

AN ANALYSIS OF METAFICTIONAL SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN  
LAURENCE STERNE'S *THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY*  
AND WILLIAM GASS' *WILLIE MASTERS' LONESOME WIFE*.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

ŞULE OKUROĞLU

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

SEPTEMBER 2005

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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Prof. Dr. Sencer AYATA

Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

---

Prof. Dr. Wolf KÖNIG

Head of

Department

This is to certify that we have read and this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully  
adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Prof. Dr. Nursel İÇÖZ

Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Meral ÇİLELİ (METU, ELIT)

Prof. Dr. Nursel İÇÖZ (METU, ELIT)

Assist. Prof. Dr. Gülbün ONUR (Selçuk U., ELIT)

**I hereby declare that all the information in this document has been presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

Name, Surname: Şule Okurođlu  
Signature:

## ABSTRACT

### **Metafictional self-reflexivity in William Gass' *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy***

Okurođlu, Őule

M. A. Department of English Language Teaching

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nursel İöz

September 2005, 120 pages

This thesis evaluates metafictional self-reflexivity, and presents it within the scope of certain structuralist and post-structuralist approaches especially by referring to William Gass' definition of metafiction and Raymond Federman's theories on the devices of metafiction. Then aspects of the works of William Gass' *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* are discussed within this framework.

Keywords: Metafiction, Self-Reflexivity, William Gass, Raymond Federman, Post-Modernism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Typography.

## ÖZ

### **William Gass'ın *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* ve Laurence Sterne'in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* Adlı eserlerinde Üst-Kurgusal Kendini Yansıtmacılık**

Okurođlu, Şule

Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Nursel İçöz

Eylül 2005,120 sayfa

Bu tez, üst-kurgusal kendini yansıtma tekniđini yapısalcılık ve yapısalcılık-sonrası bakış açısı içerisinde ve özellikle William Gass'ın üst-kurgu tanımını ve Raymond Federman'ın üst-kurgu teorilerini ele alan kuramsal bir çerçevede sunmaktadır. Daha sonra William Gass'ın *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* ve Laurence Sterne'in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* eserlerinin üst-kurgusal özellikleri bu kuramsal çerçeve içerisinde çözümlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üst-Kurgu, Kendini Yansıtma, William Gass, Raymond Federman, Post-Modernizm, Yapısalcılık, Yapısalcılık-Sonrası, Tipografya.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my hearty gratefulness to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Nursel İöz for her guidance, encouragement, insight and support. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Meral ileli and Assist. Prof. Glbn Onur for their positive and reassuring attitudes and comments, which have been invaluable guidance throughout this study.

I want to express my gratitude to my colleagues Beng Taşkesen and Ali Fuad Selvi for their helpful suggestions, valuable moral support and friendly presence.

I would also like to thank the libraries of Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University and Hacettepe University Faculty of Letters for enabling me to access the sources needed for this thesis, and for all my studies.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all my friends, especially to Dream Team, for their loving support.

I express my deepest gratitude to my parents, brother and sister for their never-ending trust and confidence in me. They have always been a valuable source of comfort and support through their heartening words. Without them, the writing of thesis would never have been possible.

To my mother,

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades increased social, political and cultural self-consciousness has influenced the novel writing and parallel to this contemporary novelists have tended to become more conscious of the theoretical issues engaged in forming fictions. Especially around the 1960s, the realistic tendency of the novel was challenged by metafiction. In 1970, in his famous essay entitled “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction”, American critic and writer William Gass coined the term “metafiction” in order to define the self-conscious novel of the period (25). The most comprehensive definition of the term metafiction as a kind of “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact <sup>1</sup>in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” was shaped by Patricia Waugh (2). These definitions point out that metafiction enables us to ask questions about reality; asks questions about its own fictional condition but also about the position it has. Thus, “metafictional self-reflexivity” seems to comprise the very tissue of contemporary sensibility.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how Laurence Sterne and William Gass apply metafictional self-reflexivity in their novels *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* and *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* in a framework based on certain structuralist and post-structuralist approaches especially by referring to the theories of the two significant critics and practitioners of metafiction, William Gass and Raymond Federman. In this evaluation, the study will focus on the similarities and differences between the metafictional qualities of these two works belonging to two different periods.

The first chapter of this thesis intends to provide a theoretical background for both metafiction and metafictional self-reflexivity by referring to the theories of William H. Gass and Raymond Federman both of whom we can call

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<sup>1</sup> Something viewed as a product of human conception or agency rather than an inherent element

“metafictionists” and literary critics. Before the theories of Gass and Federman, influential literary theories such as Russian Formalism, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and also literary movements like realism, modernism and post-modernism are discussed and how the idea of reality and meaning changed in the 60s is analysed.

Due to World Wars, the mass media, the use of computers, the theories of the great thinkers such as Bergson, Einstein, Comte, Russell, Nietzsche etc., and some other circumstances, all the stability giving means of the century were distorted. Consequently, the idea of stability, continuity and reality were all revised in order to shape a new consciousness that suited the atmosphere of the period. Thus, writers of the 70s, in order to reflect the missing coherence and “unreality” of reality, dealt with experimental and innovative forms of writing. The new fiction of the period evolved out of the need to escape the entrapment of “language as reality”. Writers like Robert Coover, John Barth, Raymond Federman, Jeanette Winterson, William Gass and Ronald Sukenick have explicitly displayed disbelief in the traditional realist fiction, which is based on the mimetic principle of art, as contemporary reality does not conform to the cause and effect principle. Thus, metafiction refers to the fictional writing which self-reflexively and systematically brings its own formal devices into prominence, poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality and draws attention to its own status as an artefact.

Moreover, both the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches have had a great deal of influence on the evaluation of metafiction. For the Saussurean theory, it is impossible to form a stable link between language and the real world due to the arbitrary characteristic of the sign. Since the sign is not the referent to an object, and the meaning is not present in the sign, the idea of language as a transparent tool is challenged by metafictionists. Hence, in metafictional texts the process of writing is so slippery that it is not possible to create stable meanings. This fundamental change in literary canon is reflected by Scholes as follows: “In the twentieth century it has become increasingly apparent that realism itself, instead of being simply the truest reflection of the world, was simply a formal

device like any other, a tool to be put aside when it had lost its cutting edge.” (169). By carrying the discussion a further step, Derrida totally deconstructs the relation between the signifier and the signified underlining that there is no transcendental signified operating as the meaning creating centre or Western idea of presence. All these significant changes in modern linguistics have influenced the writers of the 70s in shaping their innovative writing process.

The foremost assumption of this study is based on Gass’ proposition on metafiction. His first collection of essays, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (from now on it is going to be referred to as *FFL*), offers an introduction to his theory of metafiction and to his major concerns. For the first time he coined the term “metafiction” in order to define the self-conscious novel of the period and challenged the idea of realistic fiction by introducing the idea that words and symbols may be more interesting to modern man than the raw data of experience (25). He says of metafiction: “as the novel continues a newcomer among the arts - both authors and readers will allow it a greater freedom to explore its own status as an artefact and will release it from the pretence that it mirrors the real world” (McCafferey 158). The term metafiction refers to the texts in which self-consciousness is displayed through narrative self-awareness, and this is what Gass argues as metafictional self-reflexivity.

Gass firstly refers to the idea of language in metafiction by challenging the constraints of verisimilitude. According to Gass, a fiction writer does not describe since there is nothing outside of the fictional world to which he may refer. Gass asserts that the worlds depicted in a work of metafiction are “only imaginatively possible ones” that “need not to be at all like any real one” (9). Words do not have referential functions to illustrate the outside world and to create life-like images; on the contrary they are signifiers inside of a literary fiction and there is nothing out there to which they refer.

Secondly, Gass describes character as an instrument of verbal organization and of a verbal energy (*FFL* 44). According to this definition a character is not a real body, or a real personality, and not an object of perception. Characters are the

linguistic entities of the text in which they live. These signifiers cannot live outside of the text, since they are drawn for us in a text. In order to reject the verisimilitude principle of the realist writers, in his books Gass uses reflexive characters as linguistic signs that are conscious of their fictional existence. Since metafiction creates itself, William Gass offers experimental writing forms rejecting realism in story telling that is caused by the influences of the plot structure. Thus, metafiction does not follow the Aristotelian linearity of narratives; instead of this, it self-consciously draws attention to its own conventions of plot construction.

Toward the end of the first chapter, the metafictional assumptions of Raymond Federman are examined. Federman foregrounds the dimensions of self-reflexivity suggesting that the literary world is constructed entirely of language and reality means reality of this construction. Federman firstly underlines that the traditional process of the reading activity and intended effects of this process should be abolished in order to make the readers realize the formal devices of the construction. So as to attract all the attention to the creative process of the text, Federman offers an experimental paginal syntax which distorts the traditional word order, punctuation and page set-up. This new type of arrangement wipes out the conventional elements associated with the book form, displays typographical plays and visual illustrations, and also changes the way words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters and punctuation appear on the page to expose the possibilities of narrative to create an interactive experience that would attract attention to the status of the book as an artefact.

In the following chapters of this study, the approaches mentioned above will be expounded and practiced in *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. Techniques of metafictional self-reflexivity - a non-linear novel, which can be read in some order other than from beginning to end, a novel in which the author is a character, a novel about a person writing a novel, characters who express awareness that they are in a work of fiction, new paginal syntax and typographical games – are going to be examined in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and in a contemporary metafiction *Willie Masters'*

*Lonesome Wife*. The second chapter is dedicated to the novella of Gass, *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* since the book is accepted as one of the significant representatives of metafiction. The chapter will discuss the devices of metafictional self-reflexivity in *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* as well as briefly touching on the relevant literary theories and movements also incorporating various aspects of Gass' and Federman's theories. The third chapter will analyse *Tristram Shandy* by briefly dealing with its parallelism with Gass' *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*. The conclusion chapter will present a summing up of the approach and will include comments resulting from its applications.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A PATH TO METAFICTIONAL SELF-REFLEXIVITY**

#### **2.0 Influential Literary Theories**

##### **2.1.1 Russian Formalism**

Russian Formalism is a type of literary criticism and analysis considered as the initial point of modern literary theory since it “represents one of the earliest systematic attempts to put literary studies on an independent footing, and to make the study of literature an autonomous and specific discipline” (Jefferson 25). Russian Formalism includes a number of highly significant Russian scholars such as Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Boris Eikhenbaum and Roman Jakobson. Since it is considered as a mile stone in modern literary criticism, studying Russian Formalism will be helpful in understanding the changes observed in the contemporary novel.

Emerging in Russia during the second decade of the twentieth century, Russian Formalism remained active until about 1930. According to Waugh, “Though formalist work predates the recent theoretical revolution by some 40 years, its stress on the systematic study of literature links it with the work which initially broke with the traditional critical orthodoxy in the 1960s” (96, 16). What makes Russian Formalism different from the other traditional literary theories? First of all, it concentrates on the autonomous nature of literature; therefore, the acceptable study of literature is not the historical or cultural background in which it is created or a reflection of the life of its author, that is it challenges “the form that literary studies had taken during the second half of the nineteenth century, positivism, which was based on the genetic approach; critics, or rather scholars, concentrated their energies” uncovering the “sources and genesis of particular works, and the role of biography, history, and history of ideas in these genetic studies obviously reduced the importance of literature itself in literary scholarship” (Jefferson 25). In a way, Russian Formalism rescues literary criticism from the



“content and social significance of literature” and considers literature as a special use of language (Abrams, 235). According to Eikhenbaum, Formalism can be “characterized only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material” (103). Russian Formalists were innovative in their approach to literature and “much more interested in ‘method’, much more concentrated to establish a ‘scientific’ basis for the theory of literature” (Selden 29).

In their scientific approach, Formalists firstly make a kind of division between the literary language and the ordinary language. Whereas the main function of ordinary language is to enable communication by giving references to the world, the literary language attracts attention to its own formal properties. The object of the literary studies re-shaped by the Formalists, and “the central focus of the movement was not literature per se, but literariness, that which makes a given work a ‘literary’ work” (Waugh: 1996, 16). As Roman Jakobson wrote in 1921:

The object of study in literary science is not literature but literariness that is what makes a given work a literary work. The historians of literature have helped themselves to everything—environment, psychology, politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they have worked up a concoction of homemade disciplines (qt Pratt 27).

As Jakobson underlines, literary critics dealt with psychology, philosophy, history and politics in their literary evaluations. In contrast, literariness in Formalism refers to the essential function present in the system of works called literature; therefore, Formalists try to reveal the system of the literary discourse.

By concentrating on the scientific method, Formalists strongly reject the mimetic function of literature and also “move away from the view of the text as humanistic significance” (Abrams 236). Since the subject matter of the literary criticism is what they called literariness, Formalists exclude all mimetic and expressive definitions of literature. The literary language is different from the ordinary language, and it makes us see differently. According to Formalists, literature is no more an expression of an author’s personality and world-vision, or the realistic representation of the world in which he exists. Eikhenbaum declares:

“What constitutes literature is simply its difference from other orders of facts. Indeed the object of literary science turns out not to be an object at all, but a set of differences” (107). Shklovsky defines this differential specification as “defamiliarization” or “making strange “ostranenie” (14). According to Shklovsky:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (12).

This definition underlines that art refreshes our sense of life and experience. For Shklovsky art defamiliarizes the things that have become automatic or habitual. In literature the case is the same, everyday language is made strange. All these views make great contributions to the contemporary criticism and literature. By separating literary language from the ordinary language and rejecting the mimetic function of art, Formalists initiated the understanding of the contemporary self-reflexive fiction. Instead of the idea of verisimilitude in the work of art, they introduced “literariness” and “defamiliarization” plus the privileged status of reality over literature is reversed. The study of Formalism is literariness not mimesis; thus, both the writer and the critic should concentrate on the devices that give birth to defamiliarization and the literariness of the work as a system.

Various metafictional techniques are based on the Formalists’ innovations. Exclusion of mimesis gives way to the idea that literature has nothing to do with authorial meaning. Parallel to this, the focus of the literary criticism is no longer the personality of the author or representation of the world. “The exclusion of authors, reality and thought from their central position in literature was part of a purification of the notion of literature which entails a radical alteration of one of the most deeply ingrained concepts in thinking about literature: the distinction between form and content” (Jefferson 35). “The author becomes nothing more than an expert at his job, a craftsman, and the means whereby literature develops in a more or less autonomous way” (Jefferson 32). The writer of a work becomes a product not a producer. By thinking so, Formalists also deconstruct the binary

opposition between the form and the content. In traditional literary criticism content had the privileged position in the hierarchy; but in Formalism form became superior to the content since the subject of literature is literariness. The differentiation in fiction is explained through two innovative terms: fabula (story) and sjuzet (plot). In broad terms, the Formalist study of narrative depends on the difference between the incidents and the construction, between the fabula and the sjuzet.

In *Poetics*, Section Six, Aristotle gives the traditional understanding of the plot as the “arrangement of the incidents”. By this definition a plot is separated from a story. A plot is the “artful disposition of the incidents which make up a story” (Selden 35). Formalists take the argument a step further and mark that while sjuzet (plot) is literary; fabula (story) is the raw material. They put emphasis on the sjuzet as it can create a defamiliarization effect. As it is also applied by metafictionists, the traditional understanding of the narrative structure turns into a linguistic play on the fabula. Formalists violate the expected understanding of the plot through digressions, typographical games, and extended descriptions to achieve defamiliarization. Metafictionists apply all these principles to their texts so as to deconstruct the conventional linearity and plot structure and to make the literary devices prominent. The basic principle in the construction of a narrative work is not the incidents but their manner of presentation. This manner is determined by the devices of sjuzet that create defamiliarization. Traditionally the plot was a medium through which the story could be poured. So Formalists reversed the dominance of content over form and devoted their attention to form, that is to say content becomes inferior to form. The automatized arrangement of the incidents is made strange to change the mode of perception.

The Formalists’ distinction between the literary language and the ordinary language, their innovative theory of literariness, their insistence on the defamiliarization function of art and their views on the plot (sjuzet) and the story (fabula) changed the direction of the traditional understanding of literature and literary criticism. Instead of concentrating on the social, political, biographical background of a work for the criticism, they focused on the linguistic devices that

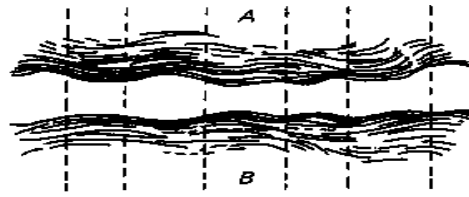
make literariness and create ostranenie. All these notions influenced the writers of the 70s especially the metafictionists and they applied these principles to their works. In the following parts of this study, all these ideas will be re-examined by giving references to the other theories and texts.

### **2.1.2 Structuralism**

Structuralism in linguistics and literary studies started with the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. With his concept of linguistic sign, Saussure created the basis of structuralism and also modern linguistics. He explained his theory of sign in a series of lectures between 1906 and 1911 and posthumously from his students' notes the book was published under the name of *Course in General Linguistics*. Structuralists analyse the units of a system, and the underlying rules that make the system work. As the name implies, according to structuralism, things cannot be understood in isolation and the subject of studies should be the structures and the underlying principles of these structures; thus, everything has to be seen in the context of the larger structures that they are part of. Since structuralism is the application of the linguistic principles to any system, it “conceives any cultural phenomenon, activity or product (including literature) as a signifying system consisting of a self-sufficient structure of interrelationships” (Abrams 242). For structuralists, all forms of social and cultural life are considered to be ruled by systems of signs which are “either linguistic or analogous to those of language” (Robey 46). Therefore, not being merely a linguistic theory; structuralism became one of the most widely used methods of analyzing language, culture, philosophy of mathematics, and society at the turn of the twentieth century.

Saussure makes a crucial distinction in the study of language by introducing “langue”, language system and, “parole”, the individual act of communication (Waugh: 1996, 22). Saussure considered language as a system of signs that are arbitrary and differential. In *Course in General Linguistics* with a diagram he defines how these signs exist:

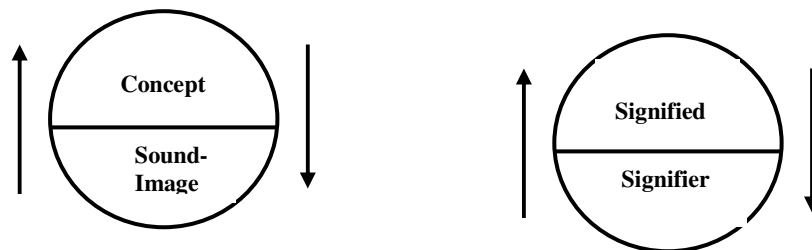
Concepts/signifieds



Sound-images/ signifiers

Figure1 The Saussurean linguistic sign

According to Saussure “psychologically our thought - apart from its expression in words - is only a shapeless and indistinct mass...without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula” (111). In the diagram A represents the floating “realm of thoughts” and B represents “vague plane of sounds” (Saussure 112). “There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language “(Ibid). In this case, signs give forms to concepts arbitrarily, and without sign systems there would be undifferentiated ideas. In other words, from Saussure's point of view, language gives shape to ideas arbitrarily and as represented by dotted lines, language divides these planes creating the sound-images and concepts which we recognize as signs. According to this idea a linguistic sign consists of a sound-image (signifier) and a concept (signified).



Eagleton explains the sign with this example, “the three black marks c-a-t are a signifier which evoke the signified ‘cat’ in an English mind” (84). The sign consisting of these two elements is arbitrary for two reasons “because, more obviously, the association of a signifier (the sound-image ‘tree’) with a signified (the concept tree) is, fundamentally the product of linguistic convention, not of any

natural link; and, there is also no natural or necessary relationship between the sign and the reality to which it refers” (Robey 47).

For metafictionists, the arbitrary relation of the signifier and the signified is the most revolutionary part of Saussure’s theory as it is based upon the disjunction between the world of reality and the world of language. Words only “articulate our experience of things”; they “do not just express or reflect it” (Robey 47). If the relation between the sign and reality is arbitrary, how meaning occurs becomes the key question for the literary studies. According to Saussure the function of a sign firstly depends on its relationship with the other signs or its difference from the other signs in the system. In order to evaluate how a language functions, individual signs should not be taken into consideration; instead, relationships between these signs should be evaluated. The most important relation between the signifiers in a system is the idea of “difference”. One signifier has a meaning within the system, not because it is connected to a particular signified, but because it is not any of the other signifiers in the system. The word "tree" has meaning, not because of the plant it is associated with, but because that word is not "free" or "three" or "trey". This idea of difference gives birth to the concept of binary oppositions. A binary pair, such as black and white, dark and light, man and woman, shows the idea of difference as what gives any word value is its difference from the other word that is considered as the opposite.

In the process of signification the difference between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations gains importance. Everything in the system is based on the relations of the units. One of the relations in a signifying system is the syntagmatic relation. The syntagmatic relation refers to the linearity of the relation in the given system. Whether in spoken or written language, words appear one by one. In this linearity, the position of a sign in the chain of signification contributes to its meaning. This linearity is what the metafictionists try to deconstruct in their texts. The meaning of a sign comes out of the words that appear before and after it. In contrast, the paradigmatic relations are in our heads, not in the system of language. In this relation the meaning of a word is created through the other words that do not exist in the given structure. If we say that “The boy kissed the girl” the

meaning of the word “kiss” can be determined through the other words which are not posited in the sentence. It is “kiss” not kill, kick, kilt etc. This contributes much to what Saussure tries to illustrate as difference in the signification process. According to Saussure the most important relation between signifiers in a system is the idea of difference. One signifier has meaning within a system, not because it is connected to a particular “signified, but because it is not any of the other signifiers in the system” (Saussure 120).

In the second half of the 20th century , all these innovative ideas induced positive changes both in the field of literature and literary studies. With the help of structuralist theories, the traditional sense of realism in literature and the idea of language as a referential medium were reformulated in metafictional texts. Saussure’s idea of the arbitrary and differential nature of the linguistic sign underlined that there is no connection between language and the reality; hence, language is not capable of accurately depicting the real world. In creating meaning, the function of the author is abolished. The source of meaning is the relation of the signs in the system not an individual author figure. This view is mostly appreciated by the writers of the postmodernist age especially by the metafictionists. By means of these innovative techniques, literary meaning is separated from the external world and the individual author and re-formed through the units of the structure in metafictional writings.

### **2.1.3 Post-Structuralism**

After Jacques Derrida's paper on "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", delivered in 1966, a new theoretical position initiated against the failures of structuralism. When structuralism was experiencing its peak, with Derrida’s criticism on structuralism along came a new wave of theorists and philosophers called “post-structuralists”. What is important is that, it is not the continuation of structuralism; on the contrary, the title directs its energies into the key concepts of structuralism and its methodology; in other words it is the criticism of structuralism.

To begin with, post-structuralist theorists revealed the unstable nature of signification. In the structuralist theory, a meaning of a sign comes from the idea of difference. Since the meaning of a sign is what the sign is not, its “meaning is always in some sense absent from it...it is never fully present in any one sign alone” (Eagleton 111). This implication shows that nothing is totally present in the sign and language is not a stable structure as the classical structuralists considered:

Instead of being a well-defined, clearly demarcated structure containing symmetrical units of signifiers and signifieds, it now begins to look much more like a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements, where none of the elements is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up and traced through by everything else (Eagleton 112).

This unstable nature of the signification process is deeply analysed by the leading figure of post-structuralism, Jacques Derrida, through his revolutionary method of deconstruction and the idea of *différance*. Derrida begins his analysis firstly by questioning the basic metaphysical assumptions of Western philosophy since Plato and concludes that “any notion of ‘structure’, even in ‘structuralist’ theory has always presupposed a ‘centre’ of meaning of some sort” (Selden 170). This point highlights that any system necessarily establishes a centre, as the “guarantor of presence” and “a point from which everything comes, and to which everything refers or returns” (Jefferson 113):

The centre is the presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought language and experience. It has yearned for the sign which will give meaning to all others - the transcendental signifier- and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point(the transcendental signified) (Eagleton 112).

