion of indeterminacy, impart the notion that characters have been freed from the tyranny of his plot."7 But it is a strategy which allows him to show the necessity of freedom without actually giving that freedom to his authorial audience.

For the order of the endings is not as arbitrary as a flip of a coin and Fowles has in fact fixed the fight for his authorial audience in favour of the modern Sarah. That is, once Fowles commits himself to his strategies—he also commits himself to controlling his characters and persuading his audience to validate the world he imagines. Not only does the second ending gain strength because Fowles directs his reader's attention to "the tyranny of the last chapter" (318) but because of his own expertise with artifice, Fowles' second ending is more aesthetically persuasive. Not only is it more modern in its ambiguity, but Charles is depicted as a still evolving human. He refuses Sarah's offer of an intimate, though "illegitimate" relationship because he saw that "he would become the secret butt of this corrupt house."(364) Though Sarah's Manipulations have prodded Charles along , he is still caught up in the conventions of his age and not yet deserving of a twentieth –century woman, and her rejection allows him to grow further, to gain "an atom of faith in himself , a true uniqueness" (366).

The second ending is also more persuasive because Sarah's function as modern text is again emphasized. Charles, like Fowles' authorial audience, realizes that Sarah has also fixed the fight; Charles does not really exercise his own freedom in his refusal of Sarah's offer, for "he saw finally that she knew he would refuse. From the first she had manipulated him. She would do so the end" (364). While the narrative audience may accept the narrator's offer to choose an ending, Fowles' authorial audience is manipulated one last time by this artifice, and Fowles persuades us of the validity of the created world of the second ending. Thus Fowles, like Sarah, gains a certain freedom – the ability to control his fictional world—through artifice, while the authorial audience, like Charles, realizes the extent to which he is in fact dependent on narrative conventions. But by discovering his or her distance from the narrative reader who believes he has a choice, the authorial reader, again like Charles, recognizes his own uniqueness—and enjoys the pleasure of entering the audience for whom Fowles exercises his artifice.

While Fowles employs metafictional techniques to create new illusions for his narrative audience, illusions which illustrate his theme of existential freedom, the success of his novel depends in large part upon the authorial audience's recognition of the process by which we are manipulated by conventions, and the extent to which we are in fact dependent upon them, in literature as in life. By suggesting that the narrator's characters are free and independent of "authorial "control , the novelist not only reveals the distinction between conventions operating in the Victorian novel and those operating in the modern mimetic novel, but he also reminds the authorial reader of the artifice inherent in all literary conventions. Similarly, the illusion created by the double ending—that the reader is free to participate in the novel by choosing the fate of the characters –

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supports the theme for the narrative reader, While the narrative explanation reveals that the authorial reader must consent to the "tyranny" of the last ending , for he or she has entered the author's imaginative world in which Fowles is free to choose among conventions. The imaginative world the The French Lieutenant's Woman is , as the narrator tells his reader, "as real as , but other than the world that is," and it thus does not promise infinite possibilities. The narrative reader is given only two endings from which to choose , for the narrator rejects the conventional Victorian dream-ending depicting Charles married to Ernestina. And Sarah, though she uses artifice to achieve a degree of freedom the other characters cannot know, is limited by the conventions of her nineteenth-century world: She may choose to be either a governess or a "Whore." Just as Sarah appeals to feminine conventions in order to seduce Charles, the author appeals to the conventions of mimetic fiction in order to disillusion and educate Charles, to show the process by which she attains her more powerful position in the ninety second seduction, Fowles reveals his artifice, his planning of his fictional world, in order to educate his reader about the process by which he gains his own limited freedom.