According to different philosophical systems or beliefs, the centre is sometimes God, sometimes the mind, the self or the unconscious and this centre-based philosophy is what Derrida calls “logocentrism”<sup>2</sup>. In order to preserve presence or centre, Western philosophy has supported violent hierarchies, binary oppositions, such as good/evil, light/dark, masculine/feminine and right/left. “In a classical

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<sup>2</sup> Logos (Greek for word) is a term which in the New Testament carries the greatest possible concentration presence: ‘In the beginning was the Word. The ‘word’ underwrites the full presence of the world.



philosophical opposition ... one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (Derrida: 1981, 41). Within these hierarchies one part of the pair always privileges over the second in order to hold presence; in other words, the second term is needed to understand the first term but the first term always subordinates the second one:

In oppositions such as meaning/form, soul/body, intuition/expression, literal/metaphorical... the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it (Culler 93).

At the heart of Derrida’s theory of logocentrism, there lies the hierarchy of speech over writing, “phonocentrism” (Abrams 203). Phonocentrism is the key binary opposition that shapes the Western Philosophy since Western culture has a tendency for a language which acts like a divine signified. Thus, for Derrida, phonocentrism is the primary target of deconstruction. As a challenge to this traditional assumption, from Plato to contemporary thinkers, Derrida’s method of deconstruction shows how such oppositions, “in order to hold their place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves” (Eagleton 115). According to Derrida the starting point in deconstruction is “to deconstruct the opposition, first of all, which is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment” (Derrida: 1981, 41). Since the first term is conceived as superior and present, while the second is thought of as absent, deconstruction, as a method, refers to the reversal of the hierarchies. The first step of deconstruction is to determine the binary oppositions, and secondly to reverse the hierarchies of the terms in order to show the instability of the presence. Subsequently, deconstruction becomes a fundamental method of textual and philosophical analysis which requires close reading of works of “literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and anthropology” (Waugh: 1996. 174).

As a consequence, post-structuralism rejects the structuralist notion of a text “as a closed entity equipped with definite meanings...to seeing it as irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single centre, essence or meaning” (Eagleton 120). Derrida points out the failure of the theory by underlining that the meaning is never self-present in the

sign as “ the features that would have strictly established a signified meaning - since this significance is nothing other than a network of differences from other signified meanings- are never present to us in their own identity” (Abrams 204). This post-structuralist challenge underlines also the metafictional idea of plurality:

Language is not stable and rather than well-defined, clearly demarcated structure containing symmetrical units of signifiers and signifieds, it now begins to look much more like a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements (Eagleton 112).

In order to deconstruct this hierarchical tradition of presence, Derrida evaluates “Saussure's notion of linguistic difference by introducing his theory of *différance*” (Derrida: 1976, 129). The term is the fusion of the two French verbs “*différer*”, which means to defer or delay, and “*differ*”, which means to be different (Abrams 204).

The meaning is a result of difference, but it is also deferred, there is always an element of ‘undecidability’ or ‘play’ in the unstable sign. This leads to an emphasis on the signifier and on textuality rather than the signified and meaning, since there is no point at which the slippage of signifiers can be stopped, no final resting point where the signifier yields up the truth of the signified, for that signified is just another signifier in a moment in *différance* (Waugh 174).

As it is clearly stated by Waugh, this play of signifiers is a continuous process within a text, there is nothing “outside the text and ... meaning and reference must be constituted from within the system as functions of *différance*” (158). Thus the text’s existence is a web of signifiers where there is no transcendental signified. Then deconstruction is a continuous process and a performance linked to the text it deconstructs.

The impacts of post-structuralism on literary studies and metafictional techniques are profound. Traditionally, literary studies have tried to uncover the meaning behind the text. This meaning is usually associated with the intention of the author or the truth of the human condition. Russian Formalists tried to find out the scientific method for literature, Structuralists tried to establish a certain set of principles and claimed that the meaning of a sign comes out of the words that

appear before and after it; but according to post-structuralism “neither language nor literature is a stable object, because neither the language of the texts we read, nor the language of the discourse in which we discuss them, is exempt from *différance*” (Jefferson 118). According to deconstructionism, there is no transcendental signified, a fully authentic presence, and meaning is “haunted by the continual play of *différance*” (Waugh: 1996, 174). As the key binary opposition which is based upon logos, ultimate referent or presence is deconstructed; Derrida shows that all philosophical signifiers are the illusions of the transcendental signified. The meaning of any written or spoken utterance is a play or a process that has no end.

The traditional idea of realism in literature is revised in post-structuralism. Since there is “nothing outside the text and that meaning and reference must be constituted from within the system as functions of *différance*”, for metafictionists reality becomes textual, that is our sense of reality is linguistically constructed (Derrida: 1876, 158). Therefore, the assumption of reality is again a play of signifiers based upon *différance*. The result is that since the text is a web of signifiers each text deconstructs itself. In a text first of all binary oppositions at work are determined and then these oppositions are continuously reversed, the traditional meaning of the oppositions is neutralized and parallel to this the meaning is continuously delayed. A “fixed and present meaning” is considered in vain (Barnes 97). This new approach to text underlines the existence of multiple meanings and “a literary text turns out to have no totalized boundary that makes it an entity” (Abrams 206). So “deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth...Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself” (Miller 105). These ideas contributed much to the writings of the metafictionists. In their novels writers are conscious of the absence of a transcendental signified, they celebrate the freedom of the text and they self-consciously play with the signifiers working at the text. By doing so, they deconstruct the idea of reality and enjoy multiplicity.

## 2.2 Influential Literary Movements

### 2.2.1 Realism

The nature of realism is difficult to define since it is related to various subject matters such as ethics, aesthetics, science, mathematics, and semantics. If the term is limited to a literary movement, a more precise definition can be given. Around the 1850s, the term realism was denoted to the novel writing that combines Romantic individualism with social determinism. Then what is realism as a movement? According to Lilian Furst's definition:

Realism denotes an illustrious body of texts which form the core of the latter half of nineteenth-century literature and related arts, and which have both earlier antecedents and later descendants. As an artistic movement realism is the product and expression of the ...social changes as well as the scientific and industrial advances of its day (1).

As it is stated in the given extract, realism both reflects and corresponds to the socially and politically changing spirit of Europe such as the revolution in France in 1830, the violent uprising of 1848 in England, rebellions in Vienna, Berlin, Venice, the growth of national consciousness, the invention of Nasmyth's steam hammer, the sewing machine etc. It was in this mood that the realists put truthfulness/verisimilitude<sup>3</sup> or method of photography at the heart of their writings.

The first advocates of this movement, Champfleury (Jules Husson) and Louis Edmond Duranty were from France. According to the early exponents of realism, Champfleury and Duranty, the realist novel should focus on the life of the ordinary people objectively and draw characters with psychological insight. They upheld "sincerity, modernity and prose, along with truthfulness, as the distinguishing features of realism, in contrast to the idealization, historical remoteness and verse of Romanticism" (Furst 3). Since the romantic fiction presents life as more heroic and more picturesque than the real one, realistic fiction resists against the idealism of romance. These theorists accepted the works of Honoré de Balzac as the motto of this movement, "the literature of the true" (Furst 2). In Britain, George Eliot and John Ruskin defined realism as an influential

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<sup>3</sup> Is an effect achieved through the deployment of certain literary conventions which have been invested with a kind of truth value.

movement in philosophy and literature by underlining the principle of truth-telling. In order to represent life as it is, realists changed “the previous stylistic tradition for fiction which was not primarily concerned with the correspondence of words and things, but rather with the extrinsic beauties which could be bestowed upon description and action by the use of rhetoric” and attempted to use language as a kind of transparent medium to the real (Watt 28). In realism, the linguistic sign is seen as a referent to the real world and the productive nature of the literary language is suppressed.

For Abrams “ a typical realist sets out to write a fiction which will give the illusion that it reflects life and the social world as it seems to the common reader” (152). To achieve this effect, the realist writers chose middle class or working class people as protagonists and these characters live through ordinary life experiences such as childhood, adulthood, adolescence, love, hatred, joy; and these writers use “adaptation of the prose style to give an air of complete authenticity” (Watt 27). Since realism defines the “particular events happening to individualised people in specified places and time space”, the aim is to give the reader the illusion of reality, that is the ordinary experience, to make them feel that the men and women in the novels really lived in the way that they are presented ( Watt 22). As Harry Shaw states, “in effective narrative literature, fictional persons, through characterization, become so credible that they exist for the reader as real people” (47).

The novel is designed to reflect the experiences of ordinary people; parallel to this, the formal features of the novel are shaped. According to Watt, “the actors in the plot and the scene of the actions had to be placed in a new literary perspective: by particular people in particular circumstances” rather than, “as had been common in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention” (15). Hence, the language is used as a transparent referent to the actual world; the plot structure is arranged according to the principle of particularity, which is the “acted out experiences of a particular character with a particular background” by referring to the real “time process” that has “effects upon characterization” (Watt 22-30). A set of narrative

procedures “which are so commonly found together in the novel” are called “formal realism” by Watt (32).

After the World Wars, the need for the new literary ideals to correspond to the changing spirit of the world politically and socially sparked the idea of realism for the second time. With the coming of the modernist writers and appearance of modern literary theories the mimetic theory of art that asks something close to a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject was challenged and became the centre of harsh criticism. Modernist writers concentrated on the reality of the individual consciousness instead of the truthfulness of the outside world. Their views against realism are going to be discussed in the next step under the title of modernism.

Opposing views against realism came out one by one in the study of literary criticism. Saussure’s revolutionary contribution to the study of language strongly challenged the idea of realism. Since language is a self-sufficient system, meaning is not determined by the intentions of the writer. Meaning in this system shows the operation of the signs which is based upon the principle of difference. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, so the signs in a text cannot be the referents of reality outside of the text. Russian Formalists also rejected the verisimilitude principle in fiction; in its place they dealt with the formal constituents of the text which they called the “literariness” and which creates defamiliarization effect. In a way, they freed literary criticism from the “content and social significance of literature” and considered literature as a special use of language (Abrams 235). Like Structuralists and Formalists, metafictionists rejected psychology, philosophy, history and politics, in short realistic constituents in their literary evaluations. Instead of concentrating on the social, political, biographical background of a work for the criticism, they focused on the formal devices.

Finally, with the coming of post-structuralists the idea of verisimilitude is totally deconstructed in metafictional texts. For post-structuralists reality becomes textual since there is “nothing outside the text and that meaning and reference must

be constituted from within the system as functions of *différance*” (Derrida: 1976, 158). When the pairs in the hierarchical oppositions are reversed constantly, that is de-constructed, the outcome is that there is no transcendental signified, a fully authentic presence and meaning. So the signs in a text are the signifiers in a web and the language is not the reflection of reality outside of the text; in other words, meaning is equal to multiplicity or a play of signifiers in post-structuralism. Metafiction completes the undoing of the image that the realists projected by putting emphasis only on the fictionality of the texts. To Miller, realism is disintegrated:

If meaning in language rises not from the reference of signs to something outside words but from differential relations among the words themselves, if ‘referent’ and ‘meaning’ must always be distinguished, then the notion of a literary text which is validated by its one-to-one correspondence to some social, historical, or psychological reality can no longer be taken for granted. No language is purely mimetic or referential (85-6).

### **2.2.2 Modernism**

With regard to literature, modernism is best explained through the writings of Modernist authors. “ What has come to be known as modernist fiction - at its strongest in novels published in the 1920s by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence - is usually defined on the grounds of its rejection of techniques and conventions apparently inappropriate or ‘too clumsy’ for new interests at the time” (Stevenson 2). Modernism is therefore a term applied to the works of the writers focusing on the modernisation of the forms and abandonment of the tradition.

“The years between 1910 and the Second World War saw a revolution in the literature of the English language” since the writers of the period were confronted by new conditions (qt Jump ix). Modernist writers dissociated themselves from the nineteenth century assumptions in order to present the changing face of the new century since they were aware of the state of the world around them. The catastrophe of World War I, the labour struggles, economic

depression, the emergence of feminism, industrial machinery were among the inescapable forces of the social modernization which broke up the nineteenth-century consensus and provided the writers of the period with the new subject matter. Hence the sense of frustration was at the heart of modernist art. Along with the social cataclysms, the intellectual changes offered by Freud, Bergson, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Marx transformed the habits of perception, and the experiments related to the older form of novel writing.

Similar to the views of metafictionists, a “modernist artist saw himself confronted by the infinite complexity of reality; he also saw that his medium itself might be part of the problem” (Jump 15). In order to reflect the changing spirit of the period, to convey the complexity of the modern experiences in a meaningful way, the modernists rejected the artistic conventions of the previous age especially the ones associated with realism and applied new techniques in their writings. In realism, a linguistic sign is taken as a referent to the exterior world and a realist writer like a photographer tries to give the illusion that the novel reflects life as it is and the social world. The mimetic theory of art in realism is totally undermined by the modernists as there is no longer an integrating faith or wholeness of the world to which a writer might refer. According to modernists, art is no longer the window on reality, and “pictorial realism” is an inadequate approach to the experiences of the modern man and this new consciousness (Levenson 7).

According to the modernists novel writing should be freed from the traditional constraints of plot, portrayal of the character in the traditional sense, linearity of incidents and instead of these it should explore new forms. Modernist writers integrated the intellectual developments in their writings. As an example, Freud with his psychoanalysis and Jung with his collective unconscious showed the power and significance of the unconscious through their studies on the human consciousness and the modernists utilized such ideas in their novels. Thus “the change must be registered on the level of literary expression, which requires a new language of forms to embody it” (Jump 35).

In order to reflect the changing reality and the experience of the modern man, modernist writers preoccupied themselves with new techniques.



Impressionism with its innovative perception in art and its emphasis on the process of the perception influenced the modernist writers, and parallel to this in modernist fiction fragmented style which relied on associations is practiced. Symbolists' insistence on a belief that language is expressly symbolic in its nature and writing should follow "whichever connection the sheer sound and texture of the words create" was carried out by the modernists in their writings (Stevenson 4). Its rejection of realism resulted in its remarkable technique called the stream of consciousness<sup>4</sup>. In the stream of consciousness technique there was a shift from the outer world to the inner world; in other words, to the "mental activities of meaning-making which refer to characters' private inner lives (Jump 35). According to these writers, activities of the mind indicate the personality and the essence of lives. In a way this technique gives the impression that the reader is gaining access to his/her private feelings and thoughts through monitoring on the stream of conscious experience in the fictional character's mind. In modernism, reality turns into "the movements of the protagonist's mind, what we become aware of is the flux of the city scene...ebb and flow of life it implies in a single mind" (Alter 141).

By doing so, modernists "subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness" (Abrams 109). Unlike a stream, consciousness does not follow a straight line, instead of this it has a foreground and background and it works on the principle of reconfiguration. Since the consciousness is fragmented, the stream of consciousness technique in the novels does not follow the realistic linearity. In modernism, instead of a linear sequence of the incidents, the fragmented activity of the mind is displayed in order to reflect the complex experiences of the modern man.

Responding to the artistic conventions of realism, the modernist novel pays attention to the flow of the consciousness of the fictional characters by applying new methods. Its rejection of traditional forms suggests that modernism is self-

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<sup>4</sup> The term was first coined by James's in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) to illustrate the continuous flow of thoughts, feelings and impressions which constitutes our inner lives.

conscious about its own fictionality and techniques since modernist writers question the novel writing. The consciousness of the modern artist “has been rendered more self-directed by the influence of psychological investigation, revealing the complexity of the human personality, and of philosophical enquiry, emphasizing the role of the agent in creating the reality which he experiences” (Faulkner 20). Modernist writers were aware of the fictionality of reality like metafictional writers; but the differential point is that fictionality is what metafiction totally focuses on. In metafiction it is not the consciousness of the writer, but the consciousness of the text.

### **2.2.3 Postmodernism**

“The décor of a room, the design of a building, the diagesis of a film, a television commercial, space capsules...so on...for now postmodernism has taken over all human and animal activities” (Federman: 1993, 109). According to some critics, postmodernism and post-structuralism both refer to the same way of thinking so they can be used interchangeably; for some postmodernism refers to a historical period that comes after modernism, and for some it refers to the self-reflexive movement in different areas of art. In literature, as the name suggests, postmodernism is a term that designates several stylistic reactions to modernism. Around the 50s new forms of experimentation developed parallel to social and cultural developments and these forms started the postmodern era. Especially the application of sophisticated technology, mass media, the use of computers in every field, electronic music, the development of a net work of TV images, advertising, improved consumer industry and fabricated life styles, aspects of popular culture, computer generated movies, virtual realities created by TV and computers have formed changing images. According to postmodernism “history and reality is no longer possible, since both have become ‘textualized’ in the world of images and simulations which characterize the contemporary age of mass consumption and advanced technology” (Selden 200).

In the 1960s, by some literary critics, such as Ihab Hassan, Paul de Man, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Frank Kermode, the term postmodernism was utilized to differentiate the post-World War II experimental fiction of Samuel

Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme from modernism. Postmodernism in literature refers to the deconstruction of the previous stylistic forms of literature in order to abandon the totalitarianism in literature and to celebrate the multiplicity. “In other words, postmodernism is conceived as the specific deconstruction of a philosophical tradition of Western civilization that holds on to a concept of rationality as a synthesis of finality and being” (Quendler 16).

The rejection of the traditional realism and its forms in modernism was revolutionary in its attempt to create alternative techniques to represent the changing spirit of the time. By that way modernist writers freed themselves from the ordinary life in order to reflect the experience of the new consciousness with fresh techniques. According to postmodernist writers the modernist belief that the artist can access autonomy by escaping from the outer reality is illusory. Postmodernists consider this idea as illusory because artists are the product of the society which they live in and the necessary materials of their works are provided by the culture which they are part of. With its revolutionary views, postmodernism rejects the idea of exile in modernism and deconstructs the borders between the high and low art. The words of Fiedler “cross the border, close the gap” indicates the determination of the postmodernist writers to unite the artwork and its social contexts (17). In short, postmodern art opens itself to the influence of any images just as popular culture does. Ihab Hassan outlines the differences between modernism and postmodernism as:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Logos	exhaustion,
silence art object, finished word	process, performance
distance participation	deconstruction
presence	absence
signified	signifier (123-4.)

Thanks to the deconstruction of the totalitarian systems and studies, and changing literary atmosphere, especially with the contributions of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, postmodernism has become an important aspect of contemporary literature. The

well known definition of postmodernism comes from Jean Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*:

Postmodernism has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, ...I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectic of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, ... I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards meta-narratives" (71-2).

In his book, Lyotard describes the postmodern condition as a certain state of science, which is based upon the "language games", and celebrates multiplicity (xxiv). That is, he celebrates the idea that in postmodernism there is no transcendental signified or ultimate truth but operating signifiers and changing realities. Decisions are based on the local conditions and they can be applied "in its own game" (Lyotard 73). Linda Hutcheon, a well-known postmodernist theorist, supports the idea of multiplicity in postmodernism seeing it as "dynamic and decentred" (Hutcheon 1989: 118). Ihab Hassan correctly claims, "as an artistic, philosophical, and social phenomenon, postmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional (open in time as well as in structure or space)" and it is also "disjunctive or indeterminate forms, a discourse of ironies and fragments, a 'white ideology' of absences and fractures, a desire of diffractions and invocation of complex, articulate silences" (283). Autonomy of the self, knowledge, history and presence are all decentred by the created images, and reality becomes something textualized:

Postmodernism is about language. About how it controls, how it determines meaning, and how we try to exert control through language. ...It's about race, class, gender, erotic identity and practice, nationality, age, ethnicity. It's about difference. It's about power and powerlessness, about empowerment... And that's just a little bit of what postmodernism [is] (Marshall 4).

Autonomy of the self and presence of perception in modernism are replaced by the pluralistic view of postmodernism. As Nairne writes, "my own feeling is that

this is a healthy state of affairs. It may be confusing for the art dealers, the art collectors, the art spectators, the art curators, and even for many artists and some art critics. But it reflects our society and the possibility of egalitarian pluralism (77).

Postmodernism in literature, engaging in the decentring of reality and language, results in a “playful, self reflexive and self parodying fiction” (Selden, 202). Authors like Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Umberto Eco, and John Fowles are the masters of this manner and practitioners of deconstruction. In their novels, these writers deconstruct the idea of an ultimate meaning and turn their writings into a web of signifiers, decentre the boundary between reality and fiction by emphasizing that reality is something fictitious, and in a conscious manner they celebrate multiplicity in their writings. Sarup explains the idea of multiplicity by claiming “we are now living in an era of implosion, of the collapse of previous differences, distinctions, and hierarchies. There has been a transformation from stable referents to 'floating signifiers'" (167).

Hutcheon defines the postmodernist novel through these words: “ the postmodernist novel puts into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we can conveniently label as liberal humanism: autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, ... uniqueness, origin” (1988:57). The postmodernist novel consciously deals with the fictionality of reality through the play of signifiers, parody and intertextuality. In his famous essay “The Literature of Exhaustion”, while defining the postmodernist novel as a rebirth, Barth proposes that the conventional novel writing has already been exhausted:

The simple burden of my essay was that the forms and modes of art live in human history and are therefore subject to used-upness, at least in the minds of significant numbers of artists in particular times and places: in other words, that artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work (205).

What he means by “exhaustion” is not “anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities” (64). The postmodernist novel ends the traditional motivation of novel writing for Barth and “one way to handle” traditional views is to “write a novel about it” (71). Waugh also supports these words by saying “far from dying, the novel has reached a mature recognition of its existence as writing, which can only ensure its continued viability in and relevance to a contemporary world” (1996: 19). Therefore, instead of the “mimesis of product” postmodern fiction deals with “the mimesis of process” (Hutcheon: 1984, 38-9).

The underlying philosophies of the postmodern novel have set up a fresh outlook for the “exhausted” novel tradition thanks to formal consciousness. Furthermore, postmodernism in literature gave birth to various types of novels engaging in these formal experimentations and metafiction is one of these outstanding types of postmodernist literature. Although metafiction is mostly associated with the postmodern novel and some critics even consider both the postmodernist novel and metafiction as the same, the case is not so. Metafiction came to prominence in the 70's through such authors as Raymond Federman, John Barth, Robert Coover, and William H. Gass. Postmodernist ideas have shaped metafiction, but this does not necessarily mean that each postmodern novel is also an example for metafiction. Each metafictional work self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction and reflects its own formal devices indicating its own construction process. Metafiction self-reflexively examines the process and the tools of fiction and at the same time deconstructs conventions of fiction and established usages of language. John Gardner openly reveals the difference by saying “post-modernism sets up a vague antithesis...seems to mean nothing but unconventional” but “metafiction is a more precise term...it means fiction that, both in style and theme, investigates fiction” (86-90).

### 2.3.0 Metafiction

Over the last two decades, especially with the emergence of postmodernist theories, a more comprehensive cultural and social interest in the problem of reality and how man constructs his experience of the world have dominated the idea of fiction. Increased social, political and cultural self-consciousness influenced the novel writing and parallel to this; contemporary novelists have tended to become more conscious of the theoretical issues engaged in forming fictions. The necessity for “such renewal and transformation came to be increasingly felt in the early decades of our century” with the coinage of metafiction. (Alter 159). Particularly around the 1960s, the realistic and modernist tendencies of the novel were challenged by the postmodernist novel in terms of both the form and the content. By doing so, postmodernist self-consciousness as a response to reality, has enabled the reader not to get answers about reality but to ask questions about it, which may be even more important. Self-consciousness of postmodernism reveals itself in metafiction in the best form. Through reflecting its own process of construction, metafiction not only asks questions about its own present condition but also about the experiences of man in the postmodern world. “Metafiction is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism” (Waugh: 1984, 21).

In the 70s, established terms like postmodern novel, new novel or anti-novel were not enough to explore the narrative innovations of several writers such as Robert Coover, John Barth, Raymond Federman, Donald Barthelme or Ronald Sukenick, so metafiction is applied to the experimental writings of these writers since these writers did not only deconstruct the dominant conventions of the previous understandings of the novel writing, but also overtly discussed the act of experimentation while performing it. Robert Scholes depicts the changes in fiction as, “in the twentieth century it has become increasingly apparent that realism itself, instead of being simply the truest reflection of the world, was simply a formal device like any other, a tool to be put aside when it had lost its cutting edge” (169).

In order to name the experimental writing of the 70s and early 80s and to set up new principles, various terminologies were designed by literary critics and writers such as “surfiction” by Raymond Federman, “introverted fiction” by John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury “self-conscious fiction” by Robert Alter, and “narcissistic fiction” by Linda Hutcheon (Waugh: 1984, 14). The richness of the terms describes “self-reflexive gestures in fictional writing which result from a variety of perspectives from which, and aspects under which, literary self-reflexivity has been examined” (Quendler 23). Although none of these terms could be accepted among the literary critics and could establish stabilized principles, with its self-conscious and self-reflective narrative innovations, the term metafiction achieved currency around the 70s since it “joins and has been joined by a number of seemingly related terms” and it is utilized to define the experimental writing of the contemporary fiction (Quendler 23). In 1970, in his famous essay entitled as “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction”, American critic and writer William Gass coined the term “metafiction” in order to define the self-conscious novel of the period (*FFL* 25).

According to Hawthorn’s designation “metafiction is...fiction about fiction- normally denoting the sort of novel or short story which deliberately breaks fictive illusions and comments directly upon its own fictive nature or process of composition” (21). Another literary critic and writer Linda Hutcheon, in her book entitled as *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, characterizes metafiction by saying “it has now been named, is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” and employs the word “Narcissistic” to “designate this textual self-awareness” (1). However the most comprehensive definition of the term metafiction was shaped by Patricia Waugh:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact <sup>5</sup>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

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<sup>5</sup> Something viewed as a product of human conception or agency rather than an inherent element



possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (1984:2).

These definitions point out that metafiction enables us to ask questions about reality and about its own fictional condition plus the position it has. Through self-reflexivity, metafiction reveals the awareness of its being an artefact. Robert Siegle delineates the term metafiction firstly by referring to the origin of the term:

What has happened to the shepherd's crook since the era before the Greek pastoral meant a literary idyll. Having admired the staff's sinuous curve back upon itself, the Romans took the Greek word for 'crook' and used it to mean to bend, bow, curve, and turn or turn around (offshoots meant a curved blade or pruning hook, pliant or flexible and other derivatives closer to bending or curving). That marks a loss of meaning, one must say, since all the herding functions of 'crook (by this date flectō) are lost, as well as the sense of its curving back on itself. Producing the word 'reflex' from this Latin root thus requires that the prefix re- be added to flectō to restore the sense of 'back upon itself.'...thereby making a word an effective illustration of how we cover over the figurative origins of language (2).

Metafiction as a discrete discursive phenomenon is a self-reflexive turn in a fictional work. Subsequently metafictional self-reflexivity becomes the medium for the self-presentation of the text and explicit revelation of the devices that construct the text:

Reflexivity uncovers a great deal about the whole narrative circuit - the codes by which we organize reality, the means by which we organize words about it into narrative, the implications of the linguistic medium we use to do so, the means by which the readers are drawn into narrative and the nature of our relation to 'actual' states of reality. Hence reflexivity is not a single-minded focus upon art for art's sake, and hardly a betrayal of the larger issues challenging the narrative artist, but rather is the most comprehensive fulfilment of those challenges that considers not only what it will say but the philosophical grounds and means for saying it (Siegle, 3).

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh sets up the frame of metafiction. According to Waugh, "the historical period we are living through has been singularly uncertain, insecure, self

questioning and crucially pluralistic”; thus metafiction “clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with, and breakdown of, traditional values” (6). Instead of creating the illusion of outside reality, metafictional self-reflexivity explores the problem of how man mediates his experience of the world ; therefore “metafiction pursues such questions through its formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book” (1984, 2). Metafiction shows that fictions are not real things and literary realism is “a tantalizing construction” (Alter x):

Novelists have discovered a surprising way out of their dilemmas and paranoia. Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems (Waugh: 1984, 19).

The rejection of the traditional forms of realism is a kind of liberation for metafictionists since this rejection frees the writers from the imposed limitations of realism such as the verisimilitude principle, true-to-life characterization, and plausibility in constructing the plot structure. As noted by Paul de Man “the self-reflecting mirror-effect by means of which a work of fiction asserts, by its very existence, its separation from empirical reality, its divergence, as a sign” and also “from meaning that depends for its existence on the constitutive activity of this sign, characterizes the work of literature in its essence” (17). In his book, *The Politics of Reflexivity*, to illustrate the division between the realistic tradition and metafictional tenets, Siegle draws the diagram (12):

Modes	Referential Focus	Reflexive Focus
Representational	“Realism”- making pictures assumptions of the “world”	Mechanics and of knowing and showing
Constitutive	“Irrealism”- various assumptions of interpreting, structuring, positing	Mechanics and types of “fabulation” <sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Fabulation is the term popularized by Robert Scholes to describe the large and growing class of mostly 20th century novels in a style similar to metafiction

As well as the postmodern questioning of the constructedness of reality and rejection of the traditional realistic forms, metafictionists explore that our knowledge of the world is attained through language and the images produced by the culture that we live in; in other words language constructs our sense of reality<sup>7</sup>. Sukenick explains that:

“Fiction constitutes a way of looking at the world... Realistic fiction presupposed chronological time as the medium of a plotted narrative, an irreducible individual psyche as the subject of its characterization, and, above all, the ultimate, concrete reality of things as the object and rationale of its description. In the world of post-realism, however, all of these absolutes have become absolutely problematic. The contemporary writer – the writer who is acutely in touch with the life of which he is part – is forced to start from scratch: Reality doesn’t exist, time doesn’t exist, and personality doesn’t exist” (41).

In this case metafictionists make use of the problematic relationship between the phenomenal world and language.

Besides realism, metafictional self-reflexivity openly challenges the modernist idea of isolation in the novel tradition. For Waugh “in modernist fiction the struggle for personal autonomy can be continued only through *opposition* to existing social institutions and conventions. This struggle necessarily involves individual alienation and often ends with mental dissolution” (10). The self-conscious approach of the modernist writers to art and to “other” reality, and their search for the innovative techniques to reflect the experience of the modern man failed to see man socially and culturally. Modernist writers declared that reality can be attained by the mind so it is subjective and the novel should reflect “mental reality” and they tried to give the sense of constructedness not through the form but through the consciousness (Faulkner 58). According to metafictionists, the modernist belief that the artist can gain an access to autonomy by escaping from the outer reality is illusory. While self-consciousness in metafiction reflects itself throughout the text and “the fictional content of the story is continually reflected by its formal existence as text”; metafiction “helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly ‘written’” (Waugh: 1984, 15-

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<sup>7</sup> Reality as a construction has been discussed in detail under the title of postmodernism

8). Modernist self-consciousness attracts attention to the aesthetic construction of the text but does “not systematically flaunt its own condition of artifice” (Alter x). It is obvious that metafictional self-reflexivity “does not involve the modernist concern with the mind as itself the basis of an aesthetic, ordered at a profound level and revealed to consciousness at isolated ‘epiphanic’ moments” (Waugh: 1894 23). From these quotations, it can be inferred that the modernist attempt to reach logos or a transcendental signified as the governing principle for the meaning in the deeper level of the mind, in short to represent inner reality, failed since this reality cannot explain the problematic relationship of language and the reality.

All these explanations indicate that metafiction separates its path from the previous novelistic tendencies and forms; and self-consciously reflects on its own nature as an artefact, its processes of production, and its potential effects on the reader. However, the self-reflexive devices in a metafictional text and how metafictional self-reflexivity blends the dimensions of self-referentiality in a text are debatable points among the literary critics and the writers of the last two decades of the twentieth century. Although as a further step self-reflexive devices are going to be discussed in detail by referring to the theories of William H. Gass and Raymond Federman, in the present condition a kind of theoretical background for self-reflexive devices in metafiction will be framed.

The term device here is closely related to the conventions of Russian Formalism. For Formalists the literary language is self-focused and it attracts attention to its own formal constituents, that is it focuses on the autonomous nature of literature or what they named literariness; therefore, the acceptable subject of literature is not the historical or cultural background in which it is created or a reflection of the life of its author. According to what is being said the subject of literature is what they called literariness or devices of the literary discourse and seemingly Formalists’ exclusion of all mimetic and expressive definitions of literature is valid for metafictionists. Shklovsky defines the function of these devices as “defamiliarization” or “making strange” “ostranenie” (14). The aim of a metafictional text is closer to the idea of defamiliarization. By applying self-

reflexive devices, metafictionists make outside reality strange and refresh our sense of reality and perception. Self-reflexivity lays bare the devices and defamiliarizes the fictional conventions; thus “the laying bare of literary devices in metafiction brings attention to those formal elements” of the text (Hutcheon 1975: 24). In this respect self-reflexiveness in metafiction is close to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect in the theatre. Brecht made use of various techniques, such as the direct address by actors to the audience, unnatural stage lighting, the use of song, and explanatory placards, which remind the spectator that the play is a representation not reality itself. Through different devices “not unlike that of Brecht’s alienation effect...self-reflection of narcissistic narrative works to prevent the reader’s identification with” conventional realism (Hutcheon: 1975, 49). It is obvious that the insistence on the formal consciousness makes clear that the hierarchical opposition between the form and content is decentred and the superiority of content is overthrown.

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Waugh delineates these devices as “frames” and illustrates reflexive frames with these words; “everything is framed, whether in life or in novels” and continues, “contemporary metafiction...foregrounds ‘framing’ as a problem examining frame procedures in the construction of the real world and of novels” (1984,28). In metafiction, these frames achieve defamiliarization effect by attracting attention not to the conventions of traditional realism but to the constructedness of reality and the renewed sense of everyday real world. “Contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins”; so “analysis of frames is the analysis...of the organization of experience...when applied to fiction it involves analysis of the formal...organization of novels” (Waugh: 1984, 30). In support of frames, Goffman states, “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles which govern events...and in our subjective involvement in them, frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements” (67).

Self-reflexive language is one of these frames in metafiction. Metafictional self-reflexivity systematically focuses on the problematic relationship of language and reality to reflect “awareness of ...linguistic constitution” (Hutcheon: 1975, 7). In metafiction, contrary to the language of the realistic conventions, signs do not refer to objects or situations that are presented as the outside reality. For realists everyday world is the only real world which they see or believe so the language of realism is metonymic, that is it represents the descriptions from the real world. Contrary to this view, “In literature, the language creates its object: it does not have to describe an object outside itself. Literary language has a kind of fundamental reality of its own...not the presence of the real objects but their absence” (Hutcheon: 1975, 93). Metafictionists underline that language produces reality and fiction shows the existence of multiple realities and alternative worlds; according to what is being said metafictionists “set out to show that reality is not something that is simply given... it is no longer experienced as an ordered and fixed hierarchy...but a web of multiple realities... reality is manufactured “(Waugh 51). Thereby metafictional self-reflexivity “provides a meta-commentary on fiction itself... construction of reality” (Quendler 16). For this reason metafiction is needed to describe the arbitrary relationship between the reality and the fiction and to abolish the referential potential of words. Through metafictional self-reflexivity, the Saussurean division between the langue, the language system, and parole, any individual utterance, is also decentred; and, any metafiction has become its own parole. Metafictional self-reflexivity both reveals and points out the arbitrariness of the linguistic system and the impossibility of objective reality.

Characterization is another self-reflexive device in metafictional texts. In view of the fact that metafictional texts construct multiple realities through linguistic signs it can be concluded that characters are the part of this process of construction. Since this device is going to be discussed through the theories of Gass and Federman in the following steps, only brief information about the metafictional characterization will be provided here. Within the frame of realistic conventions a linguistic sign is seen as a referent to the real world, so the productive nature of language is suppressed; as a result, characters are portrayed

according to the verisimilitude principle and they are depicted for the reader as real people:

Fictional characters, properly speaking, have no dimensions that pertain to spatial existence and fiction exists in thought, not in the world of extension, but we are in the habit of applying the term 'three-dimensional' metaphorically to characters that seem convincingly lifelike, a usage that may reflect something of the ambiguity with which we usually think about fictional characters (Alter, 6).

Metafiction is a kind of fiction that self-consciously points out the devices of fiction; as a result characters in metafiction are the reflections of the process of construction and of "their status as fictional entities" (Hutcheon: 1975, 51). Since the relationship between the sign and the reality is arbitrary and a sign refers to absence; according to Derrida, "characters are absent because they are linguistic signs" and "they are literally signs on a page before they are anything else...they do not exist, yet we know who they are"; consequently they are essential parts of the play of signifiers (Waugh: 1984, 118). What is important in such characterization is that the characters are the self-reflexive devices which self-consciously draw attention to their being linguistic entities. A character is the most outstanding self-reflexive device in a metafictional text since it has the knowledge of its fictional creation.

If a character is a linguistic sign referring to absence, the status of the author in metafictional texts is a good point for discussion. In realistic tradition all the conflicts in the novel are resolved through the dominant "voice of the omniscient, godlike author" but metafictional self-reflexivity "displays and rejoices in the impossibility of such a resolution and thus clearly reveals the basic identity of the novel as genre" (Waugh; 1984, 6). In realistic novels "readers identify" the work "with the narrator and experience with and through him" (Hawthorn 37). Akin to realism, in modernism, the isolated author and his/her consciousness become the structuring principle or the source of presence that shapes the reality. When it comes to metafiction the case is not so in view of the fact that metafictional texts reject the traditional figure of the author as the logos of the narration or transcendental signified or source of order. Like the characters in a

metafictional text, author becomes a linguistic entity. Metafictional self-reflexivity reveals this idea explicitly throughout the text and shows “not only that the author is a concept produced through previous and existing literary and social texts but that what is generally taken to be reality is also constructed and meditated in a similar fashion” (Waugh: 1984, 16); as a result, the metafictional text is the world of signifiers and in this arbitrary system of language the author becomes one of the signifiers. For Waugh “contemporary author, now the contemporary categorizer, is himself produced through the textual combinations” and “the antecedent of the first person narrator is not I but the story speaking of itself (Barth, 1). “ The symmetry between author and work as a translation of life into literature can no longer be maintained, namely both as regards the mimetic relation between the author (and his life) and the work, and as regards the temporal aspect of this relation” (Quendler 117). Through self-reflexivity the author discovers and verifies that “the language of the text produces him or her as much as he or she produces the language of the text” and the reader “is made aware...the author is situated in the text” (Waugh: 1984, 133).

The personal form of the author or subjective human source of the meaning was totally and explicitly discarded by Roland Barthes, one of the key figures first in structuralism and later post-structuralism, when he proclaimed “The Death of the Author” by his rejection of the author as the unique creator of presence, logos or meaning, so “it is obviously insufficient to repeat the empty slogans: the author has disappeared or God and man died a common death. Rather, we should re-examine the empty space left by the author’s disappearance” (Foucault 121). Both of the views put emphasis on the death of the traditional author and loss of a transcendental signified. In traditional conventions of realism, the author’s intentions are regarded as the source of the meaning given through the text. For Formalists what the text means obviously is not the same as what the author wants it to mean; therefore, Formalists concentrate on the formal devices that give “literariness” to text and create “defamiliarization” effect. In the practice of literary criticism, these views are supported by the structuralist approaches. Structuralists put forward that it is unfeasible to form a stable bond between language and the real world due to the arbitrary characteristic of the sign; that is



why the process of writing is so slippery; consequently it is not possible to create stable meanings which can be attributed to a god like author. Since the meaning is based upon the idea of difference in structuralism, the meaning is not present in the signifier; therefore the notion of authority with its emphasis on the ideas of presence, transcendental signified or logos is totally undermined:

It is from the beginning of this twentieth century on, with formalism, literary modernism, and structuralism that the issue of impersonality became more and more overwhelmingly relevant for literary theory, until the present postmodernist de-centring of the subject (Steven 32).

In metafiction the notion of authorship is associated with the idea of the disappearance or the death of the personal creator. Like post-structuralism, metafiction abandons centres and deconstructs oppositional hierarchies; as a replacement for these, it offers *différance*, which is the play of signifiers which is the fusion of delay and being different, and in consequence, the meaning of any written or spoken utterance is a play that has no end. The voice of the writing subject is replaced by the process of writing itself. When the play of signifiers begins, the ontological status of the author loses its presence so “our subject slips away...all identity is lost” (Barthes 118). In consequence for Barthes the death of the author “whom literary criticism has always cherished as the god-like and absolute referential origin of literature and creator of meaning, calls for an end of a criticism that attempts to decipher the text as an analogous search for the author” (Quendler 117). Metafictional self-reflexivity lays this consciousness bare and it turns author into a character. The loss of the transcendental signified or traditional author in metafiction corresponds to the evaluation of the notion of absolute.

As it is explored above, around the 60s, the understanding of the old reality, based on order, unity, presence and coherence was deconstructed and the new reality was explored through multidimensional structures and indefinite meanings resisting any systematic ordering. Reality no longer followed the theory of order; instead, multiplicity played the crucial role in making out one’s existence. Thus metafiction is not a copy of the empirical world, but rather a “continuation of that order, fiction-making process that is part of our normal life” (Hutcheon 89). Via self-reflexivity, metafictionists “pointedly ask us to

watch...what is involved technically and theoretically in the making, as the novel unfolds” (Alter xiii). Metafiction “by claiming that it is nothing but art, nothing but imaginative creation...becomes a vital: it reflects the human imagination, instead of telling a secondhand tale about what might be real in quite another world” (Hutcheon: 1975, 47). Self-reflexive metafiction is “fiction...which is a manifest fabrication about fabrications” (Alter 130). Self-reflexivity in metafiction mirrors the new stage of contemporary culture’s commitment to multiplicity knowing all about its own components and dynamics. In the following steps, by referring to the theories of William Gass and Raymond Federman, metafictional self-reflexivity is going to be discussed in detail.

### **2.3.1 William H. Gass**

William Gass is a novelist, essayist, philosopher, and finally an instructor at Washington University. He is the recipient of two awards “National Book Critics Circle Award” for Criticism and the “Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award” for his linguistic and literary studies. Among the contemporary fictionists, the philosopher, literary critic and novelist, William Gass is an outstanding figure who made use of language and the art of fiction as the subject of his theories and works. What is important about Gass is that he dealt with the disciplines of literary studies during the 1970s; consequently he has fused the use of language and the art of fiction in his literary and philosophical writings. “His fiction” and literary criticism “focus[es] on ...the role of the artist, the relationship between man and his fictions, and the barrier of symbols that man constructs to keep the world at arm’s length” (McCaffery 152). His first collection of essays, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, offers an introduction to his theory of metafiction and to his major concerns. The book has become a “kind of Bible for contemporary innovative writers, providing a convincing theoretical justification of the nonmimetic approach many of them are pursuing” (McCaffery 153). This part of the study intends to offer an introduction to Gass’ theory of metafictional self-reflexivity and, in consequence, to metafictional writing by taking *Fiction and the Figures of Life* into consideration. According to Gass:

Fiction is not form of meaning, nor a means of attaining wisdom. As a philosopher, to put on the other hat, I have a very

dim view of the ability of literature to give us knowledge. But fortunately, it seems to me, we can read literature without taking it seriously in that direction while seriously taking it in other directions. As long as you keep the work on the plane of making statements about the world, then the question becomes, 'Are these statements wise statements, true statements?' But in my view the integrity of the work is all that matters aesthetically. I mean, my books are made up. They are not about the world (qt in McCaffery 155).

And his definition of metafiction completes the idea of fiction:

I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of the work of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien...in which the forms of fiction serves as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions (*FFL* 24-5).

In these definitions, Gass attracts the attention to the point that metafiction is a "meta" form that reflects upon the distinction between fiction and reality and "what happens when fiction critically reflects on its fictionality is that it recasts the opposition between fiction and reality within the fictional reality" (Quendler 160). In the 60s, social, political and cultural diversities, particularly the rise of counterculture and the ethnic and sexual minorities of society challenged the established notions of reality and created "meta" forms in different studies. Parallel to this, metafiction "creates ordered fictive worlds through language ...and these fictions are indeed man's way of dealing with the discrete brute facts of chaotic reality" (Hutcheon: 1975, 88). In line with the experiences of the contemporary world, metafiction examines the changing realities and images of this current sensibility. Waugh's theory of meta-fiction is helpful in understanding Gass' declaration of "meta" reality. For Waugh, the "increased awareness of 'meta' levels of discourse and experience is partly a consequence of an increased social and cultural self-consciousness" and consequently "the simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and objective world is no longer tenable... 'meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers" (1984:3). Similar to Gass and Waugh, Alter emphasises the difference between the traditional realistic view and metafictional constructedness

by saying in “English criticism of the novel there has been a recurrent expectation that ‘serious’ fiction be an intent, verisimilar representation” and he continues with his definition of metafiction, “the kind of novel that expresses its seriousness through playfulness, that is acutely aware of itself as a mere structure of words” (ix). Then the discussion comes to the point how this fictive nature is divulged. Metafictional self-reflexivity is the principle which reveals the constructed nature of fiction and reality as well. In metafiction there is no autonomous referent directing readers to the outside world or reality and there is no transcendental signified creating absolute meaning. Metafictional self-reflexivity is “intended in various ways to draw our attention to fictional form as a consciously articulated entity rather than a transparent container of ‘real’ contents”; in other words “a self-reflexive text systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality” (Alter x). The mimesis of the outside world in realistic tradition is transformed into the “mimesis of process” in metafiction and this process is mirrored overtly by metafictional self-reflexivity (Hutcheon: 1975:5).

According to Gass the major self-reflexive device in metafiction is the language. Gass puts the literary language at the centre of his metafictional studies since the constructedness of reality can be reflected only through the play of signifiers:

[Words] have a reality far exceeding the things they name...When we think about our own life, it's surrounded by symbols. That's what we experience day and night...In the old days we might have supposed that the daffodil was much more interesting than the word daffodil, but I simply would deny that. The word daffodil is much more interesting than daffodils (*FFL* 2).

It can be inferred from the point here that language is the key indicator of metafictional self-reflexivity. A novel does not stand for or represent the outside world since “there are no descriptions in literature, there are only constructions” (*FFL* 27). The worlds, characters, incidents depicted in a work are “imaginatively possible ones” that is they are all creations of the words not outside reality (*FFL* 9). In this case, words in fiction operate differently since they are not referents to ultimate reality outside of the textual system. This view is closer to Derrida's

affirmation that "outside the text and that meaning and reference must be constituted from within the system as functions of différance" (1976, 158) and "nothing beyond it" (Gass 8). As noted by Gass, instead of trying to find out the literary objects outside of the text, one should concentrate on how words function in metafiction seeing "there are no descriptions in fiction, only constructions (*FFL* 17). Similar to the structuralist views, each metafictional text is a system, parole of its own construction, and like a formalist one should deal with the operations of words to uncover the literariness of the text. According to Gass words in fiction "need not be at all like any real ones" (*FFL* 9). Through these words he "asks his audience to consider carefully the pure fictive, constructed nature of the work of literature" and "to observe how the writer takes language out of its daily operation, cuts it off from its ordinary functions, and transforms it into the artificiality of fiction" (McCaffery 158). Thanks to self-reflexive language, metafiction is freed from the verisimilitude principle and it is allowed to reveal its status as an artefact. What is left is to concentrate on the construction of the metafictional text under the guidance of the self-reflexive language.

To make Gass' notion of language more understandable, it will be better to turn to Saussure's and Derrida's implications on language. Derrida applied the term writing to the "entire field of linguistic signs, seeing the graphic signifier as no more exterior than the phonic, where both are representations of the signified"; but, the distinction of signifier and signified is like "that of speech and writing in that each is an imposed structure based upon the presupposition of internal elements of language" (Currie 9). Saussure underlined that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, there is no natural bond between them, and there is also no natural or necessary relationship between the sign and the reality to which it refers; therefore, language is not capable of depicting the real world. As for Derrida there is no autonomous reality outside of the text or ordering principle for the absolute meaning, language is the constant play of différance. Waugh considers the language of fiction as the medium of metafictional play for "the construction of an alternative reality by manipulating the relation between a set of signs" (1984:35).

Like Russian Formalists, Gass underlines that the subject of literature and literary studies is literariness. Gass articulates that words of the practical life become the parts of the language game in metafiction and “the referential function of the words disappears” since “there is nothing out there to which they refer” (McCaffery 159). In *FFL* Gass explicitly points out that words act like signifiers that reflect upon themselves and at the same time function as the signifiers of other signifiers without reaching a transcendental signified. In metafiction “the sign remains; it sings, and we return to it again and again” (Gass 31). As a consequence of this, biographical, cultural or scholarly aspects are all dethroned by the constructions of the literary language.