Finally, the French Lieutenant's Woman is a text that draws attention to the process by which it is constructed to establish a new sense of realism. Fowles does not suggest that all life is a fiction, only that "Fiction is woven into all." "We are all in flight from the real reality," as the narrator suggests: "You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it … fictionalize it , in a word" (82). As Hutcheon suggests, Fowles shows the extent to which "the act of making fictions is a natural and 'Vital' human function. "8 Fictionalizing , for Fowles , is also a function of morality ,one that allows us to imagine possibilities and to make peace with the choices we make. Though the novel cannot—and does not desire to – extirpate its author, Fowles employs metafictional techniques in order to make his authorial readers self-conscious about the process by which we free ourselves from not give us the freedom to choose an ending for his fictional world, he suggests a new relationship between the fictional and the real, a relationship in which artifice is inherent in all that we believe is real. Fowles thus empowers his reader, not by granting him or her control of the fictional world to the French Lieutenant's woman, but by revealing the processes by which he and Sarah discover freedom through their imaginative use of fictional conventions. Though Fowles employs many different metafictional techniques to reveal the extent to which we are dependent upon "artificial" conventions , he finally subordinates the metafictional elements of the novel to his own historical—and realistic—interpretation of how the shift between the centuries occurred.

III. THE REALISM OF METAFICTION: CONCLUSIONS

As Patricia Waugh suggests, "the most fundamental assumption" of metafictional writers "is that composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one's 'reality.' ''9 instead of pretending to mirror the world outside of fiction , metafiction mirrors its own construction draws its reader's attention to the processes by which an individual author or reader employs fictional conventions in order to create the illusion of an orderly world. Even in a novel like The French Lieutenant's Woman, in which the reader is able to enter a narrative world that is as "real" as the world outside of the fiction, the authorial reader's attention is drawn to the processes by which the mimetic protagonist—Charles—confronts the conventions of his time and moves toward constructing his own reality, apart from Victorian conventions. Though Fowles' novel offers narrative readers a well –made and realistic plot, he nevertheless reveals to his authorial readers the process by which he constructs that plot, the decisions he makes for his characters, and the means by which he fixes the fight in favour of the modern Sarah. Instead of offering authorial truths to readers , then , writers o metafiction are interested in revealing the processes by which fictional worlds are constructed and in making the reader aware of is or her role in the process of that construction.

Metafiction, by foregrounding its use of artifice, thus asks its readers to participate more self-consciously than does traditionally mimetic fiction. But by acknowledging the reader's participation in the making of meaning from a fictional text, the author does not necessarily abandon his own role as constructor of the reader's experience. Raymond Federman suggests that the "new fiction will not create a semblance of order, it will offer itself for order and ordering";

> Thus the reader of this fiction will not be able
> to identify with its people and its material, nor
> will he be able to purify or purge himself in
> in relation to the actions of the people in the story.
> In other words , no longer being reader will be the

one who extracts, invents, creates a meaning and
an order for the people in the creation which will
give the reader a sense of having created a meaning
and not having simply received , passively,
a neatly prearranged meaning.10.

Though many writers use metafictional techniques to create the illusion for their narrative audience that the reader has control over the fiction and responsibility for its meaning, the fact remains , as Fowles ' narrator suggests , that "not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely" (82). Some writers of metafiction (Barth, Calvino, and Gass, for example) do desire that their readers no longer consider the author to be "a prophet, a philosopher, or even a sociologist who predicts, teaches, or reveals absolute truths,"11 as Federman suggests, but none of the authors considered here extirpates himself from his fiction nor do they desire to. In many ways, metafictional techniques are every bit as "authorially" manipulative as those of the traditionally realistic novel, for they make the activity by which the competent reader enters the authorial audience of most texts part of the narrative text: in other words, by foregrounding the process by which the text is constructed, authors of metafiction frequently usurp a comfortable critical role from their readers. As they invite us to construct the text , they also force us to become aware that we are constructing it at their bidding. They make us self – conscious about their activities as well as our own.