Different from the other metafictional theorists, in *Fiction and Figures of Life*, Gass offers the idea of metaphor as another device for self-reflexivity and he “extends his analysis of the function of words in a literary text with his brilliant discussion of the construction of metaphors” (McCaffery 163). Gass’ notion of metaphor is not similar to that of Roman Jakobson. As a structuralist Jakobson thinks of language as a system of signs and analyzes how these signs interact within the system. Saussurean syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes (discussed in the Structuralism part) constitute the basis for the exploration of both metonymy and metaphor in Jakobson’s theory. Language functions through the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. Within the language system, metonymy works on the syntagmatic axis and metaphor manoeuvres on the paradigmatic one. The syntagmatic axis works on the contiguous elements that are next to each other; in other words, elements related by association such as “the Crown” is related to “King”. The paradigmatic axis works on the elements that are substitutes for each other such as “the Light” may be used as a substitute for “Truth”. Gass, in his theory of metaphor, challenges this well-known application and establishes his own theory as a self-reflexive device that provides alienation effect or defamiliarization effect in metafiction. The defamiliarization effect of metaphoric language in metafiction alienates the reader from the realities of the outside world or automatized experiences of that world and also automatized reading experiences. Instead of all these habitual traits it attracts the attention to the words and their operation in the process of the construction and new contexts. At the core

of his metafictional language there lies re-evaluation of metaphor because Gass considers a text as “monumental metaphors” (*FFL* 68). Contrary to representational language, metaphoric language indicates the process:

The metaphor creates new contexts which engender new subsenses (or connotations) that cannot be reiterated adequately along proportional relations. This procedural character of the metaphor and its creation of new contexts (which Gass views as the result of a semantic violation) draw attention to the self-referential aspect of language. An important implication of Gass’ argument is that the metaphor thereby dissociates itself from an impetus towards truth. Rather than inferring a systematic closure in the guise of a substitution, the manifoldness of senses to which the metaphor adheres undermines an assertion of its truth value and thereby relativizes meaning and truth as a function of the interacting sense and subsenses, denotation and connotations (Quendler 124).

This view explains Gass’ idea that “there are no descriptions in fiction, only constructions” (*FFL* 17). Metaphors are not something used as an ornament for their emotional or colourful effects but they are “very much like the form and method of the novel” and construction of this form self- reflexively creates alienation effect by drawing a line between the reality and the process itself since “the novel is a metaphor we move at length through, the construction of a mountain with its view, a different, figured history to stretch” beside our own, a brand-new ordering both of the world and our understanding” (*FFL* 69). Metaphoric language is the medium. The metafictionist “is ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows...that his business is to make one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is master - language” (*FFL* 24). Thus metaphoric language constantly refers to its status as a medium of artefact and reminds the reader that they are experiencing a new reality composed of words and at the same time acts as the reminder of the constructed nature of metafiction.

In the vein of the self-conscious nature of the language, characterization props up the metafictional self-reflexivity. Gass defines the lifelikeness principle in traditional characterization as, “ (1) a noise, (2) a proper name (3) a complex system of ideas, (4) a controlling conception, (5) an instrument of verbal

organization, (6) a pretended mode of referring, and (7) a source of verbal energy” (FFL 44). To make the case more comprehensible, he explores these points by referring to Henry James’s Mr. Cashmore of *The Awkward Age*:

(1) he is always a ‘mister’...His name (2) locates him, but since he exists nowhere but on the page (6), it simply serves to draw other words toward him (3), or actualize others, as in conversation (7), when they seem to proceed from him, or remind us of all that he is an emblem of (4), and richly interact with other, similarly formed and similarly functioning verbal centres (5) (FFL 44).

What he is trying to say is that Mr. Cashmore is not a real person living in real surroundings: “he is not an object of perception, and nothing whatever that is appropriate to persons can be correctly said of him” (FFL 44). Metafictional self-referentiality reveals the awareness of the fictive nature of the characters, that is consciousness of their being only linguistic entities without real life correspondence. Characters in metafiction “are incorporeal essences and definitions which are assigned a name and whose physical characteristics are limited to the sounds, shape and pitch, and rhythm of the words out of which they are created” while “we often think we can visualize characters and empathize with them much as we can with our next-door neighbour” (McCaffery 156).

Derrida, in his analysis of the Saussurean sign, calls attention to the idea of absence. The meaning of a sign is what the sign is not; therefore language is not a stable structure as the classical Structuralists considered. Here Derrida mentions the failure of the Saussurean theory in search of a transcendental signified by underlining that the meaning is never self-present in the sign since the process of signification is nothing other than a network of differences. In fiction characters are like “empty canvas”; in other words, signs referring to absence and their linguistic existence can be created only through words and can survive only within the borders of the text. For Gass “such efforts to see fiction as a mirror of or window into reality miss the fundamental point that characters and events in fiction are the product of *aesthetic design* and that, consequently, the ‘truth function’ of fiction is highly questionable” (McCaffery 157). Hence characters of a metafictional text are not realistic, social or psychological selves but linguistic



ones. In metafictional texts a character is “only a voice, having knowledge of its existence only, it appears, when it utters... language which is the totality of existence”; for that reason a character has no life reality outside of the text and “they are trapped within the script” (Waugh: 96, 118). To indicate this consciousness; in other words, to provide alienation effect, characters in metafiction constantly reflect their fictive and linguistic natures overtly to remind the reader that what they are experiencing is not reality but constructedness of reality.

In order to designate the assumptions about the characters, reality and the view of art discussed in this part, it will be useful to see McCaffery’s analysis of Gass’ metafiction:

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	REALITY	PROMISE OF ART
Personal temerity	Threatening; destructive	Linguistic imaginative bravery
Sense of personal isolation and imprisonment	Presence of walls, barriers and objects which reflect only the self (windows, mirrors)	Symbolic interaction with others via speech, gestures, imagination
Fear of sexual and imaginative impotence	Emotional and physical coldness; mocking emblems of sexuality and castration	Proof of potency via imaginative and artistic construction
Obsession with bodily process and debilitating effects of time	Entropic	Triumph of spirit over body; establishment of permanence and beauty
Fears internal conflict and sense of emotional chaos	Disordered and ambiguous	Creation of balance, order, harmony

(184).

Table 1 An analysis of Gass’ fiction

Both the definition and the exploration of metafiction engaging in such principles claim that metafictional texts consciously work on the idea of self-reflexiveness to indicate the fictive nature of art and reality. Gass’ suppositions on metafiction give way to the idea that “the artist’s ability to create a self-contained world and then retreat into it is a metafictional theme” (McCaffery 171). In his

*Fiction and the Figures of Life* he praises the contemporary notion of fiction as follows:

The art of the novel is now a mature art, as constantly the source of that gratification found in the purest and profoundest contemplation as any art has ever been, and the prospect of a comprehensive aesthetic that will provide for its understanding and its judgement is grand. The novel is owed this (*FFL* 26).

### **2.3.2 Raymond Federman**

Raymond Federman, born in France (1928), is a literary critic, a novelist, an essayist, a lecturer, a dramatist and finally a poet. He has published five volumes of poems, four books of criticism on Samuel Beckett, three collections of essays, numerous articles, essays, translations, and ten novels. He has received various literary awards for his experimental novels such as National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, New York State Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for fiction and his novels have been translated into German, Serbian, Italian, Hebrew, French, Hungarian, Polish, Chinese, Dutch, Rumanian, Greek, Portuguese, Japanese, and are soon to appear in Finnish and Turkish. As an influential literary figure he held various central positions. From 1973 to 1976, he was a member of the Board of Directors of The Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, then served as Co-Director of The Fiction Collective, in 1995 he was one of the judges for the American Awards for Literature and he is currently on the Board of Directors of The Fiction Collective Two. He is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Contemporary Fiction Writers*, *Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*, *World Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Contemporary Authors' Autobiographies*. What is important about him is that with his definition of "surfiction", the term coined by Federman to define metafictional texts, he designates the principles and formal devices of self-referential metafictional texts. In this part of the study, Federman's assumptions on the metafictional devices and how self-reflexivity operates in metafiction are going to be explored by referring mostly to his famous book of criticism *Critifiction*, a collection of postmodern essays, and from time to time by referring to his well-known book *Surfiction*.

Federman, in the beginning of his book, entitled as *Surfiction*, labels the contemporary novel as “surfiction” and defines it as:

The kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination and not in man's distorted vision of reality - that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality [...]. Just as Surrealists called that level of man's experience that functions in the subconscious SURREALITY, I call that level of man's activity that reveals life as a fiction SURFICTION. Therefore, there is some truth in that cliché which says that "life is fiction," but not because it happens in the streets, but because reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in fictionalized version (1975: 7-8).

In this definition Federman calls attention to two concepts; reality and fiction, then chooses the term surfiction not because it imitates reality but because he is searching for the kind of novel that depicts the fictionality of reality. He makes use of prefix “sur-” as it is applied in sur-real. Federman puts the type of experiences that disclose life itself as a fiction in this category, similar to the Surrealist insistence on naming the individual’s subconscious experience as Surreality. Like Gass, Federman emphasizes the constructedness of reality and favours the destruction of the conventional techniques associated with realism. In view of the fact that in modern linguistics the relationship between the language and the world is arbitrary and a sign is not a referent to any object within the outside world, furthermore the relationship between them is based upon Derrida’s idea of absence; the notions of the mimetic forms in art are not even representations of realism. Federman underlines that we can get knowledge of the world only through the language and the cultural images; related to this, language in metafiction self-reflexively helps us reconstruct multiple realities. By consciously referring to the processes of fiction making, metafiction both displays and insists on the arbitrariness of the linguistic system and the impossibility of getting into presence or ultimate truth. Federman celebrates the failure of traditional forms of reality as a medium of freedom in metafiction; “to write a fiction today is...to create DIFFERENCE, and not to pretend that fiction is the same thing as reality” and “ metafiction is the only fiction that still means something today, is the kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction beyond its own limitations... challenges the tradition... renews man’s

distorted view of reality... reveals man's playful irrationality" (Federman: 1975, 37).

Definition of the surfiction takes the discussion one step further and brings the question of "creating meaning" to the surface. Metafiction "is made of understanding which for most of us means primarily words - only words" so "if one admits from the start ...that no meaning precedes language, but that language creates meaning as it goes along...as it progresses, then writing will be a mere process of letting language do its tricks" (Federman:1993, 38). In metafiction, writing turns into what "to produce...to progress" and to create fiction "is to transform reality, and to some extent even abolish reality and especially the notion that reality is truth" (Ibid). Engaging in creating meaning, metafiction eliminates all the forms of duplicities especially "that double-headed monster which for centuries subjected us to a system of ethical and aesthetical values based on the principles of good and bad, true and false, beautiful and ugly" (Federman 1993:39). Instead of all these notions, metafiction will "simply BE and its primary purpose will be to unmask its own fictionality, to expose the metaphor of its own fraudulence... [Not] any longer to pass for reality, for truth, or beauty" (Ibid). In meaning production, the connection between the traditional view of reality and fiction is brought to an end, as a result metafiction:

will no longer be regarded as a mirror of life, as a pseudorealistic document that informs us about life, nor will it be judged on the basis of its social, moral, psychological, metaphysical, or commercial value, but only the basis of what it is and what it does as an autonomous art form" (Federman:1993, 39).

In his theory, Federman fuses the structuralist view of the novel as a self-sufficient system with the formalist view of literariness; that is, formal devices which create defamiliarization effect. The formal devices and the consciousness of the form in metafiction are revealed through self-reflexivity and the manoeuvres of self-reflexive devices. Federman composes a manifesto for self-reflexive devices in metafiction under four propositions.

As for the first assumption, Federman offers “the reading of fiction”. In this very first step, he underlines that the traditional notion of reading activity and intended effects of this process should be abolished. Federman depicts the act of conventional reading as a “boring, fixed and restrictive” system of reading which means “starting at the top of the first page, and moving from left to right, top to bottom, page after page to the end in a consecutive prearranged manner” (Federman:1993, 40). Federman argues that the activity of reading is governed by the conventional rules of printing, book marking, unity, and continuity of words. All the rules and principles of printing “must be forced to change as a result of the changes in the writing of a story... in order to give the reader a sense of free participation in the writing/reading process, in order to give the reader an element of choice in the ordering of the discourse” (Federman: 1993, 40).

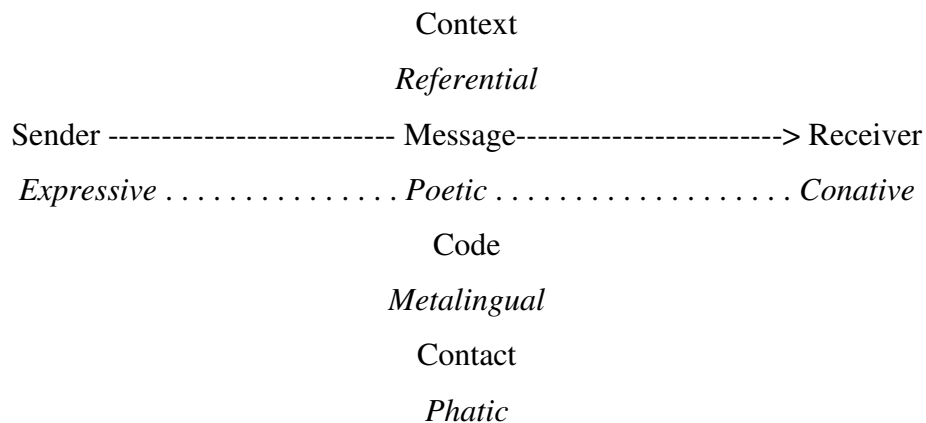
The conventional syntax reduces “the multiplicity of words and controls their energy and their violence”; furthermore “it fixes words into a place, a space, and prescribes an order to them. Federman finds out the solution in the new page-set-up and typography:

Words, sentences, paragraphs (and of course the punctuation) and their position on the page and in the book must be rethought and rewritten so that new ways (multiple and simultaneous ways) of reading these can be created. And even the typographical design of the pages and the numbering of these pages must be reinvented. The space itself in which writing takes place must be transformed (Federman 1993:41).

The aim of this transformation is to alienate the reader from the traditional way of looking at a page and to achieve defamiliarization effect to make them recognize multiplicity in writing/reading. For Federman in order to create these effects, self-reflexive ways should be developed:

The page, but also the book made of pages - must acquire new dimension, new shapes, and new relations in order to accommodate new writing. Pages no longer need to be the same uniform rectangular boxes. It is within this transformed typography of writing, from this new paginal syntax rather than grammatical syntax that the reader will discover his freedom in relation to language (Ibid).

Furthermore, in his first proposition Federman analyses the use of language and strongly criticizes the conventional understanding of language as a medium. As for Federman, language is not the referent for the objects in the real world or the medium of the unified story which has a certain magnitude. The language itself is forgotten as being auditory or visual in the novel because of the intended reading activity. In his further explanation of the proposal, Federman's idea of language can be analysed through Jakobson's communication model:



The traditional novel dealt with the mimetic or referential function of the work of art. With the coming of structuralism the attention is directed to the metalingual function of language. The metalingual function includes the codes and devices which govern the meaning and the structure. Seeing the language of metafiction as another "meta" system, Hjelmslev develops "metalanguage" by taking Jakobson's model into consideration. Metalanguage "is a language that functions as a signifier to another language and this other language thus becomes its signified" (4). Federman combines this innovative view of language with the idea of typography in order to reveal metalanguage. "If we are to make of the novel an art form" we must "raise the printed word as the medium and therefore where and how it is placed on the page makes a difference in what the fiction will be for the reader" ; in other words, writers " must render language concrete and visible so that it will be more than just a functional thing that supposedly reflects reality"; that is " the real medium will be the printed words as they are presented on the page" (Federman:1993, 42). Language in metafiction should be self-reflexive to explore overtly the idea of this new sense of syntax.

As for the second proposition, Federman offers “the shape of fiction”. In this assumption Federman deconstructs the established notion of the plot structure, especially compulsory linearity, in constructing the story. The plot is no longer the events of a linear or sequential outline and it should not obey the logical transitions or the system of cause and effect. The reason is that:

If life and fiction are no longer distinguishable one from the other, nor complementary to one another, and if we agree that life is never linear, that in fact life is always discontinuous and chaotic because it is never experienced in a straight line or an orderly fashion, then similarly linear, chronological, and sequential narration is no longer possible (Federman 1993: 42).

Metafictional rejection of the conventional plot structure is closely related to Formalists’ division between the fabula and the *sjuzet*. Metafictionists are not interested in the fabula/story but the linguistic arrangement of the text/*sjuzet*. In a text, the *sjuzet* can create defamiliarization effect since it refers to the formal devices such as the manner, linguistic plays, paging and verbal effects that are used to convey the fabula. These formal devices contribute much to the metafictional self-reflexivity:

Words, phrases, sequences, scenes, spaces, word-designs, sections, chapters, etc. must become digressive from one another - digressive from the element that proceeds and the element that follows. In fact, these elements will not only wander freely in the book and even be repeated, but in some places they will occur simultaneously. This will offer multiple possibilities of rearrangement in the process of reading” (Ibid).

Federman through these words offers a new type of arrangement by destroying the conventional elements associated with the book form and also by changing the way words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters and punctuation appear on the page so as to expose the possibilities of narrative to create an interactive experience that would attract attention to the status of the book as an artifice. The self-reflexive discourse in metafiction points out that the language and paginal arrangement of the fiction are “no longer progressing from left to right, top to bottom, in a straight line, and along the design of an imposed plot”; instead it will follow “the contours of the writing itself as it takes shape within the space of the page” in other words it

“will circle around itself, create new and unexpected movements and figures”, consequently, the fiction is:

no longer acting as a mirror being dragged along the path of reality... [it] will now reproduce the effects of the mirror acting upon itself. It will not be a representation of something exterior to it; it will be a self-representation...will be self-reflexive...rather than being the stable image of daily life...will be in a perpetual state of redoubling upon itself in order to disclose its own life –THE LIFE OF FICTION...thus fiction will become the metaphor of its own narrative progress, and will establish and generate itself as it writes itself (Federman: 1993, 43).

For the third proposition, Federman presents “the material of fiction”. To begin with, Federman highlights the traditional position of an author whose experiences are glorified and considered simultaneous with the writing process. The conventional fiction is based upon the experiences of the one who writes it, consequently the author is perceived as the source of the meaning; in other words, completely the representation of the “presence” or “the ordering principle”. In this case, the very material of the metafiction is language and there are no limits beyond the potential of language. The absence of the traditional author is closely related to the idea of paginal syntax. In *S/Z*, Barthes’ distinction between the “lisible” (the readerly and the “scriptible” (the writerly) is quite similar to the division between the conventional novel and metafiction (1975: 3). In this separation the word lisible refers to the work and scriptible refers to the text. The conventional novels are lisible; they are already known and consumed passively as the representations of the exterior reality. In lisible works the voice of the author is considered as the ultimate signified who creates the meaning; the story is based upon linearity, characters are life-like, and the experiences of the characters are realistically drawn. In contrast, metafiction falls under the category of scriptible, since the scriptible points out the process. The scriptible “texts” are the web of the signifiers without signifieds. There is no ultimate meaning, an ultimate voice, a linear structure or realistic representation; but the scriptible text allows the reader “to gain access to the magic of signifier, to the pleasure of writing” (Barthes: 1975, 4). Scriptible texts are not closed systems which carry out pre-determined meanings; as a substitute they draw attention to the language and the operations of



the language; that is text's plurality. In "From Work to Text" Barthes lists differences between the work and the text by saying "the work is a substance...a text is a methodological field"; secondly "what constitutes a text is its subversive force in respect of the old classifications"; and thirdly "text for the very reason that it knows itself as a text... is experienced only in an activity of production"; and finally "the work closes on a signified... is then the object of a literal science" but "the text practices the infinite" signifiers, so "the text is plural...[a]weave of signifiers" (Barthes: 1975, 156-163) . "Since writing means filling a space (blackening page), in those spaces where there is nothing to write, the writer can, at any time, introduce material" such as "quotations, pictures, charts, diagrams, designs, illustrations, doodles, lists, pieces of other discourses, etc" not related to the story he is inventing so there is only arbitrariness and freedom in scriptible texts (Federman: 1993, 44).

If a fiction is not narrating a life-like story but only filling a space then the characters are not the elements of this so-called stable, predetermined linearity. As a result " the people of fiction, the fictitious beings will no longer be called characters who carry with them a fixed personality, a set of social and psychological attributes" (Federman:1993, 44). Metafictional characters will be the explicit reflections of their being changeable, "irrational, nameless, unnameable, playful, volatile, unpredictable", especially the product of language (Ibid). This does not necessarily mean that they are only like puppets without realistic representations. Quite the opposite; their being linguistic entities will be more complex, more authentic, and "more true to life in fact, because (since life and fiction are no longer distinguishable) they will not appear to be what they are: imitations of real people; they will be what they are: word-beings" (Ibid). While the hero or protagonist of a conventional novel who is blessed with a proper name, an age, parental ties, a nationality, a past, and a social role functions within all these predetermined conditions, the "creatures" in metafiction are busy with their own creations only out of language:

This creature will participate in the fiction only as a grammatical being...Made of linguistic fragments often disassociated from one another, this word-being will be

impressive, amoral, irrational and irresponsible in the sense that it will be detached from the real world, but entirely committed to the fiction in which it will find itself, aware only of the role it has to play as a fictional element (Federman: 1993, 44).

It is obvious that metafiction is no longer a social or historical writing trying to represent the real life and the real people. The readers will not associate themselves with the characters in metafiction; instead they will take part in the act of creation. This alienation will be provided by the self-reflexive linguistic entities that are constantly commenting on their fictive natures or that are conscious of their grammatical functions.

The fourth proposal is about “the meaning of fiction”. The former propositions strongly highlight that metafiction celebrates disorder, deconstruction and incoherency on purpose. Since the meaning is not present in the sign and it refers to absence, metafiction does not attempt to be truthful, realistic or certain presence for the idea of creating the transcendental signified. Metafiction is self-consciously digressive, illogical, incoherent and non-linear so as to deconstruct the idea of traditional plot structure. As a result, the metafictional text “will not have a beginning, middle and end, it will not lend itself to continuous and totalizing form of” writing/reading and “will refuse resolution and closure”, will “remain an open discourse” (Federman: 1993, 46). Metafiction, unlike a conventional novel, is no longer a manipulation of an author and the authorial point of view. Creating meaning in metafiction is not a passive process attributed to an authorial principle based upon the idea of presence; instead it is the freedom of creating multiple alternatives. The meaning in metafiction is not the experiences of the writer and the writer is no longer a prophet, a foreseer, a philosopher or a sociologist or the voice of an omniscient or omnipotent creator. In the case of metafiction, language functions independently of the mind. In the process of enunciation the presence of the person is not needed. "It is language which speaks, not the author", so “I” refers to a linguistic sign that is absence; in this sense “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin...where our subject slips away...where all identity is lost ...the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death (Barthes 118-9). The “I” in the text has nothing to do with the individual mind; “language knows a ‘subject’, not a

‘person’” (120). As it is put forward by Barthes, “the death of the author” is the celebration of the multiplicity.

Abridged to non-sense and non-knowledge, the world is no longer something known or something expressible, but it should be experienced. Metafiction cuts its ties from the verisimilitude, invents its own knowledge by claiming its own status as an artefact and affirms its own autonomy by rejecting the kind of knowledge that is pre-determined, received and commended by the conventions. “What replaces knowledge of the world and of man is the act of searching within the fiction itself for the implications of what it means to write fiction” and this becomes “an act of self-reflection, and therefore fiction becomes the metaphor of its own narrative progress. It establishes itself as it writes itself” (CF 10). A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically “flaunts its own condition of artifice and by doing so probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality [...]” (CF 11). Metafictional self-reflexivity speaks out this new consciousness and directs its energy to the process of construction and the revelation of the progress:

A fully self-conscious novel, however, is one in which from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention (SF 12).

In short, the self-reflexive metafiction challenges mimetic representation and mimetic realism, therefore the text becomes a performance. As a result, explicit self-reflexivity releases energies into the language of fiction and the idea of construction; by doing so it frees the fiction from fixed desires and stable points of reference. These devices are explored throughout the theory part of the study but it will be better to sum them up. According to Rudiger Imhof’s definition, metafictional self-reflexivity can be disclosed through:

- ☞ Alternative beginnings and endings
- ☞ Lack of an obvious, conventional plot
- ☞ Diffused episode
- ☞ Minimal development of character

- ☞ Detailed surface analysis of objects
- ☞ Many repetitions
- ☞ Various experiments with vocabulary, punctuation and syntax
- ☞ Variations of time sequence
- ☞ Topographical alterations
- ☞ Self-conscious narrators
- ☞ Self-reflexive metaphors (19).

All these principles are referring to the end of the two myths about fiction: the myth of the author as the creator of the work and the myth of originality; that is the work of art is true and original (*CF* 56). Thus, metafictional self-reflexivity reveals its innermost secrets and draws attention to its own medium of language and no longer presents what is exterior to it. Disputing the traditional devices such as the linear plot-structure, the omniscient narrator, creating alienation effect and through reminding its being an artefact, not a mimetic representation, metafiction celebrates the birth of a new fiction.

In the following chapters the term metafictional self-reflexivity will be evaluated in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* and William Gass' *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* by referring to the metafictional approaches especially to the theories of William Gass and Raymond Federman.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN WILLIAM GASS' *WILLIE MASTERS'* *LONESOME WIFE*

Around the 60s, two neophyte writers John Gardner and William Gass published novels in two opposite directions. While Gardner was producing traditional and realist novels, William Gass named his antirealist novels metafiction. In this duel, Gass supported the idea that the realm of fiction is not the place for social crusades, underlining that there is no reliable truth inherent in fiction and what is produced is only an artefact. In other words, what Gass means by metafiction is creating a literary object which has a life of its own and through which the reader experiences the process of construction. In this respect, Gass' *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (from now on it is going to be referred as *WMLW*), first published *Tri-Quarterly* in 1968, is a good starting point for the discussion of both metafictional devices and the theories of Gass on metafiction. Why *WMLW*? Because of its “shattering conventional expectations about how we read or how a work of fiction should be organized, *Willie Masters* is an especially clear and ambitious representation of a metafictional work - and a virtual casebook of literary experimentalism as well” (McCaffery 171).

In *WMLW*, Gass exhibits the pleasures of language by building a kind of parallelism between the text and the body of Babs Masters, the lonesome wife of the text, and carries this analogy a further step by analysing this parallelism through the relationship of a woman and her lover, actually the text and the reader; because of this reason *WMLW* is “multidimensional; it grows in one direction without leaving everything else behind it. It doubles back on itself, but it also spirals ahead” (Holloway ix). As it is multidimensional for many reasons, in order to understand Gass and his work *WMLW* one should catch the visual energies and the structural intricacy of the words on the printed page.

Characterisation in the text is one of the key metafictional elements. In conventional novels, authors ponder over their characters with a social, historical, psychological and political background to make readers believe that these “men and women in the novels really lived in the way that they are presented” (Watt 22). In metafictional texts true-to-life characterization is replaced by the characters functioning as linguistic signs living only within the borders of a text. As a result “the people of [metafiction], the fictitious beings will no longer be called as characters who carry with them a fixed personality, a stable set of social and psychological attributes” such as a name, a gender, a condition, a profession, a social identity (Federman 44).

A few characters appear in *WMLW* and not much background is provided for the reader. *WMLW* is typical of Gass’ characterization since the major character Babs, Lady Language, is a character who self-consciously reflects upon the fictional world that she finds herself in the act of creating. She is the source of self-reflexivity, who overtly declares that “I used to write the scripts myself” (Olive Section). In *WMLW* “not only do characters verbally construct their own realities; they are themselves verbal constructions, words not beings” (Waugh 26). In the text, the readers are told about Willie Maters, the husband, his wife Babs and her lover Phil Gelvin; however, not much background is given about the characters. In the text, Gass builds a text in which Babs, Lady Language, consciously constructs both her own identity as a linguistic entity and at the same time the text. All the characters exist within the borders of the text as signs and transform the text into a reflexive play of signifiers; because of this reason, it is better to name the book an example of Barthes’ scriptible text since “the text is [a] plural...weave of signifiers” (Barthes 163).

Secondly, the text has no conventional linear plot structure and well-developed story which includes causal events in a certain sequential movement that has a certain magnitude. *WMLW* is a fictional construction including only signifiers without a certain meaning creating a centre behind them. Similar to Federman’s view, Gass mentions that fiction cannot be a mirror to a reality exterior to itself. In defiance of traditional traits Federman claims that “the shape

and order of fiction will not result from an imitation of the shape and order of life, but rather from the formal circumvolutions of language as it wells up from the conscious” (*SF* 11). In view of the fact that there is not a story that has a certain beginning, middle and end readers cannot follow the development of the events. The aim is to attract the attention to the words not to a story or to the characters. By doing so *WMLW* firstly creates a defamiliarization effect as it does not follow the traditional, automatized or habitual understanding of the novel and the reading process. Abandonment of the habitual activity of reading so as to discover new methods for reading at the same time generates the Brechtian alienation effect. The words in metafiction are not the images of the world that dominates the readers’ mind, so the emotional involvement of the readers with the text is prevented by the view that what they are witnessing is not the illusion of the world but the words.

In *WMLW* Lady Language, Babs is involved in the physical charms of language so much as to seduce a new lover, Gelvin/the reader of this experimental “essay-novella” since she is not happy with her negligent husband/reader; consequently “events occur while Babs makes love to a particularly unresponsive lover Gelvin” (McCaffery 172). This parallelism frames the central metaphor of the text. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, Gass introduces an alternative notion of metaphor. As stated by Gass, “metaphor” is a self-reflexive device that alienates the reader from the realities of the outside world or automatized experiences of that world plus automatized reading experiences. For Gass a metafictional work arises from a verbal centre, “a metaphor”, and as soon as a metafictionist “exposes a symbolic centre, he has finished the work”. A metafictionist starts his text with a metaphor and develops his metaphor by applying various metafictional devices; moreover, he lets his text build up itself. Therefore “spiralling or tunnelling out from” the metafictional metaphor, the metafictional text gains an “intensive process of organic growth outward from the centre” and “as opposed to linear development” this movement shapes the text (Holloway 12). In *WMLW*, with the help of the central “love metaphor”, “we lose our conventional distance” since “Babs demands readers’ undivided attention, as a jealous lover keeps her partner on a short leash” (Gass: 1984; 32). To achieve this,

firstly the metaphoric language of the text attracts the attention to the words and their operations in the process of the construction and new contexts. As a second step the readers are alienated from the conventional intended effects aroused by the previous reading traits since the text self- reflexively directs the attention to the construction of the text and draws a line between the reality and the process itself. Thus, the text becomes the application of Gass' notion that "the novel is a metaphor" (*FFL* 69).

The central metaphor of the text is prominent just before the readers open the book. Below, on the left side, the front cover of the book is displayed and on the right side the back cover is shown:

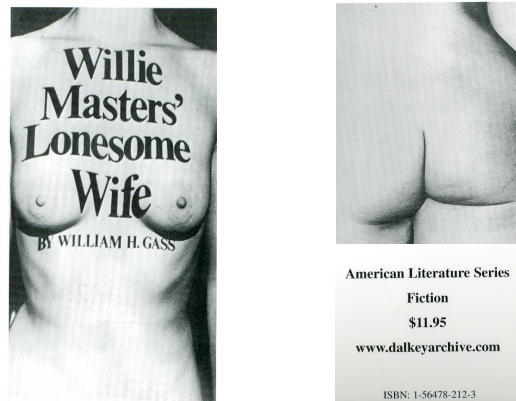


Figure 2 The front cover of *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*

On the front cover is a frontal photograph of a naked woman; on the back cover is a corresponding photograph of the backside of the same woman. Thus Gass invites his readers to enter this work of art – a woman made of words and paper – with the same sort of excitement, participation, and creative energy that a man would ideally have in entering woman's body in sexual intercourse (Caramello 56-69).

As it has been attempted to be put forward right from the beginning, the book is like a woman made of paper and ink. The body is the text and the text is a process or construction made up only of signifiers. Even the very beginning of the text self-consciously reflects its own world as an art object excluding the idea that it is not the extended referent of the outside world and its realities.



In *WMLW*, in addition to the idea of metaphor and characterisation, the “self-absorptive nature of the medium (fictional language) manifest[s] itself in the purpose and content of Gass’ quintessential model of metafiction” and the text “calls attention to every line and on every page to the fact that it is pure invention: that is it has nothing to do with the daily world; that it is ‘made - up’ out of words and artwork printed on paper and nothing else”; in other words “that its language points only to itself and to nothing beyond” (Holloway 11). For Gass “the structures of language, and therefore of fiction, have no clear-cut relation to referents but exist instead as entities in their own right, as additions to, not reflections of, the realm of matter” (qt Holloway 9). Babs overtly and consciously achieves Gass’ theories on language by drawing the readers’ mind to the words themselves and away from the message beyond the words. Language in *WMLW* is cut off from the objective world; the readers are forced to see the text as a fictional product entirely concrete in itself. As it is underlined by Kaufmann “gazing in a mirror of words” Babs “fictionalizes itself. Her subject is herself – the printed language that comprises her and the Fiction she is” (88). While reflecting her nature as a linguistic construction Babs consciously and overtly makes use of several linguistic theories. Firstly, Babs re-examines her world of words through a Lockean understanding of language which “develops from sense to impression to perception to concept” (McCaffery 180). Babs in the Olive Section, as a footnote pointed by asterisks, utilizes Locke’s ideas on language and how people employ language in practical life:

\*\* Locke. *Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II. Ch. Xi, Sec. 9: The use of words. then. being to stand as outward marks of our internal ideas, mark, and those ideas being taken from particular things, mark, if every particular idea that we take in, masticate, and swallow down, should have a distinct name. names must be endless, names must be endless, names must be endless, names must be endless; ... Mark-to prevent this, the mind makes the particular ideas, received from particular objects, to become general like the spread of a disease, a blight of generals, ... destroying the trees; which is done by considering them, as they are in the mind already such appearances, separate from all other things, naked, solitary, and apart from every circumstance of real existence, such as time, place, or any other concomitant ideas, just as I am. ... This is called *abstraction*, sometimes love, and always the art of writing, where by ideas taken like a cutpurse from the coat and

trousers of particular Beings become general representatives of all of the same kind . . . Thus the same cal or being observed today in chalk Or snow, which the mind yesterday received from milk, it considers that appearance alone, hard, soft, or liquid. elects it a representative of all of that kind, chalk white, snow-white, milk white as the man on the nail

This quotation from Locke is a good starting point for the discussion of the relationship between the words and the world. According to the Lockean theory, at birth the mind of a person is empty like a blank sheet and it is written on by the pen of experience which operates on the objects of the world. Consequently, ideas “taken from particular things” and words “stand as outward marks for internal ideas” (Olive Section). Naming refers to the sensual perception of the objects in the world, so the process of recognition is materialistic. According to this theory a word refers to an object, which is at the same time the Western idea of presence. Before deconstructing this logocentric view, Babs takes Locke’s ideas to heart “for she constantly muses over the appropriateness of names in just this fashion” (McCaffery 180):

Nikolai. Habib. Albert. Paul. Bathed in blue. Clarence. Horace. A violinist must care for his hands. What would you call a rhino, finely trained? I wouldn't call it Calvin. Calvin's a cad's name. And Gus is lower class....Charles. Christopher. .... Pat and Mike-both balls-two wrinkled old retainers... James, Jan, Joseph, Harold, John... if you had nice pleasant names for yourself all over, you might feel more at home...Is that your name? (Olive Section).

Lady language “does not interest [her] self in those things which we usually find in narrative. The narrative is a narrative of her body. While readers ignore her various body parts – words, pages, chapters – she names them” (Kaufmann 92). As well as indicating how man gives a proper name to certain things, “she wonders, for instance, why men do not assign proper names to various parts of their anatomy” (McCaffery 180). Babs suggests that “they ought to name their noses... Why not their ears too?-they frequently stuck out. This is my...Slav nose, Czar Nicholas. And these twins in my mirror, Reuben and Anthony, they have large soft lobes (Olive Section). By dealing with this theory in an ironic way, Babs criticizes the unshakable notion of words being referents. While talking about the naming process, and its inadequacy in expressing our experience of the

world, Babs consciously declares the failure of words in representing reality. As the next step, she starts with the Saussurean linguistic sign and ends with Derrida's *différance*:

\*\*\*\*\*What's in a name but letters, eh? and everyone owns *them*. Sam says the sound, sun or the figures S, U, N, are purely arbitrary modes of recalling their objects, and they have the further advantage of being nothing *per se*, for while the sun, itself, is large and orange and boiling, the sight and the sound, sun, is but a hiss ... a giggle of ink on paper. So use any names you like. Who's in the news? Have a friend in the house? a score to settle? ...Or maybe you've thought of a funny one, with dirty undertones. But the language of nature is a subordinate *Logos*, Sam says, that began its life with the thing it represented, and became the thing it represented. ... the cold notion of the thing, it expresses and becomes part of its reality, so that the sight and sound, sun, in Shakespeare, is warm and orange and greater than the page it lies on.

As she puts forward, since there is no natural link between the sign and the object the signified is not present in a linguistic sign. This means that a linguistic sign does not include an ultimate meaning and meaning is delayed for the relations of signs based on the idea of *différance*. That is one signifier leads to another and another without reaching a transcendental signified. In *WMLW*, Babs turns the whole text into a web of signifiers. Even about her name readers cannot reach a signified as she is referred to as I, Babs, Willie Master's wife, and Olga. Explicit self-awareness of the text/Babs displays that what the readers will witness is only the conscious play of signifiers not the signifieds referring to a meaning generating *logos*.

Typographical elements of *WMLW* are other self-reflexive devices underlining the fictional status of the text. Experimentation with the physical shape of the novel is a sort of expression of the deconstructionist play of metafiction. In order to explain the need for a change in visual page-set-up Raymond Federman articulates:

The whole traditional, conventional, fixed and boring method of reading a book must be questioned, challenged and demolished...and the space itself in which writing takes place must be changed. The space, the page (and the book made of pages), must acquire new dimension, new shapes, new relations in order to accommodate the new writing. And it is within this

transformed typography of writing, from this new paginal (rather than grammatical) syntax that the reader will discover his freedom in relation to the process of reading a book, in relation to the language and fiction (*SF* 9-10).

*WMLW* is an excellent model for Federman's assumptions on the new paginal syntax since it appears as a visual artifice not reality. The pages of the text are not ordered in a linear fashion; moreover, they are not given sequential numbers. Both the front and back cover of the book are the first signs of unconventional layout. The reader "having seen the front of the naked woman, might well wonder if she has a backside; he turns immediately to the final page and discovers yes...the rear view of the same woman" then "he has done what realist fiction tries to prevent" since "he has neglected to progress methodically through the book, from sentence to sentence... [in] mechanistic time order...he has rebelliously turned the back page" (Holloway 78). There is only one page that has a number on the top of it since this page has been taken from another book. In this textual world readers are not following a linear narration consisting of causal events that need sequential numbering or order. These traditional traits are totally deconstructed by *WMLW*. What the reader needs is only the words and their plays since nothing in the text is a referent to a signified outside of the text. In the original copy of the text, Gass employs different colours and textures instead of conventional chapter divisions and pagination in order to display textual awareness. Applied colours and textures go parallel to the central metaphor, the stages of sexual intercourse. The movements of Babs' mind determine the colours and the paginal syntax of the text; furthermore, she reflects this conscious act in every possible occasion. The first eight pages are printed on blue and thin paper; "these pages suggest the rather slow beginnings of intercourse and Babs' playful, low-intensity thoughts and remembrances"; the next section consists of twelve in olive colours; which includes "the most varied in typography and graphics, corresponds to the rising stages of Babs' sexual excitement and her wildly divergent thoughts" and the next eight pages have the colour red suggesting "the climax of the intercourse and the direct, intellectual climax of Babs' thoughts about language"; in the final stage the pages have the white colour which refers to

“Babs’ empty, lonely feelings after intercourse when she realizes how inadequate the experience has been” (McCaffery 174).

The texture of *WMLW* reflects the text’s awareness of its own process of construction and throughout the book the self-reflexive tissue of the text is nourished by the photographs of Babs’ nude body. Babs uses any page as a mirror to her construction. At the first page of the book, Babs’ finger points out the raw material of the text, words, and reveals the textuality of her world:

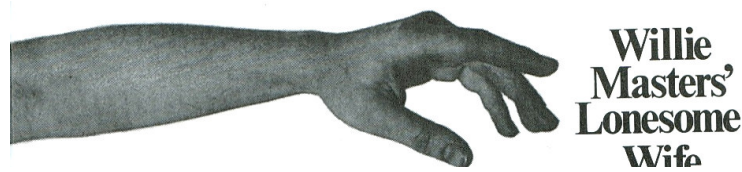


Figure 3 The photography of the bare arm pointing

As it is placed above, the title page displays “the flesh made word” and the bare arm “almost touches Michelangelo-like, Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife, the title: the wife makes herself the wife, a printed object” (Kaufmann 100). Her body gives light to her text, and she begins to create her world out of words. After the photograph of Babs’ bare arm, the first section of the text is opened with a picture displaying the upper part of her body and her face. In the photograph she is “waiting for the printer’s phallic S – block” (McCaffery 174). Lady Language takes the authority and begins to construct herself:



Figure 4 The text woman

The point where the text begins to move, Babs eats the first letter S which starts the first word SHE. “The text woman...purely creature of words... is what she eats; she is nourished by, is made of words...she is the language...she is the novel that she narrates...the metafictional object” (Holloway 78). As the book progresses while her face loses its clarity her body becomes prominent. The photographs of her body display the process of the construction self-reflexively. On the fourth page she says that “you are going to be as big this sway as you are the other. This sway, see?” after these words on the next page there is the photograph of the “buttocks swayed” (Kaufmann 94).

Babs carries on mirroring her construction through various conscious and explicit typographical plays in order to focus our attention on her physical form. Besides the photographs, she employs different type forms which contribute much to the textual self-reflexivity of the text. “The most intricately developed method used by Babs to call attention to her slighted charms is the wide variety of type styles with which she constructs herself” (McCaffery 174). For instance, in the first section of the book Babs utilizes three separate type-styles: roman, italic and boldface which refer to three different monologues: For instance, contrary to the conventional paging display, on a single page one can observe three separate typing forms:

*She'd love him eve n if his head weren't shiny. I'll be a little mouse of a woman, blond and skinny, and there'll be rings on my belly where men have set down drinks ... **It is certainly amazing what brilliantine can do.** .. *She had so wanted lobes when she was young. To dangle diamonds from, and pearls in petals of silver, spills of crimson glass or wheels of polished jade or even jasper, a match for her hair... Her own nose was buttony. **Suppose, for instance, a stranger were to-oh, say you're laughing uproariously, and that's the occasion for it-spit in your mouth, god forbid.****

In the first part “The roman sections deal with her memories about the past and her concern with words” and “the italic sections indicate her memories of her first sexual encounter” finally “the boldface sections present her views about the nature of bodily processes (another obsession of many of Gass’ characters) and their relation to her aspirations for ‘saintly love’” (McCaffery 174). Additionally, in roman type, Babs reflexively expresses her literary nature, not as a character, but as the fictive process, that is the text itself. By doing so Babs wipes out the

traditional typographic linearity in the narration. The attention of the readers is diverted to a new paginal syntax. For the readers who are accustomed to one-dimensional page layout and linear narration, this intention may be impractical but “type styles can be found here from nearly every period since Gutenberg, ranging from pre-printing press calligraphy to old German gothic, Victorian typefaces, and modern advertising boldface” (McCaffery 175). By applying different fonts Babs’ aim is to “achieve...a freedom from many of our language’s traditionally imposed rules of syntax, diction, and punctuation... from the typographical conventions of ordinary narratives and...one-dimensional method of presenting” (McCaffery 175).

Besides the application of different typefaces, Babs makes use of various typographic inventions so as to distort the conventional typology. At the beginning of the text, the readers are introduced to three separate typefaces. As the text progresses in its construction, Lady Language continues to utilize innovative typographic devices intricately. The colour of the texture turns into oily olive and the paper becomes thicker, and parallel to Babs rising excitement, various visual elements distort the traditional form. When the readers have used eight pages, they come across a one-act play which is “presented with all the rigid typographical formality usually found in a written transcription of a play” (McCaffery 175).

Babs provides the readers with details on stage directions, costumes, and props by taking advantage of asterisks. In this part, the three different typefaces of the previous section are replaced by a one-act play and its comments in asterisks. The use of footnotes to comment is typical of several writers. Just like one of these writers Babs begins to use footnotes started with asterisks. In the beginning of this new section asterisks appear in small type, but when the text moves, these remarks become larger and bolder; moreover, the number of these remarks increases. Later on it becomes impossible to keep up with these asterisks and “the comments themselves become so large that the text of the play is crowded off the page – to make room for a page containing only large, star-shaped asterisks” (McCaffery 176). Lady Language consciously and overtly plays her paginal

syntax and declares that she takes pleasure in using these asterisks since they seem decorative on the page:

Anyway, these asterisks are the prettiest things in print. Furthermore, you have no trouble, do you? with charts and tables, graphs or logs. (Go to a movie.) Forward and back, in and out, up and down, we skip about compiling sonorities and sensibiles of all sorts and sizes, even to the e

After these explanations on the use of asterisks it will be better to illustrate these usages with some examples. In the beginning of the olive section asterisks do not occupy much space on the page–set–up. They are applied to the comments in between the words of the players:

*He recoils, sliding his chair, which is on greased casters, half-way across the stage: snick! After a prolonged silence\*\*\*\*\*, during which both of us sit as motionless as frightened hares\*\*\*\*\*, the dialogue commences*

*[timidly] Dear?*

*[ignores him, shifts in her chair, shows a little leg]*

*clears throat, tries unsuccessfully to speak, then does} Agnes?*

*[ignores him, shifts in her chair, shows a little more leg]*

*[puts hand over mouth, pops eyes, shoots quick look at audience]*

*Hildur?*

*ignores him, shifts in chair, shows a little more leg]*

*[puts hand over mouth, pops eyes, looks imploringly at audience]*

Figure 5 The use of asterisks I

In the beginning of the Olive Section the dialogues between the players occupy almost the whole page; and notes offer information about such topics as Locke's semiotics or stage directions. However, when the text progresses asterisks and comments take much more room than the dialogues. Only two or three lines of the characters can be seen among the asterisked footnotes and comments:



*Olga. Buns!*

*Ivan. Buns\*\*\*\*\**

*Olga. There is only bread in my buns*

*Ivan. My bun's not entirely bread*

*Olga. Bun!*

**\*\*\*\*\* You must instruct the actress playing Olga to emphasize the difference between her fist suddenly smashing through the newspaper, and the modest, dainty way she is to cover her knees, not to mention the delicate refinement of her coffee table manners. I was always very good at it. Incidentally, this is not *Alice in Wonderland*, but real life-the stage-therefore a prop must be prepared which will permit the action called for. ... It's best to use the front page of the 10cal sheet wherever you are, but THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, *faute de mieux*.**

**\*\*\*\*\* The gestures of the actors are no more than words, mere words, the commonest kinds (] am hungry; ] am tired; I'm full of fear; see me twist the stern of my cocktail glass, that signifies lost love, it signifies my loneliness, it means lust and debauchery; and now] fetch and carry, pour a drink, the n drink the drink I pour; I've not arms**

Figure 6 The use of asterisks II

Then asterisks begin to appear “absurdly omnipresent” (Holloway 82). Toward the end of the section, asterisks leave very little space for the words of the characters. The voices of the characters continue to fade away. Below is a page on which a few words of the characters can survive on the left side of the page:

in. I haven't got it. ...  
 Iga. I haven't got it. ...

just those very circumstances, the height of humor has been scaled. Where the mechanical is seen to shine through the rib-cage (ribs are repetitious, they shine through the starving comically) there the funny button has been pushed; and the reason that, like punch my judy, I'll punch yours, the reduction of the human to the mechanical is amusing is because laughter is social, for example, unlike self-abuse, and the laugh is a social corrective like a curtsy or the guillotine, both of which, though we invented them (we took an age), have made much shorter work of us. Which reminds me—I suppose you know the joke about the very obese Jew whose smoke was so greasy it stuck in the flue. The Germans had to slay the stack out with a bulgar serb of croat they had hungarian a pole—back and forth, up and down, round and round, over and over—