The metafictionalists' concern with form, structure, language, and the conventions of fiction leads critics like Neil Schmitz to agrue that "unless extended expressive or a particular vision of experience, .. metafiction becomes nothing but mode : a series of acrobatic exercises in technique. "12 All metafiction, however, does provide us with a vision of experience—the experience of constructing a fictional text, and as authors of the realistic novel have shown us , all rhetorical techniques, whether mimetic or metafictionl, can be used for moral , amoral, or immoral purposes. While metafictional techniques may be inherently self-conscious, they are not inherently asocial, a historical, or even inherently unreadable or elitist. Fowles' novel, for example, though a summation of metafictional techniques, cannot be accused of any of these typical complaints about experimental literature. Though Sarah functions metafictionally, Charles is a character with whom, in Federman's terms, readers can "identify," and the narrative progresses in an essentially traditional and linear manner that makes the novel quite "readable'' And in addition to the role of parodist, Fowles plays the roles of historian and sociologist, acknowledging the fictitiousness of his created world at the same time that he indicates its relationship to the "real reality" that exists outside of the fiction.

Thus, while I have argued throughout this study that some metafictional texts are more successful than others, some more or less interesting and persuasive, I would also suggest that while the techniques are designed to make us more self-conscious of our activity as readers, they are nevertheless techniques used by particular authors to achieve particular effects, techniques which and be exploited for many different intentions. Gass, for instance, employs metalinguistic techniques to celebrate the medium as a means of expressing both imaginative and intellectual processes, while Barthelme uses them to raise questions about the ways language limits and deadens our cognitive processes. Similarly, Barth teaches his readers to celebrate and luxuriate in man-made constructions, while Borges warns his to be wary to orderly rhetorical systems. And while cover parodies traditional narrative forms in order to elevate the status of the tale and to revive our faith in the redemptive power of fiction, Barthelme parodies the tale of Snow White to reveal the sometimes paralyzing effects of conventional fictional structures. The variety of intentions and effects created by metafictional techniques suggests that metafiction is a genre analogous to—and not necessarily in opposition to—realism; that is , its practitioners, unlike those of tragedy or romance, are generally less interested in the well-wrought plot than in the "truthful treatment" of their material, in the depiction, in other words, of the processes by which their texts are constructed and read.

Metafiction also raises another ideological question about the different satisfactions offered by self – conscious texts. Texts that are radically metafictional – Willie Master's Lonesome wife, parts of Lost in the Funhouse, many of Barthelme's Lonesome wife, parts of Lost in the Funhouse, many of Barthelme's stories, Coover's "The Babysitter," if on a winter's night a traveller—do indeed seem more "undeadable" than texts that retain strong ties to mimetic narrative conventions, as do, for example, the novels by Gardner, Puig, Fowles , and many of the stories by Coover. By challenging our unexamined and conventional assumptions about the activity of reading, by constantly exposing the structures and questioning the language used to make fictions , the authors of radically metafictional texts reduce the reader's emotional involvement in the text and make it difficult , if not impossible , for the reader to respond in familiar ways. Cynthia Ozick, speaking about the experience of reading Hardy's novels, suggests that "it is possible first to ask the question "what is this novel about?' and then to give an answer":

Hardy writes about – well, life (nowadays we are make to hesitate before daring seriously to as well as felt. A society with all its intermingling and complexities is set before us in short, knowledge of something real, with knowledge of cow. What is a cow, how does the milkshed like, what is the life of a milker, To touch any element of cow intimately and concretely is to enter a land, a society, a people, and to penetrate into the whole lives of human beings.13

An experimental test that refuses to allow its narrative readers to enter a land in which cows are real is , according to Ozick, "Unreadable" and fails "because it is neither intelligent or interesting.14 But while these

radically metafictional texts refuse us the emotional and intellectual satisfaction of penetrating the whole lives of human beings , they offer satisfactions. Instead of offering the narrative audience "Knowledge of Cow," these texts offer their readers a knowledge of the processes by which narratives are constructed, a knowledge of the intellectual processes by which reader and author make sense of the written word, a self-consciousness about the activities of reading and writing. One of the strategies of these "unreadable" texts , then, is to make the reader work hard and then to pay him or her well te reader who enters the elite authorial audience of a difficult text is made to feel that he or she has accomplished something that not everyone can. One satisfaction of reading radical metafiction, then, is that instead of making us aware of our "oneness" with the world, is that we sense our intellectual uniqueness. If writers of metafiction must sometimes plead guilty to the charge that they are elitist, so then must their readers acknowledge that part of the pleasure of reading metafiction is the act of joining and elite authorial audience.