I salute you, with great affection and regard, for the last time.

until there wasn't a bit of greece roumanian.\* \* \*


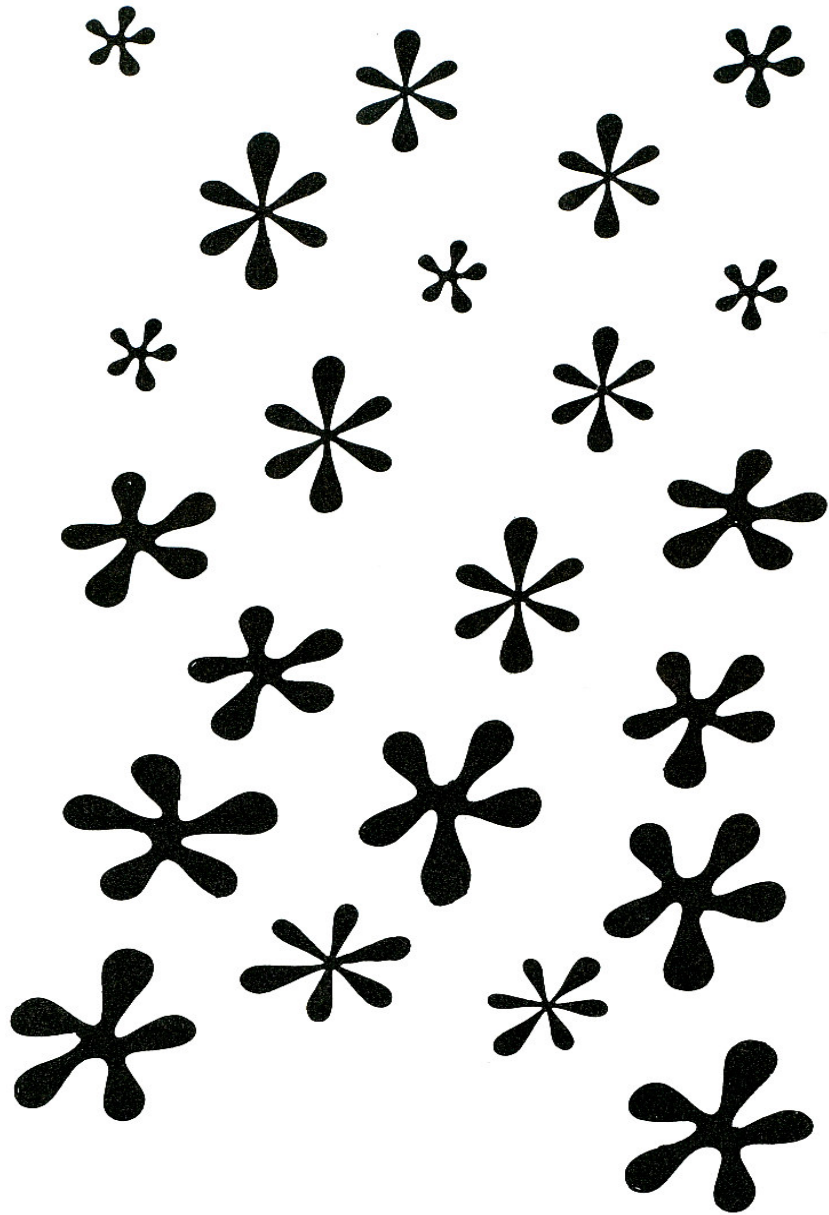


Figure 7 The use of asterisks III

“The [asterisked] pages carry readers into the labyrinthine footnotes and lose them in the toils of the text... The intricate footnotes...force readers to attend to the body of the text” (Kaufmann 95). Toward the end of the Olive Section, pages are crowded with star-shaped asterisks. Then enormous asterisks take over the entire

page like snow flakes. For instance, the part following this sentence is a whole page taken from the same section:

A cow broke in  
tomorrow morning  
to my Uncle Toby's  
fortifications.



Notions and  
scruples were  
like split  
needles, making  
one afraid  
of treading or  
sitting down,  
or even eating.

Figure 8 The use of asterisks IV

In the Olive Section, by applying asterisks in different size, Babs creates fragments through which she parodies traditional works. She deliberately interrupts the page with different type faces, recalls some extracts from well-known novels and breaks further the readers' interest in plot and the conventional continuity. Near the end of the Olive Section, frames in the form of the footnotes occupy the whole page. For instance, Sterne's fanciful footnote appears: "A cow broke in tomorrow morning to my uncle Toby's fortifications". For this side of the tradition, "cows cannot

have broken in tomorrow morning. The narrator disdains such facts, which takes readers through the body of the work and to the ‘reality’ that they think lies beyond the page” (Kaufmann 97). While “building [her] own body”, Babs consciously reminds her readers of the novelistic tradition pointing out that “the whole literature lies before us” (Olive Section). The novelistic tradition includes ancestors such as *Tristram Shandy* (from which the previous quotation is taken) and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Besides Sterne’s quotation, Hardy’s words from the novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* will be helpful to explain the case in a better way. In *WMLW*, the quotation from *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is given in the form of a comic book balloon:

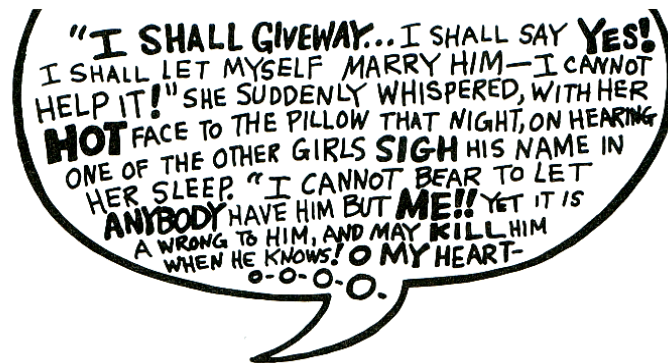


Figure 9 Comic balloon

Although these words were uttered by Tess Durbeyfield when she decided to marry Angel Clare, the balloon makes it seem as if the text was speaking plus “the comic-book, exaggerated typeface makes the protestations seem to come from a slightly more verbose Brenda Starr or Wendy Winkler” (Kaufmann 99). The most striking aspect of her reflexive narrative technique is her conscious distortions of her own narrative line by making use of various extracts from different novels. What Babs underlines here is that when the usual page set-up is distorted, when words change their forms, what they say also changes in a significant way. As readers, we fail to recognize that physical form affects our own understanding of reality. If we neglect to recall the body of Babs, we cannot be truly involved in the process of her construction. She is aware of the existing realistic tradition based upon the verisimilitude principle and at the same time she is sure that she will not follow this tradition. By parodying the readers’ expectations inherited from the traditional novelistic line, Babs criticizes readers’

“obsession with the facts of the narrative” (Blue Section). At the beginning of the book, she “felt the terror of terminology” and underlined that she is “different...totally different” since “fact does not move” her (White Section). Throughout the book, parodying novelistic tradition, she never lets her readers forget this distinction.

As it is understood from Babs’ comments and her visual plays, she consciously applies all these visual plays and reflects explicitly that the readers will find themselves in “a nest of contrivances” (Blue Section). In addition to all these self-reflexive elements, Babs continues to apply several examples of typographic deviations in the book. She displays a newspaper “cut-up and concrete poem” (McCaffery 176):

dress cut from a red and white cotton table  
 cloth a tiny check words fail but rather  
 smooth and soft distinctly if only you  
 could feel it I had a slim cross-hatching  
 stripe just like it once when I was younger  
 in a bathing suit embracing me like water  
 those times have drained my skin has changed  
 re-arranged its crinkles o for a smooth soft  
 water like again words which sail white  
 words wind skins fresh northwest dress

*Got to get description in.  
 What's this girl look like,  
 don't we know? And what's  
 she wearing? Or if she has  
 shed her clothes, or some  
 of them, as has been intim-  
 ated, where'd she put them?  
 Did she throw, in passion  
 probably, not caring hoots,  
 eager for the hot encounter,  
 her woolly benjamin across a  
 chair? It's very vague.  
 This Gelvin fellow, now, for  
 instance—isn't it? We  
 could use a pix or two of  
 him. Cunnilingus or fell-  
 atio—they have a wide ap-  
 peal—would do. But please,  
 be quick, or they'll be . . .*

“I never voyaged so far in  
 all my life. You shall see  
 men you never heard of be-  
 fore, whose names you don't  
 know, going away down through  
 the meadows with long duck-  
 ing guns, with water-tight  
 boots wading through the  
 fowl-meadow grass, on bleak,  
 wintry, distant shores, with  
 guns at half-cock . . .”  
 We can't make love like that  
 anymore—make love or manu-  
 script. Yet I have put my  
 hand upon this body, here, as  
 no man ever has, and I have  
 even felt my pencil stir, grow  
 great with blood. But never  
 has it swollen up in love.

It moves in anger, always, against its paper.

Figure 10 Newspaper cut-up

When the readers turn the next pages they come across various shapes made of words such as a Christmas tree and an eye:

Actually,  
 it doesn't  
 matter how t  
 his scene is pla  
 yed, for this is wh  
 at they call a natura  
 ly humorous situatio  
 n. It's what you want to  
 try for: a naturally humor  
 ous situation. Now a fellow  
 finding his penis baked in his  
 breakfast roll like a toad in a bis  
 cuit—that's a naturally humorous  
 finding, the very heart of a naturally  
 humorous situation, and he could say:  
 say, I think I've found my penis baked  
 in this roll like a toad in a biscuit, and ever  
 yone would laugh; they'd laugh, it wouldn't  
 matter what he said, because it's simply a basi  
 cally comical condition. If you're in a basically  
 comical condition, you can do as you please. The fo  
 vely thing about such a condition, a basically comical  
 one, is that you can put anything into it you like, only  
 laughter, simple and true, will ring out. That's in fact, wh  
 at comedy is made of, if you want to know the whole and  
 tal honest of it. A fellow losing his dick somewhere, of cours  
 e, that could be tragic, anyone can see that could be tragic, but  
 finding it again, in his billfold possibly, or lying across his co  
 nfrakes, or coiled in the bottom of his tackle box, that would  
 be comic, sure as  
 shooting—comic as  
 Christmas—a funda  
 mentally funny fix.

BY WHICH I  
 SEE GOD IS THE  
 SAME AS THE EYE B  
 Y WHICH GOD SEES ME.  
 MY EYE AND GOD'S EYE /  
 RE ONE AND THE SAME  
 —ONE IN SEEING,  
 ONE IN KNOWING  
 AND ONE IN  
 LOVING.

Figure 11 Christmas tree

Furthermore, Lady Language consciously uses signs and even the representations of coffee – mug stains to draw attention to the visual qualities of the pages:

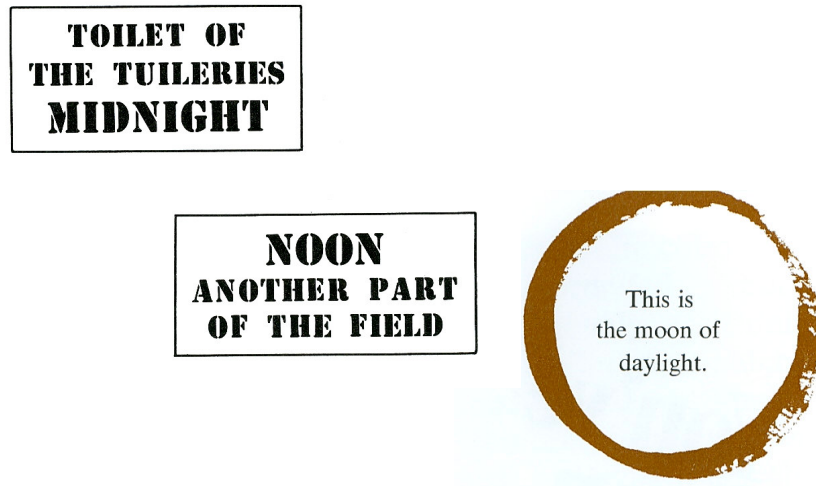


Figure 12 The coffee-mug stain I

All these shapes and visual elements call attention to the point discussed in the previous paragraphs, briefly language. By a cartoon balloon, an advertisement, a tree-shaped paragraph and placard, Babs shows that language must be watched. In her conscious textual formation, Babs reflects her awareness of her own process by warning the readers, “Did it catch you? Be more observant next time” (Olive Section). Since readers “don’t know the way”, Babs acts like a “kind of a siren and a long wail of warning” and she self-reflexively “carries the readers on a flow of words. Babs’ narrative does not interest itself in those things which we usually find in narrative. The narrative is a narrative of her body” (Kaufmann 92).

While deconstructing the conventional understanding of linearity in narration and one-dimensional typographic page-set-up, Babs frees her readers from the conventional reading traits and makes her readers evaluate their automatized process of reading. By doing so Babs firstly creates the defamiliarization effect since she makes the words and the paginal syntax seem

strange, secondly she creates an alienation effect since she prevents her readers from the emotional involvement with the text. What Babs strongly underlines is that “ the Western conventions of reading - left to right, top to bottom, from first page to last – are all merely conventions that can be altered” (McCaffery 176). As for Butor “it is a misconception for us to think that the only kinds of books are those which transcribe a discourse running from start to finish, a narrative or essay, in which it is natural to read by starting on the first page in order to finish on the last” (44). As it is discussed during the typographical elements part, in *WMLW*, Babs both consciously and reflexively makes a linear reading process unattainable. Toward the end of the book, Babs consciously starts to make use of five separate narrative lines engaging in five separate typefaces. She changes the style whenever she wants so the readers are forced to be careful about the words and their presentations. Since she constantly plays with the typefaces and narrative forms, the readers cannot follow the traditional reading process. Instead of the traditional way from top to bottom, they are forced to follow one style of narration and its typeface from page to page. Consequently the one who reads the text is made to trace the font in order to follow the narrative line linked to that font. As an example two successive pages are taken from the book and arrows are drawn to show the ways that should be followed during the reading activity. The first example narrative line begins with the word FEELING and ends with an incomplete question WILL YOU BLEAR THE. In order to follow this line one should not begin from the top and read down. Instead of this conventional process, one should go to the next page and should find out the same font in order to continue the same narration. The continuation of the incomplete question can be seen on the next page and concluded with the word MIRROR. The same process is valid for the other narrative lines on the page:

FEELING NOW, BUT IN ADDITION THERE'D BE THE KISS OF ALL THAT AMOROUS, AMOROUS MONEY. PHILLY, BABY. . . PHILLY.

...

LITTER OF HEAVEN: CLUMPS OF CLOUD, BLOOMING AS CASTLES. OH, HIS LUNGS ARE LIKE HUMPS OF A CAMEL. HIS INSIDE'S BEEN VAPORIZED. HOW THIS MIST OF IMAGES PERFECTLY DESCRIBES HIM. MAYBE THE WALLS. MAYBE THE WINDOWS. GRAY SMUDGE, SMOKE SMUDGE, SPECKS, NICKS, FLAWS: TOWNS AND COUNTRIES COMING INTO VIEW THROUGH THE GRIME. IN THE WALLS, THEN, MY BREATH CLOUDING A MIRROR OR THE GLASS. MY SOUL-A SMUDGE. THEY TEST TO SEE-IF YOU LIVE. WILL YOU BLEAR THE

your pardon; but i am naturally impatient, and you drive me mad! What harm can it possibly do you to tell me in what situation' your sister stands, and your own expectations of being able to assist her? it is time enough to refuse my advice when i offer any which you may thin k improper. i speak calmly to you, though 'tis against my nature:-but don't urge me to impatience-it will only render me incapable of serving Eftie." Distracted (have you any notion of my problems?), i sip noisily and stare into space. Ella Bend felt that same warmth, too, many times, when her fingers found her cup, but Ella always with this shining sample sales man in his polished shoes astride me, and you wish to speak of poetry. All of us aren't better off than I; we're cold, closed in, alone, in some vast public-bordered place where love is called for as you'd call, for sausage. We fear our age. ... And we walk warily among our young as though on nightfall through a

MIRROR? YES . . . YOU DO. YOU BLEAR THE MIRROR, STEP IN THE DUST, SHOUT-AND BUFFET AIR. YOU BUFFET THE AIR. YOU MOVE.

in ju m st

YOU ARE ALIVE. YOU MOVE-SLIP FROM SMEAR TO BUFFET-LIVE. AN UDDER DISAPPOINTMENT. SO MAYBE IT WAS THE WALLS, OR

...

WALLS AND GRAY WINDOWS, THE RUSH SEATS, THE MAGENTA PHLOX, THE BROWN, THE GRAY AND YELLOW, THE BROWN AND

ORANGE, DOGS, CA TS, COWS, AND HORSES ST ANDING IN CLOUDS, DEAD AS THE DUST THEY'RE ST ANDING IN THEMSELVES, OR OUR

PLUMP, WHITE, SINGLE, WOOLLY SHADOWS RUNNING ON THE GLASSY SKY, LYING ABOUT HAPPINESS LIKE LAMBS AND PUPS AND KITTENS LIE ABOUT LIFE ALWAYS-CURSE THEIR MAKER-OR MAY

peered longingly in, since the spinning coffee was for her more even than the orbit of an ocean; it was, in addition, the black hat of the heavens . . . oh dear, i am reminded-wondrously reminded-memory is a marvellous, hideous, broom-riding thing - of a hat my uncle had, his only hat, magnetic of snow. Kechel was his name, not that it matters, a fancy undertaker, one who wore full mourning as some of them once did, and this regalia included a tall black topper, a true stovepipe, high and shining,

cemetery. This is not poetry. Only our hate has a high sound. Our work has deserted us. Study and amusement.

Faith.

Loyalty is lost. That isn't poetry. Ifs my day off. My husband's

got his penis caught between my pill winks. There's no space there for poetry.

Carlos. [rolling over sleepily] Hmm?

...



In such pages, Babs deconstructs the conventional reading process from top to bottom and forces her readers to pay attention to the new technique from page to page:

Throughout *Willie Masters* Gass never allows our eyes to move easily along the page from left to right and top to bottom; instead, we turn from page to page, moving backward and forward, moving our eyes up and down in response to asterisks or footnotes, from left to right to check marginal glosses, and occasionally standing back to observe the organization of the page as a whole (as when we note that one page is shaped like a Christmas tree, another like an eye chart) (McCaffery 177).

For Babs, literature is not sequential story telling (fabula), but the construction (sjuzet) on the printed page. Babs' conscious and explicit plays on words and their shapes on the printed page to draw attention to her status as an artefact are prominent self-reflexive devices. She applies what is theorized by Federman: "the most striking aspects of the new fiction will be its semblance of disorder and its deliberate incoherency" (*SF* 13). In the course of such plays of signifiers she removes the possibility of finding a unifying principle referring to presence; instead, she constantly reminds her readers that what they are witnessing is the process of construction not the reality.

In addition to the conscious application of the visual qualities of the words, Babs self-reflexively constructs herself through her "highly poetic language" (McCaffery 177). Throughout the book, she draws attention to the naming process and how language builds the world around us by questioning conventions. Instead of using referents to the outside world, she plays with the signifiers of her textual world. Since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, Babs intricately plays with the signs without reaching a final meaning. Just like dealing with a puzzle, readers cannot reach a definite meaning behind a signifier. The whole text refers to a process or a web in which Babs is busy with her own conscious construction. She exists there not to "provide an authentic or trustworthy view of things" but to "withdraw from reality into an intentionally artificial domain and be content with the internal cohesiveness of the artefact alone" (Day 2). In the Olive section Babs directly speaks out: "I dream, invent and imagine...I never die...then I am as it is, reflecting on my own revolving...[and] in that self-

responsive way comprise a song which sings its singing back upon its notes as purely a mirror”. To deconstruct the traditional reading traits she mirrors even her own pages:

I can't complain. You're supposed to be lonely—getting fucked. I *guess* that's what will happen. Time out from picture magazines, the pattern books, no breather for a cigarette or laying out of solitaires or swallowing beer or vacuuming the rug. I dream, invent, and I imagine.'

I can't complain. You're supposed to be lonely—getting fucked. I *guess* that's what will happen. Time out from picture magazines, the pattern books, no breather for a cigarette or laying out of solitaires or swallowing beer or vacuuming the rug. I dream, invent, and I imagine.'

Figure 13 The mirroring of the text

Babs' awareness of her own process of construction is the most obvious indicator of metafictional self-reflexivity since she knows her status as an artefact and overtly declares her own fictionality. In this respect as it is mentioned in the theories of Gass and Federman, Babs questions the traditional understanding of literary realism. Babs deforms the conventional position of novel writing and reading and points out that what readers are experiencing in *WMLW* is not the reality but the process of construction:

There is the speech of the ultimate mind, abstract...and then there's mine, for when you use me, when you speak in my tongue – the language of imagination – you speak of fact and feeling, order and spontaneity, suddenness... desire and reservation – all at once...The usual view is that you see through me... what I am really – significant sound...and everywhere, again, he seeks out unity: in the world he unifies both sound and sense...between words and things he further makes a bond so that symbols seem to contain their objects (Red Section).

As it is underlined in the given part, “the usual view” is that readers are accustomed to accepting what is presented in the novel as the illusion of reality or a kind of window opening to the transcendental signifieds of the outside world; thus, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is connected with a “bond” containing the “object”. As opposed to this conventional understanding, Babs acts just like a metafictionist who is “ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows...that his business is to make one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is master - language” (Gass 77). She openly

and overtly complains about the conventional traits and reminds that “both readers and writers are too often unresponsive to the body of literature – a body made of language” (McCaffery 179). In the Olive Section, while developing the metaphor of physical love between the text and the reader, Babs comments on the medium of a writer and the material of her construction:

numbers. Imagination is its medium realized. You <sup>trying</sup>  
are your body—you do not choose the feet you walk  
in—and the poet is his language. He sees his world,  
and words form in his eyes just like the streams and  
trees there. He feels everything verbally. Objects,  
**passions, actions— I myself believe that the true kiss comprises  
a secret exchange of words, for the mouth was made by God to give form  
and sound to syllables; permit us to make, as our souls move, the magical  
music of names; for to say Cecilia, even in secret, is to make love. How**

Figure 14 The power of imagination

She admits that the perfect lover she is seeking for is the one who shares this awareness and pays attention to the play of words on the printed page and who takes part in the process of construction. As readers are accustomed to conventional traits, she has difficulty in finding a lover who shares the awareness of this experimental construction. “She admits that she rarely finds lovers appreciative enough to create her property” (McCaffery 179). Below is the last page of the third section:

**You've  
been  
had,**

Really, did you read this far? puzzle your head? turn the pages this and that, around about? Was it racy enough to suit? There wasn't too much plot? I thought the countess something fab. For the nonce. Nothing lasts. But, honestly, you skipped a lot. Is that any way to make love to a lady, a lonely one at that, used formerly to having put the choicest portions of her privates flowered out in pots and vases; and would you complain at having to caress a breast first, then a knee, to sink so suddenly from soft to bony, or to kiss an ear if followed by the belly, even slowly? Only a literalist at loving would expect to plug ahead like the highway people's line machine, straight over hill and dale, unwavering and ready, in a single stripe of kiss and covering, steady on

**from  
start  
to  
finish.**

Figure 15 The reader-lover

On this page she “proclaim[s] the affair has ended in a double way (You’ve been had, from start to finish). Either the reader-lover has cheated and skipped a large portion of the text...or he has pushed ahead with the process with dogged determination” (Holloway 83). Babs asks various questions in between the large letters since she is aware of the traditional tendencies of the readers and her being different as she does not develop a linear paging system, a story and conventional characters. Unhappy with the unresponsive lover Gelvin, who has left her, she hopes for having a true literary intercourse with one who really sympathises with her. Babs complains by saying, “as you see, its centre’s empty, no glow there. And I am lonely. This stupid creature who just now has left me, whom I favoured with my charms...he didn’t in his address, at any time, construct me” and presents Gelvin as an illustration for the unsatisfactory love (White Section). Babs criticizes the lovers/ readers who “approach lady language in the wrong spirit, looking for the wrong sorts of things”; to be brief, “who have forgotten how to

make love appreciatively” (McCaffery 179). In the White Section, when the unresponsive lover Gelvin/ reader leaves Babs, she “curled up in a fetal position, her head resting upon her knees in a position indicating her sad, lonely feelings of resignation and rejection” (McCaffery 174).



Figure 16 The loneliness of Babs

The nude woman eating the letter S in the beginning of the text now has turned her face and her lights have failed consequently “the book has concentrated again into itself; into a seed or kernel of extraordinary potential that awaits the fertilization of the next reader” (Holloway 84). “I am an image...then I dispose my flesh...I used to cut designs and paper ladies from, the dull bleak busy walls like this man’s arms around me” says Babs to indicate the conventions around her and her being different from other paper figures (White Section). The unshakable conventional habit of reading makes her feel alone. This photograph and Babs’ words are among the prominent self-reflexive indicators in view of the fact that they express her own conscious creation and her loneliness. She is waiting for the next lover who will perform the text. As Babs consciously expresses, “*THEY TURN THEIR BACK ON ME, I’M WHAT THEY’VE LEFT NOTHING’S CHANGED*” (Red Section).

The last page of the book is the final self-reflexive play of Babs. She leaves coffee-mug stains on the page as her marks. “ She leaves a ring with her coffee cup, a sort of kiss on the page, returning us to the lips that formed the words we read...readers on the other side...no kiss...Pyramus and Thisbe – like to the other side” (Kaufmann 101):

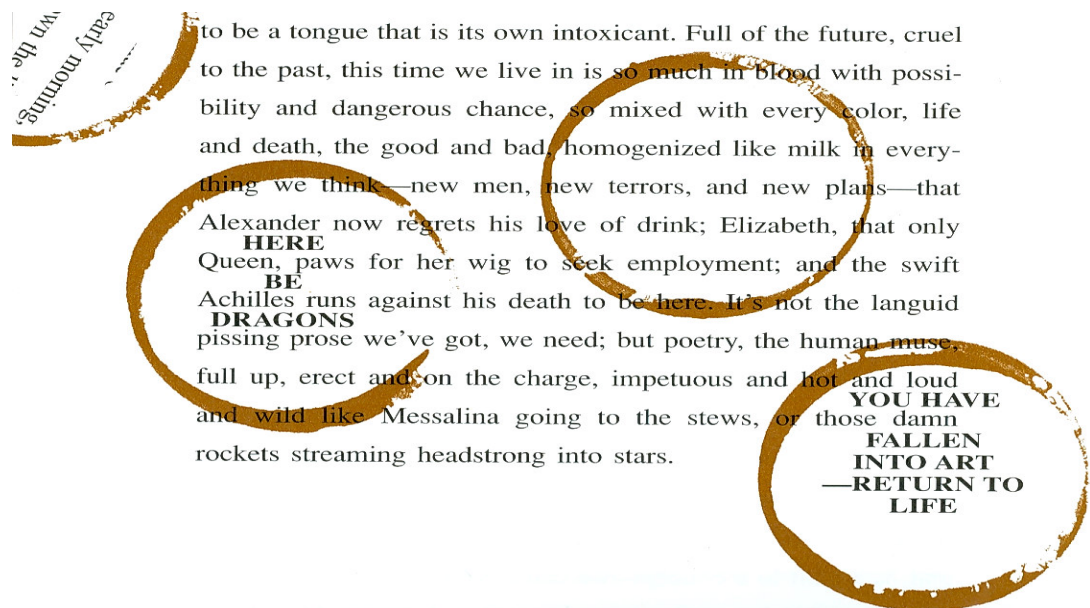


Figure 17 The coffee-stain II

“The muddy circle you see just before you and below you represents the ring left on a leaf of the manuscript by my coffee cup” says Babs in the last section and questions herself “why put a ring in the book? Kiss mine - why not?” On the fourth page of the book she has reminded the reader that “I write the finis for them...I never die”. As she reminds at the end of the Red Section she “builds her own body” draws a line between the real world and her fictional world. Through her self-reflexive words and visual parts, Babs has succeeded in taking her readers to a new world which they have never experienced. This is the “ sweet country of the word – writer and the reader talking and dying alike, the lonesome self losing and recreating itself in language...turning itself into a playhouse” (Kaufmann 71). In the last line of the text, in Babs’ kiss, the reader sees the line “YOU HAVE FALLEN INTO ART – RETURN TO LIFE”. “Readers are returned to life remade, renewed; they return to the world with a new sense of its complex

construction and being- if they have attended well the lonely wife” (Kaufmann 105).

To conclude, *WMLW* is a text on process. According to Gass “we rarely attend to the words of the novel for themselves and so we hardly notice how beaten and chipped they are, like the language of everyday, the language of most novels passes from consciousness, is extinguished by its use” (FFL 3). In *WMLW*, by deconstructing traditional thematic and formal concerns what Gass tries to display is that literature is made of words only words and as readers we should pay attention to words without searching for referents outside of the text. In its “unorthodoxy and campy presentation of concept as cunt” it succeeds in making the reader “hesitate, suffer the little planned shocks, wonder about the story that is not really a story, become confused, and ultimately, in most cases, lose interest” (Kaufmann 85). “Mixing poetry, off-colour songs, visual tricks, puzzles, theatre, mazes, and a many-levelled narrational structure, Gass creates an outstandish piece of metafiction” (Holloway 11). Babs is self-reflexive about her own world made of paper and ink and invites her readers to this new and experimental world through various conscious ruminations. *WMLW* is “recursive, reflexive, metafictional, turning back on itself” in Sukenick’s words “all made up” (56).



## CHAPTER 4

### SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN LAURENCE STERNE'S *THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY*

The son of a military officer Laurence Sterne was born in Clonmel 1713, spent his earliest years in various towns and was educated in Halifax until his father's death. Then he attended Jesus College, Cambridge and finally he became a clergyman. After graduating from Cambridge, Sterne settled in Yorkshire and remained in England. In 1759, near the end of his life, he began to work on his novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman* (from now on it is going to be referred as *Tristram Shandy*) and during 1768, he composed a fictional narrative *A Sentimental Journey*. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, published between 1759 and 1767 in five separate instalments and in nine volumes, brought him an instant celebrity and his novel became one of the milestones of the novel tradition.

*Tristram Shandy* is one of the most extraordinary novels in English literature. Since it is a "kaleidoscopic novel: rich and multicoloured, with many complicated and beautiful patterns" which "thematizes fictional representation of reality, and...limitations of language", for its time, the novel is highly unconventional in its narrative technique. (Whittaker 1). Even the title of the novel suggests a play on the novelistic tradition of its time. In the title instead of presenting adventures of his hero, Sterne introduces his readers to the life and opinions of the protagonist. Although the novel is the contemporary of Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Richardson's *Pamela*, *Tristram Shandy* bears little resemblance to the sequential and structurally unified novels.

Firstly, Tristram of the book differs from the conventional understanding of the narrator. Like Babs of the *WMLW*, Tristram consciously composes his fictional world out of words and uncovers the fictional devices deliberately and overtly. "It is Tristram Shandy, the self-conscious narrator of his own life story, who tears the



book apart or, if one prefers, holds it together” ( Booth 37). *Tristram Shandy* begins with the first person singular ‘I’ which introduces to readers the narrator. Within the conventional frame, the author invents a narrator who tells the whole story and also who stands as the transcendental being that produces the realities for the readers. This is not the case in *Tristram Shandy*. In *Tristram Shandy*, readers cannot learn even the name of the narrator until Book I, Chapter IV and cannot come across the birth of the narrator until Book III. All we know about the world of Tristram is what he chooses to reveal to us. “He is both chronicler of his accident-prone childhood, and the central consciousness of his Shandean world, through which we see the differing characters of Walter, Toby, Trim, Dr. Slop, et al” (Whittaker 54). He consciously constructs his fictional world and unlike a traditional narrator he acts like Barthes’ postmodern scriptor. As it is mentioned by Barthes:

Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away; the negative where all identity is lost... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it...antecedent to his work as a father to his child”( 1977,142).

Tristram does not perform the conventional narrator role as a meaning creating father to his work, and does not sacrifice the formal qualities of the text in order to narrate a complete and sequential story. Although the novel is written two hundred years before all the contemporary metafictional theories, it is a good example for examining the application of various metafictional devices. Tristram’s role in the novel is exactly the same as the role of a scriptor in metafiction. In metafictional texts, in complete contrast to a conventional narrator “scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing... there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*” (Barthes: 1977; 143). Throughout the novel, Tristram consciously and explicitly underlines that he is composing his fictional world in front of his readers. He does not try to enforce pre-determined meanings or to create outside referents for the sake of reality principle; what he is creating is just an artefact. In his construction, similar to Babs’ “writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, ‘depiction’ ...

rather, it designates exactly what linguists... call a performative a rare verbal form”( Barthes: 1977; 144). Thus the signs on the printed page are not the “line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but are multi-dimensional” and this multiplicity results in “the birth of the reader” and at the same time the “Death of the Author” (Barthes: 1977; 148).

In the process of creation, Tristram makes use of two ways to build up a relationship with his readers. Firstly he mentions his awareness of his potential readership and from time to time he invents an imaginary but “specific reader, sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, and addresses directly to that imaginary reader” (Whittaker 4). Such words as “in which the reader is likely to see me” and “I know there are readers in the world...who find themselves ill at ease” include readers in the process of writing (I,1)<sup>8</sup>. What is important here is that, resembling Babs’ attitude, Tristram draws the readers’ attention to the process of the production. In addition to these examples, he addresses to a specific reader reminding us that he is looking forward to a high level of participation, that is “the birth of the reader”, and tolerance in this metafictional process since he is aware of the possible expectations of the conventional readers. In Book I, Chapter 1 the reader is called “dear Sir”, in Chapter 4 Tristram addresses to a female reader as “Madam”, in Chapter 6 the reader is again called “Sir” plus “my dear friend and companion”. Babs’ need for a passionate lover who really pays attention to her body/formal construction can be observed in Tristram’s need for a passionate reader who will care for his writing process.

The most effectual self-reflexive device of Tristram’s narration is his direct addresses to his readers. In these cases, Tristram draws the reader into the process of fictional construction by giving his readers vital information about his innovative style. Just from the beginning of the book, he demands the patience of his readers for his unconventional method: “You must have a little patience...my dear friend and companion, if you should think somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out, bear with me, - and let me go on, and tell my story my own

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<sup>8</sup> The page numbers of the given quotations display changes according to the different editions of the same novel. At the end of the quotations, only the number of the book and the number of the chapter will be given.

way” (I,6). “The effect of unconventional narration is here achieved primarily by characterizing the narrator and his methods and physical surroundings with great particularity, by doing the same for the ‘reader’...on the highest level of unconventionality, by throwing the two together in intimate conversation” (Booth 43). In Book I, Chapter 1 he directly addresses his readers by saying “Believe me, good folks”, “you may take my words”; in Chapter 4 “you have all, I dare say, heard animal spirits”. Tristram deconstructs the narrative space between the author and the reader; and both consciously and reflexively makes his readers take part in his writing process. While addressing reflexively to a specific reader, Tristram informs him/her about how to read his book:

----- How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, *that my mother was not a papist*. ---- Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to re-peat it over again, that I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing. - - Then, Sir, I must have missed a page. -- No, Ma- dam, -- you have not missed a word. ---- Then I was asleep, Sir. -- My pride, Ma- dam, cannot allow you that refuge. ---- Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter. -- That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again (I, 20).

Just like the readers of the lonesome wife, Tristram’s readers are not supposed to follow the flow blindly; they should pay attention to the formal construction and take part in the writing process. In the given extract, Tristram sends a female reader back to retrace some readings since she has not come to all possible conclusions. When the lady departs, Tristram informs the rest of the readers about the book and its nature. Tristram “draws us into the world of the novel only to draw out again so that we can realize how we were thinking when we were in the text” and “the distance he keeps re-establishing by gazing out at us prevents any type of personal identification with...what takes place within the novel”(Konigsberg 60).

Although Babs does not try to invent stories to narrate, Tristram tries to continue with various stories. What is striking about Tristram's "own way" is his digressive style. In *WMLW*, Babs cares only for the shapes of the words in her act of writing and does not worry about the story telling. However, Tristram tries to carry on with different stories in order to parody the novelistic tradition of his time. Throughout the novel, Tristram introduces numerous digressions which distort the linearity of the narration. Tristram's insistence on digressions is closely related to John Locke's theory known as the "associations of ideas". For Locke, as it is mentioned in the previous chapter, all knowledge is derived from experience through the medium of our senses; so, there are no innate ideas. According to Locke, "disparate thoughts and ideas are linked together without any logical or causal connections" (Whittaker 6). Therefore, words and actions are under the control of unconscious motives. A conventional writer, through selecting the events taking place in the span of the time of the novel, composes a complete story. These ideas give birth to one of the recurrent self-reflexive devices of the novel, which is about the difficulty of selection. In Book I (4), Tristram overtly states that he does not intend to confine himself to the literary principles of Horace and to other previous writers:

I find it necessary to consult everyone a little in his turn; and therefore must beg pardon for going on a little further...I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done...I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived.

In his new way, these associations intrigued Tristram with their irrational and unconscious nature. Although the novel seems quite a long one in physical terms, it does not include a long and complete story. From one event to another, Tristram moves among his digressions. The major parts of his story can be summarised in this way. The book includes three major fragments. The first one is about Tristram's birth and the theories of Walter Shandy through which he plans to control his child's upbringing. This part of the novel occupies the books until Book VI. The second fragment deals with Toby's battlefield stories and his courtship of the Widow Wadman. In the third one, Tristram shares his illness and his impending death with his readers. These fragments are not clearly separated

from one another since Tristram moves in different time schemes, plus all these fragments include some other diversions that are unfinished. Tristram is not born until Book III, and when he is born his nose is crushed by the doctor's forceps in the process. He is baptised but given a wrong name accidentally. His father works on an encyclopaedia for the education of his son slowly. He could not be successful in his process since he cannot keep up with the pace of Tristram's growth. Aged five, Tristram is accidentally circumcised by a faulty sash window. The adult Tristram visits France, the widow Wadman falls in love with Uncle Toby, and wonders about the exact place of Uncle Toby's war wound. A very long novel can be abridged in a few sentences like these. Thus, *Tristram Shandy* is not a novel dealing with what happens; instead of this, it deals with the writing process that takes place. In Book I and Chapter 4, Tristram displays a delightful example for the association of ideas:

from an unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up, --but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popped into her head, — & *vice versa*: — which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious *Locke*, who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever. But this by the bye.

In Chapter 4, readers are given the information that Mrs. Shandy wound the house clock on the first Sunday of every month, and arranged "other little family concernments to the same period...to get them all out the way at one time". In the given quotation, Tristram magnificently portrays the effects of these two events on his mother's mind. Through applying the method of selection, Tristram at the same time parodies the minute-by-minute realism of a conventional writer. In Book III and Chapter 29, Tristram describes Walter Shandy when he learns that Tristram's nose is crushed at his birth:

The moment my father got up into his chamber, he threw himself prostrate across his bed in the wildest disorder imaginable, but at the same time, in the most lamentable attitude of a man borne down with sorrows, that ever the eye of pity dropped a tear for. ---- The palm of his right hand, as he fell

upon the bed, receiving his forehead, and covering the greatest part of both his eyes, gently sunk down with his head (his elbow giving way backwards) till his nose touched the quilt...his right leg (his left being drawn up towards his body) hung half over the side of the bed, the edge of it pressing upon his shin bone. -- He felt it not. A fixed, inflexible sorrow took possession of every line of his face. -- He sighed once, --- heaved his breast often, -- but uttered not a word.

Here, Tristram defamiliarizes Mr. Shandy's posture by making the action slow down. In another example, in a two-chapter-long period Tristram narrates the attempt of his father and Uncle Toby to get downstairs in a self-reflexive manner:

Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going one pair of stairs? For we are got no farther yet than to the first landing... and for aught I know, as my father and my uncle Toby are in a talking humour, there may be as many chapters as steps”(IV,10).

This technique of delaying makes the readers attend to the creating act, so automatically perceived views are defamiliarized. Tristram is consciously involved in a verbal presentation and lays bare its own devices. This technique also creates the Brechtian alienation effect since it reduces emotional involvement of the readers with the text, and reminds them that what they are witnessing is just the construction of an artefact. Seeing that he has difficulty in selection, digressions become inevitable for Tristram, “for, if he is a man of the least spirit he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid” (I, 14). For Federman, the digressive writing process shapes the metafictional discourse; in other words, “sequences, scenes, word-designs, sections, chapters must become digressive from one another - digressive from the element that proceeds and the element that follows” to offer “multiple possibilities of rearrangement in the process of reading” (1993, 42). In this respect, Tristram's way of composing his own world is similar to the view of those metafictionists. *Tristram Shandy* opens with a romantic view of sexual intercourse; but, this romantic view is distracted by a mundane thought about winding a clock. This opening scene becomes the central metaphor for the writing process. The very first scene of the novel at the same time is the first digression of the book and the first barrier against the linear progression. Until book VII,

Tristram deals with Walter Shandy's theory that the outcome of a person's life depends on the conditions of his conception, homunculus, "as an entire human being". This very first scene determines the digressive nature of Tristram's writing process.

Throughout the novel Tristram uses digressions as a challenge to traditional linearity. Tristram does not intend to follow a causal, sequential and logical plot structure that leads to conventional expectations in readers' mind. In order to distort linear narration, Tristram applies several digressions, and acknowledges the difficulties that digressions cause to the progress of his narration, "I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could, — and am not yet born" (I, 14). The digressive nature of the book is the most apparent self-reflexive aspect of the book as well. In Chapter 22, he explores elaborately that although he utilizes digressions, he simultaneously shapes the progression of his own plot structure; as a consequence, he explicitly challenges realistic, sequential and causal linearity:

— This is vile work. —For which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going ; — and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits (I,22).

In the same chapter Tristram makes it clear that digressions are the essence of his narration:

Digressions, incontestably, are the sun shine; — they are the life, the soul of reading; — take them out of this book for instance, — you might as well take the book along with them; — one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; — he steps forth like a bridegroom, — bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail (I, 22).

This technique is not the way of a conventional realist writer. A realist writer "normally wants the reader to become lost in the story, to believe in the

characters, and turn the pages in suspense to find out what is going to happen”; moreover, “all this as if the novel’s content were real, not imaginary” (Whittaker 6). A realist writer usually hides the tactics of his selection and formal difficulties of this process; so pretends that readers are getting the whole story. However, Tristram never allows his readers do the same while reading *Tristram Shandy*. This resistance is similar to the Brechtian alienation effect. The formal qualities (sjuzet), actually the violation of the conventional expectations defamiliarizes the readers from the automatized perception of the novel and creates the alienation effect by reminding them that what is being presented is just an artefact not the mirroring of the reality. This is the very reason explaining why the book is a good example for the metafictional self-reflexivity.

Even though Tristram constantly intrudes in the narration, delays the delivery of the promised materials and creates fragments, his self-reflexive narrative excites fragments in quick succession without losing the attention of the readers. Tristram begins his writing process at the earliest possible point wishing “to go on tracing every thing in it, as Horace says, *ab Ovo*” (I.4). While trying to cover every issue, Tristram leaves the fragments unfinished; so, he creates atemporality that the readers are not accustomed to. He suspends all the stories in the readers’ mind, makes them imagine the rest, and involves them in his writing process. As Tristram reflexively states “when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in reader’s fancy”(VI,33). For example, In Book III, Chapter 20, Tristram stops writing “The Author’s Preface” saying that “all my heroes are off my hands...’tis is the first time I have had a moment to spare”. In Book II, Chapter 8, Tristram refers to another fragment: “I shall be able to find a place for it in the third volume or not. It is about an hour and a half’s tolerable good reading since my uncle *Toby* rang the bell”. These words allude to the fact that while uncle Toby was ringing the bell, the act was interrupted by another story line. In Book I, Chapter 21, Tristram makes uncle Toby halt in the middle of the chapter and leaves him there for a space of nine chapters:

I think, replied my uncle *Toby*, taking his pipe from his mouth, and striking the head of it two or three times upon the



nail of his left thumb, as he began his sentence, ---- I think, says he : ---- But to enter rightly into my uncle *Toby's* sentiments upon this matter, you must be made to enter first a little into his character, the out-lines of \_\_\_\_\_ which I shall just give you, and then the dialogue between him and my father will go on as well again.

Not until the next book is this scene completed by the scriptor Tristram. In another example, although Tristram promises to continue his narration in five minutes time, Mrs. Shandy stands at the doorway for eight chapters while Tristram is following another line:

My mother was going very gingerly in the dark along the passage which led to the parlour, as my uncle *Toby* pronounced the word *wife*... In this attitude I am determined to let her stand for five minutes: till I bring up the affairs of the kitchen (as *Rapin* does those of the church) to the same period (V.5).

Tristram “insists that readers forget their expectations of simple linear chronological narrative and follow wherever his whims or private associations lead” (Rizzo 67). All these fragments ruin the sequential expectations and self-reflexively suggest the play of formal qualities. In a conventional novel, experiences and incidents are selected and arranged to form a coherent story. However, in *Tristram Shandy* formal devices (sjuzet) are everything and the story (fabula) is nothing. Instead of a complete story, Tristram’s self-conscious act of writing directs the attention of the readers to the technical problems of writing it. “Thus Tristram’s history is never finished; we learn a great deal about his father, his uncle, his mother, and Trim”; however “these histories are mere pendants to the projected narrative, outgrowths of his attempt to record everything *ab ovo*” (Holtz 98).

Related to the “association of ideas”, Tristram shapes his writing process according to his flow of consciousness. The stream of Tristram’s mind does not flow in a straight line but runs into different directions. Tristram habitually freezes his narration, leaves the scene, and continues his narration with another fragment; consequently all the fragments remain unfinished as said by Tristram: “let me stop and give you a picture” (VI, 25). “Characters are often frozen in positions, suspended, as it were, in mid-chapter, as if the frame of a film has been frozen for

us to examine it outside its narrative context” says Whittaker (75). The accident that smashed his nose, the effects of his circumcision, the influence of the wrong name and all other events in the story nourish the idea of incompleteness. Tristram begins several stories but he does not complete them. In the book, Walter Shandy’s *Tristrapaedia*, the story of Aunt Dinah and the coachman, the tale of the King of Bohemia, story of the uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman all remain unfinished. In Book VIII, Chapter 28 “we lost it, an’ please your honour, somehow betwixt us” says Trim and reflexively declares that the process of the text lost the story. Hence, prefaces and dedications appear in the middle of the book, chapters are omitted, stories are interrupted and lost.

The digressive nature of the writing process creates fragments and these fragments reflexively distort the time sequence and construct the text digressively. Usually the time span of a realist novel includes years to complete a story that has a certain beginning, middle and an end. All the events happening in these years are based on cause and effect relationship. In a realist novel, this causal connection working both on the characters and the events makes the novel more convincing for its readers. The protagonist of the book progresses in time, he/ she becomes educated, usually reaches adulthood. The time span of the story and the time it takes the reader to complete the book creates a great gap. Although it is a vital problem for the realist writers, Tristram is fascinated with this disparity. For instance, a realist novel usually begins with the birth of the protagonist; however, in *Tristram Shandy*, the time span before the hero’s birth is given priority. He is aware of the fact that he is not following the conventional plot structure but creating various diversions; thus, he needs different techniques to hold these fragments up. He moves between these fragments and while doing this he explicitly and totally deconstructs the linearity of the narrative process. “There is much talk, some isolated incidents, a few episodes; but the final impression is that nothing really has happened”; because of these reasons, “however specific the underlying chronology, the sequence in which Tristram orders his materials baffles normal expectations” (Holtz 90). Producing the sense of incompleteness towards his fragmented stories, Tristram shows that his story is just a production.

Whittaker lists the differences between the realist treatment of time and Tristram’s understanding of time:

Time in a Realist Novel	Time in <i>Tristram Shandy</i>
Time and its management is usually a hidden aspect of a realist novel.	Time and its management are foregrounded as one of the main themes of <i>Tristram Shandy</i> .
The action of the novel progresses.	The action of the novel regresses.
Narrator does not usually mention the time it takes for someone to read the book.	Narrator talks to an imaginary reader about the time it takes to read parts of <i>Tristram Shandy</i> .
Narrator does not mention the time it’s taking to write the book.	Narrator continually mentions the time it’s taking him to write <i>Tristram Shandy</i> .
Narrator assumes a consensus with the reader about chronological time.	Narrator makes a distinction between chronological and subjective time, and draws the reader’s attention to the difference.
Events and technical aspects of the novel (e.g. the preface) are usually in chronological order. Cause precedes effect.	Preface is inserted in the middle of the novel. Events are not in chronological order. Effects often precede causes (76).