Metafictional writers, then , as well as those readers who find metafiction both intelligent and interesting , assume that these intellectual activities are valuable worthwhile, and important—as fitting a subject for fiction as romance, marriage, tragedy, society, and other aspects of life." Ironically, those critics, like Ozick, who most ardently hail the value of literature as a means to denounce the metafictionalists for their triviality; that is , While they believe fiction –making and fiction – reading are inherently valuable activities, they nevertheless denounce these activities of the mind as too trivial to be made the subject of fiction. One of the pleasures of entering a text that is self-reflexive and process-oriented, then, is the acknowledgement that one's activity as a reader is in fact important. And as radically metafictional texts call our attention to the processes by which we read, they encourage active and self-conscious readings of texts and worlds. Metafictional writers suggest, as does Wayne Booth in his preface to A Rhetoric of Irony, that the activity of reading, or contemplating language and the structures that make up fiction, is inescapably a moral activity, one aspect of living a full life:

… Not just the practice of literary criticism but life itself con and should be enhanced by looking to our language. Unlike some of those earlier scorers of the language of the tribe, I cannot claim to have high general hopes. But then I do not, like some of them, think that if the world is not saved all it lost. For me, one good reading of one good passage is worth as much as anything there is , because the person achieving it is living life fully in that time.15

The value of metafiction , as well as the satisfactions it offers, lies in its exposing the processes by which human beings construct and read worlds ; rather than being anti-realistic and anit- mimetic, metafictionl techniques merely suggest a different realism by revealing (or imitating) the processes by which fictional worlds are constructed. Instead of subverting" not only literature but the desire to have a literature," 16 as Ozick claims that experimental literature does , metafictional techniques proclaim the value not only of "literature," but of the life of the mind which the processes of fiction-making and rading develop. As john Barth suggests, "as long as the   private, verbal registration of experience has a future—and, just as important, the registration of verbal experience , the experience of language, which can take us beyond the possibilities of reality— literature has a future. '17

NOTES:
1. Linda Hutcheon, "The Real World(s) of Fiction: The French Lieutenant's Woman," English Studies in Cananda IV: I (Spring, 1978), p.81.
2. William Nelles, "Problems for Narrative Theory: The French Lieutenant's Woman, "Style 18:2 (Spring, 1984), p. 207.
3. Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 57.
4. Walter Allen, "The Achievement of John Fowles", Encounter 35:2 (1970), p.67.
5. John Fowles, The French Lieutenant's Woman (New York: Signet Publishers, 1969), p. 10. All further references to this work will be cited in the text.
6. Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative, p.67, 66.
7. Frederick M. Holmes, "The Novel, Illusion and Reality: The Paradox of Omniscience in The French Lieutenant's Woman", Journal of Narrative Technique 11:3(Fall 1981), p. 190.
8. Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative, p.58.
9. Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction (London: Methuen Books, 1984), p. 24.
10. Raymond Federman, "Surfiction—Four Proposition in Form of an Introduction", in Surfiction, ed. Raymond Federman(Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), p. 14.
11. Federman, p. 14.
12. Neil Schmitz, "Robert Coover and the Hazards of Metafiction", Novel7 (1973-74), p. 213.
13. Cynthia Ozick, "Innovation and Redemption: What Literature Means", in Art and Ardor (New York: Dutton, 1984), p. 238-239.

14. Ozick, p. 239.
15. Wayne Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. xii.
16. Ozick, p. 243.
17. John Barth, "The Future of Literature and the Literature of the Future", in the Friday Book (New York: Perigee Books, 1984), p. 165.

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