Table 2 The treatment of time

In Book IX, Chapter 8, Tristram builds an analogy between pen and his life by saying “life follows my pen”. Writing about the crushing of his nose, Tristram says “sympathetic breast” that leads to dip his pen with “sad composure and solemnity”. While narrating his father’s sorrows at his sons misadventure, Tristram uses the words , “dropping thy pen, —spurting thy ink about thy table and thy books— as if thy pen and thy ink, thy books and thy furniture cost thee nothing” (III, 28). Although he has so many points to write, he is aware of the impending death. Tristram knows his life-in-book; that is, he is born in his own writing process and will die in it. As it is told by Tristram in Book IX, chapter 25, “—that whatever resemblance it may be to half the chapters which are written in the world, or, for aught I know, may be now writing in it — that it was as casual as the foam of Zeuxis his horse” , not his story but his pen governs that process. As

long as he lives, he will continue his writing process and only his death will be the end of the writing process:

I think, I said, I would write two volumes every year, provided the vile cough which then tormented me, and which to this hour I dread worse than the devil, would but give me leave... I swore it should be kept a going at that rate these forty years if it pleased but the fountain of life to bless me so long with health and good spirits (VII, 1).

Federman's theory of metafictional reading process and paginal syntax correspond to Tristram's innovative writing techniques in his novel. For Federman, "the whole traditional...fixed, and boring method of reading a book must be questioned and challenged" through "innovations in the writing itself"; thus "the very concept of syntax must be transformed" (1993,40). Resembling Babs in *WMLW*, Tristram constantly draws the attention to its own formal qualities. Tristram's self-reflexive awareness "displays a shift from the 'being' represented in a text to the 'being' of the text" (Zimmerman 112). Similar to the attitude of Babs, Tristram highlights the process of its own formal construction acknowledging the book as an object. In contrast to a realist writer who makes every attempt to divert attention from the formal merits in order to create the illusion of reality, self-reflexive *Tristram Shandy* and *WMLW* reinforce readers' awareness of the book as an artefact. To achieve this, like Babs, Tristram Shandy employs various typographical devices. The difference between the two is that, although *WMLW* is completely based upon typographical plays on the printed pages, *Tristram Shandy* employs these elements moderately during the course of his digressive and fragmented narrative.

The process of conventional reading is based upon the interpretation of the signs. In order to create the illusion of reality, in the conventional novels a linguistic sign is used as the signified referring to an object of the outside world; moreover readers are made to believe that the relationship between the sign and the signified is natural and the signified is present in the sign. With the post-modern linguistic theories, this belief is totally deconstructed and the activity of reading is transformed into the play of signifiers. Tristram defines "words" and their functions in a work as follows:

I hate set dissertations, ---- and above all things in the world, 'tis one of the silliest things in one of them, to darken your hypothesis by placing a number of tall, opaque words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your readers conception (III,20).

Tristram here complains about the inefficiency of signs for reality; that is, the major subject of current linguistic theories. For Holtz, “only in recent years have scholars begun to see how basic to *Tristram Shandy* is Sterne’s concern for language” (66). Since sign does not refer to a “presence”, and meaning is not encapsulated in the sign, there is no transcendental signified that operates as the logos of the book. Like a metafictionist, Tristram plays games to display his awareness of the impotency of words. As an example, the idea of the hobby-horse becomes a major signifier for the readers. It refers to the obsessions of the people but not with a certain signified. For Tristram, it is the formal concern of his novel writing, and he follows a kind of hobby-horsical movement: forward and backward. For Walter Shandy, hobby-horse refers to his philosophical views on his child’s upbringing. In uncle Toby’s case, it is the obsession with his map, the detailed study of fortification and military science. For instance, Tristram introduces his uncle Toby as a “man with very little choice in words” (I, 21). While Toby is suffering from his wound, Walter Shandy brings him guests, to whom Toby tries to narrate his misfortune. However, the task becomes hard and Toby languishes for “insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story” plus he cannot communicate with the guests around him (II, 1). Since there is a gap between the sign and the referent, Toby cannot transmit the things in his mind truly. Tristram explains this by saying, “the true cause of the confusion in my uncle Toby’s discourse” is “the unsteady uses of the word” (II, 2). Tristram uses the term “opaque” to indicate “imperfection of the words” (V, 7), and to explain “the word is not the thing, but only a sign for a conception of it” as well (Holtz 66). While in the conventional course of reading, readers are involved in a process of translation, they are engaged in the play of signifiers in a metafictional text. A metafictional text creates signifiers without signifieds behind them, and deconstructs the idea of reaching a certain meaning in a book. Even though *Tristram Shandy* is not written in today’s literary canon, it displays the metafictional awareness of multiplicity created by the innumerable signifiers:

"--Was it without remission?--  
 "--Was it more tolerable in bed?  
 "--Could he lie on both sides alike with it?  
 "--Was he able to mount a horse?  
 "--Was motion bad for it?"(IX, 26).

Widow Wadman asks all these questions to reach the signified of the signifier "wound". However, for all "the joint efforts to solve the problem in language, to connect the sign and the thing, the widow Wadman never does get beyond the trenches at Nabur" (Holtz 78). Thus, a metafictional text does not try to create a single meaning; in its place, it subverts the linear reading process and celebrates multiplicity.

The most obvious typographical element of the book is the use of dashes. The dashes are employed in various ways: "Sometimes it is used instead of a full stop, or as parenthesis [,] sometimes it indicates flow where a full stop would create too much of a pause" but most often "it is used as a dynamic gesture which enacts the uninhibited rush of the thought process" (Whittaker 60). William Holtz uses a quotation from *Tristram Shandy*, which includes dashes, and compares it with one more conventionally punctuated form:

For as soon as my father had done insulting his Hobby-Horse,—he turned his head without the least emotion, from Dr. Slop, to whom he was addressing his discourse, and looking up into my father's face, with a countenance spread over with so much good-nature;—so placid;—so fraternal;—so inexpressibly tender towards him:—it penetrated my father to his heart: He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing hold of both my uncle Toby's hands as he spoke:—Brother Toby, said he:—I beg thy pardon;—forgive, I pray thee, this rash humour which my mother gave me (II,12).

For as soon as my father had done insulting his Hobby-Horse, he turned his head, without the least emotion, from Dr. Slop , to whom he was addressing his discourse, and look'd up into my father's face, with a countenance spread over with so much good nature, so placid, so fraternal, so inexpressibly tender towards him it penetrated my father to his heart: He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing hold of both my uncle Toby's hands as he spoke: "Brother Toby", said he "I beg thy pardon; forgive, I pray thee, this rash humour which my mother gave me(85).



Just like Babs, in his writing process Tristram employs asterisks which he calls “stars... [he] hang up in some of the darkest passages” (VI, 33). He leaves out words, indicates them through dashes or asterisks and makes his readers take part in his creative process. In *WMLW*, by changing both the size and the number of the asterisks, Babs indicates the footnotes, attracts the reader’s attention to her visual plays, and distorts expected narrative linearity. However, Tristram uses asterisks instead of the words to show their inadequacy of them in representing reality. In Book V, Chapter 17, he uses asterisks to indicate specific letters or words:

The chamber-maid had left no \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\* under the bed : —Cannot you contrive, master, quoth *Susannah*, lifting up the sash with one hand, as she spoke, and help-ing me up into the window seat with the other, — cannot you manage, my dear, for a single time to \*\*\*\*\* \*\* \* \* \* \* \* ?

Most probably “chamber-pot, and piss out of the window” would be the substitutes for the missing words (Whittaker 35). But in another example it becomes difficult to guess the words substituted by the asterisks:

With a kick of both heels at once, but at the same time the most natural kick that could be kick'd in her situation — for supposing \* \* \* \* \* to be the sun in its meridian, it was a north-east kick — she kick'd the pin out of her fingers —the *etiquette* which hung upon it, down --- down it fell to the ground, and was shivered into a thousand atoms (VIII, 9).

In the given extract, it is difficult to find certain words which will fill the gaps created by the asterisk. The fragment does not enable us to get the sense of the missing words. In this case, Tristram makes his readers use their imagination and participate in the writing process. Instead of the written words on the printed page, readers come across these asterisks which distort the linear paginal syntax. In another case Tristram leaves the stage for his readers:

—Lord have mercy upon me, —said my father to himself—  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

These asterisks “heighten comic suspense while reminding us how arbitrary all narrative selections and divisions are” (Alter 48). This self-reflexive writing

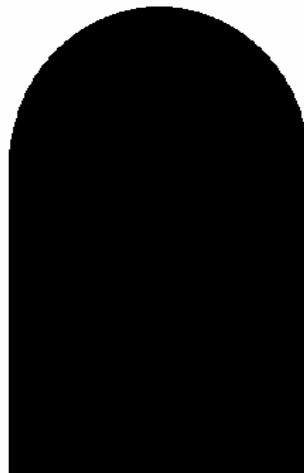


process mirrors the nature of the text for which the aesthetic theory and artistic practice are more important. Tristram's "broken-off forms, like crumbling walls of the ruins, call our attention to their deliberate incompleteness" (Harries 96). While looking at these asterisks, readers can only guess what the thoughts of Walter Shandy are; even in this case, readers cannot reach a definite meaning. There is freedom left for the readers' imagination to create their own meanings for the asterisks. Since the meaning is not present in the sign, words cannot mirror the objects of the world; thus, one cannot reach the signified behind these signs. Instead of obeying the rules of a finished story, in *Tristram Shandy* readers are free in their choice of words; hence, while reading the book, readers are writing it with Tristram.

Like Babs, in his process of metafictional construction, Tristram employs different typefaces so as to distort the expected linearity of the printed page. The difference between the two books is that, Babs constantly changes the fonts and consciously makes the linear activity of reading impossible. She does not care either for the story or for the causal line to narrate that story. Even in between the paragraphs on the same page she employs several typefaces. However, Tristram plays with the fonts according to the fragments that he narrates. Although he does not narrate a unified story that has a sequential movement in itself, he cares for the fragments that he tries to carry on. He plays with the fonts to show that what he is creating is just a fictional world. He wants his readers to be careful about the fictionality of his world. For instance, in Mrs. Shandy's marriage settlement, in Book I, Chapter 15, Tristram uses fonts like in the following sentence: "***And this Indenture further witnesseth***". Furthermore, in his narration he frequently uses italics and upper-case fonts. In Slawkenbergius's Tale he uses italic cases such as "*Vespera quadam frigudula, posteriori in parte mensis Augusti, pregrinus, mulo fusco colore insidens*" (IV). In a realist novel, the reader considers a word as the object that it refers to; however, *Tristram Shandy* self-reflexively draws attention to the signs for their own sake, for effect, decoration and illustration.

In addition to the use of various typefaces, Tristram plays some other typographical games consciously and overtly. In a traditional reading process, readers take a novel expecting to face up to written words arranged in a straight line to be read from left to right and top to bottom. Federman underlines the necessity of using typographical elements by saying, “words, sentences, paragraphs (and of course the punctuation) and their position on the page and in the book must be rethought and rewritten so that new ways...of reading these can be created” (1993, 41). With his unusual narrative style, Tristram creates some feeling of shock by deconstructing the conventional narrative line. It throws readers’ expectations aside and makes them realize the play of signifiers. Instead of following the linear presentation of the signs on the page, Tristram makes use of the black and blank pages. After Yorick’s death, instead of words Tristram gives way to black pages, and subverts the expectations of the readers. In Book I, Chapter 12, after saying “Alas, poor Y O R I C K!” Tristram places blank pages:

Alas, poor Y O R I C K!



Although the written words do not appear on the printed page, Tristram makes his readers search for the meaning in the absence of the words and conveys his feelings through presenting a gravestone. The shock of the black pages creates the defamiliarization effect in the reader’s mind. The expectation of the readers is

to see words on the printed page, but in the process of reading they suddenly see shapes instead of words. Yorick's death, idea of mourning, sorrow, and silence may be the intended meanings that can be inferred from the given shape. Like a metafictionist of the contemporary literary canon, Tristram deals with signifiers without a certain signified behind them; furthermore, the readers are forced to seek multiple possibilities for these kinds of representations. Similar to this, in Book III, Chapter 36, Tristram places two marbled pages which totally distort the linearity of a realistic-page-set up:



Figure 18 The marbled page

As it is stated in the beginning of the novel, he does not want to confine himself to the rules of the previous writers and theorists. Tristram consciously mocks the readers' desire to make sense of the novel and to see the novel as the composition of words referring to a representation of the reality. Like Babs, Tristram draws the readers' attention to its own structure as an artefact and its formal qualities. What is represented on the page is just the complex nature of the writing process. As a further step for his self-reflexive plays, in Book VI, Chapter 38, Tristram leaves a blank page for his readers to draw their own version of Widow Wadman and forces them to take part in the creative process. He consciously cuts his narration, and wants his readers to "call for pen and ink...to put [their] fancy in it" (VI, 38).

Tristram intentionally and openly refuses to draw the attention of his readers to the story; contrary to this view, he desires to make his readers aware of the formal construction. To do so, Tristram “prods us, plays with us, leads us to – to do s, he extends the spaces of our minds while making us self-consciously aware that he is doing so” (Konigsberg 59).

Tristram continues his subversion of the realistic novel tradition by applying other self-reflexive games. “Conventionally, pages are to be filled with words by the author” and they should follow a sequential line; however, Tristram’s “sense of the book’s physicality allows him to leave pages blank, or to pretend that he’s torn a page out altogether” (Whittaker, 63). In Book I, Chapter 25, Tristram self-reflexively declares that “what was to come in the next page” he will “tear out of [his] book”. Furthermore, in Book IV, he consciously and explicitly leaves out a whole chapter (24) and from Chapter 23 he moves to Chapter 25. Although he knows that “there is a whole chapter wanting” there, he makes “a chasm of ten pages in the book” and omits ten pages<sup>9</sup>. In the next chapter, Tristram gives the content of the missing chapter and explains that he has omitted those pages since they are not in line with the stylistic process of his own construction. As a self-reflexive narrator, Tristram openly declares that what he is creating is an artefact, and he consciously twists the realistic linearity. In Book IX, Chapter 4, with the introduction of line drawing, Tristram conveys his one of the most prominent self-reflexive devices. Instead of words, Tristram uses a twirling line to put across what he needs to say:

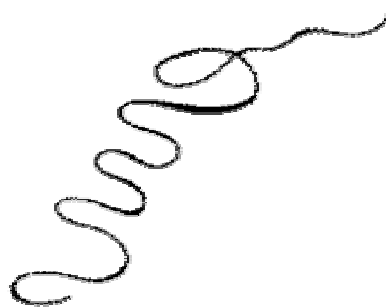


Figure 19 The twirling line

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<sup>9</sup> The pagination in the Wordsworth edition goes from page 208 to page 219.

With this graphic illustration, Tristram cuts up a sentence and with the coming of the line the sentence is left incomplete. After this unfinished sentence Tristram notes, “a thousand of my father’s most subtle syllogisms could not have said more for celibacy” (IX, 4). Both the twirling line and “the succeeding sentence emphasize Sterne’s acute awareness of the limitations of words” (Whittaker 63). Instead of directing the readers to search for the meaning that the story conveys, Tristram draws their attention to its formal devices and experiences freedom of choice in his process of production. The most outstanding example of self-reflexive typography is displayed in Book VI, Chapter 40:

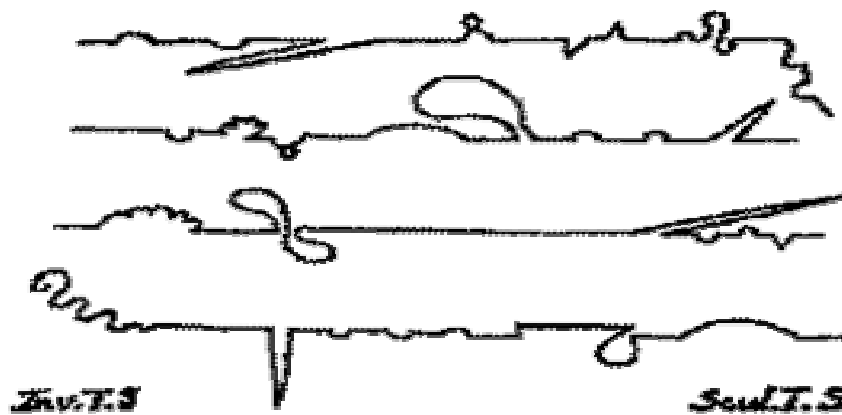


Figure 20 The four wiggly diagrams

These graphic illustrations show narrative lines in *Tristram Shandy*. So as to exhibit both the progressive and the digressive nature of his writing process in Book II, III, IV and V, Tristram draws four wiggly diagrams. “These are not drawings relating to the content of the novel, but rather to the theory of fiction; we are made to look at the difficulties inherent in the narrative progression” (Whittaker 64). Unlike a realist novel, *Tristram Shandy* is a self-conscious text that overtly points out its own creative lines. Through these drawings, Tristram intentionally displays the “technical aspects of novel-writing” and “this foregrounding inevitably weakens our belief in the novel’s plot” (Ibid). Instead of pretending to be a finished object as in realistic tradition, *Tristram Shandy* acts like a metafictional text which invites its readers to join its own process of construction. Just like a metafictional text, *Tristram Shandy* explicitly discusses its own creative process with its readers and does not try to make them forget the formal qualities that create the text; furthermore, the book never lets its readers to

be lost in a linear story. Through these self-reflexive devices *Tristram Shandy* “jerks us out of the comfortable feeling of gradually becoming lost in a novel” (Whittaker 65).

While reading a typical realist novel, if readers are asked to draw the narrative line, they would probably draw a progressive single story line. However, this application would not be enough to define Tristram’s narrative process. “The mimetic focus of narrative as sequential action and the movement of events through time” are all baffled by Tristram in a self-reflexive manner. Tristram builds his creative process on the two principles; “creates a fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion” (Federman: 1993, 31). As it is shaped through the graphic illustrations above; his process of construction involves many loops and curves referring to its complex nature of writing. The typographical tricks of *Tristram Shandy* “tease us into an awareness of the novel as a printed artefact, make us ponder the limits or power of language and its mechanical conventions” (Alter 108).

Even though *Tristram Shandy* was written nearly two hundred years earlier than the metafictional theories, Sterne’s view of the novel form is very close to contemporary self-reflexive metafiction. Akin to a metafictionist, Sterne regards the form itself as the main focus of the novel. He displays the application of Federman’s idea that “to write is to PRODUCE, and not REPRODUCE a pre-existing meaning” (Federman: 1993, 38). This self-reflexive tactic is extended to the discussion of the technical problems inherent in writing an experimental novel which is totally different from the traditional line. In order to deconstruct the realistic writing process Tristram employs various techniques; for instance, he omits a chapter, tears out a page, displays typographical illustrations, and distorts the linear narrative process through the digressions. Like a metafictionist, his aim is “to unmask its own fictionality...not pretend any longer to pass for reality” (Federman: 1993, 39). Whereas a realist novel draws the attention of the readers to the story, *Tristram Shandy* never lets them engage in the story; on the contrary, Sterne frequently warns its readers against the changes in the process of the

construction. In the following example, Tristram informs his readers about the movement of the narration:

Dr. *Slop* drew up his mouth, and was just beginning to return my uncle *Toby* the compliment of his Whu — u—u — or interjectional whistle, —when the door hastily opening in the next chapter but one — put an end to the affair (III, 11).

With these self-reflexive words “in the next chapter”, Tristram cuts his narration and instead of dealing with the story line, he talks about how to construct his fictional world. Through this self-reflexive example about the novel’s being an artefact, Tristram underlines that he “cuts itself off from referential points with the external world” so as to show it is only a construction of words (Federman: 1993, 9). In book III, Chapter 31, in another passage between the two characters of the novel, Eugenius and Tristram, by saying “the fifty- second page of the volume of this book of books” Tristram refers to an earlier page of the book which they are in. In book IV, Chapter 10, Tristram complains about his not being able to move his characters and expresses his feelings with these words: “Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs?” following these words he decides to “drop” his narration and start “a new chapter”. In Book IV, Chapter 13, Tristram tries to move his characters and needs help “to get [his] father and [his] uncle Toby off the stairs, and to put them to bed”. A traditional writer, in the course of his sequential story, engages in the realistic depiction of the scene, the position of his characters in that scene and the movement of the story. Contrary to this, Tristram reflexively distorts realistic presentation by discussing how to move his characters in his writing process. By these self-reflexive references to its being an artefact, Tristram reminds his readers that what they are witnessing is the construction of the words. According to metafictionists, writing is just filling the space, “in those spaces the writer can, at any time introduce material (quotations, pictures, charts, diagrams, designs, illustration, doodles, lists, etc.) totally unrelated to the story” since “there is no constriction in the writing of fiction, only arbitrariness and freedom” (Federman:1993,44).

On the self-reflexive nature of Tristram Shandy, Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky wrote one of the highly important articles. As the initiator of the theory

of defamiliarization effect, Shklovsky analyses the novel by taking formal devices into consideration. For Shklovsky, the technique of art is to make the familiar objects seem strange. Tristram constantly baffles the readers' accustomed process of reading by employing typographical devices, by giving references to the difficulty of writing, by addressing directly to the readers, by using a digressive act of writing, and so on. The readers' desire to become lost in the story is deconstructed by Tristram's conscious and self-reflexive insistence on his writing process. Tristram deals with what is called literariness, and rejects the realist expectation of language as a transparent tool. Shklovsky says, "Formalistically, Sterne was a great revolutionary; it was characteristic of him to 'lay bare' his technique" (12). "By violating the form, he forces us to attend to it; and, for him, this awareness of the form through its violation constitutes the content of the novel" (Shklovsky 25). Thus, it "could be called the first great anti-novel" and at the same time "the archetypal example of reflexive fiction [that] can exist only in opposition to a novel" (Whittaker 75).

As a conclusion, it may be asserted that although *Tristram Shandy* was written long before the emergence of the metafictional theories, the self-reflexive nature of the book makes it unique in the history of novel writing. "Tristram Shandy certainly does not satisfy the usual expectations as to how a novel should be organized, but that is because it is not the usual sort of novel" (Jefferson 17). Like a metafictionist, Tristram makes use of several metafictional techniques to reveal its own process of creation. Even though the novel was printed in a period when writers dealt with the realistic depictions of the outside world, the self-referential *Tristram Shandy* consciously and overtly displays the process of literary creativity and the problems of writing a novel. By bringing its own formal functions into absurd prominence and focusing on the self-conscious act of writing rather than on the thing being represented, Sterne committed himself to a type called "metafiction".



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study aimed at analysing the metafictional self-reflexivity by referring not only to the influential literary theories such as Russian Formalism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism; but also to the movements such as Realism, Modernism and Post-Modernism. The method was a blend of Gass' definition of metafiction, and Federman's study of metafictional devices leading to self-reflexivity. The idea of metafictional self-reflexivity is analyzed in two novels written in two different centuries, *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* by William Gass in the twentieth century, and *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne in the eighteenth century. The technique employed was close reading, and paying attention to the devices arising out of the idea of self-reflexivity.

Firstly, metafiction is the term applied to a certain type of fiction, or tendency in literature which started with French literary experimentalism in the 1950s and reached its peak in 1970s. Due to Einstein's theory of relativity, the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, World Wars, the use of nuclear weapons, the application of sophisticated technology, mass media, the use of computers in every field, electronic music, the development of a network of TV images, advertising and other theories and circumstances, both the identity and the position of man became highly ambiguous. Especially after the collapse of the idea of modernity, scepticism toward two terms, "advancement" and "civilization," shaped a self-conscious sensibility based upon uncertainty rather than stability. Above all, in the field of literature and literary theory, the idea of scepticism is furthered by two important names; Saussure and Derrida. Thus, the conventional understanding of "reality", which is based upon the logic of order, linearity, unity, and coherence is deconstructed by writers since the 70s.

In 1970, by William Gass, the term metafiction was used to name the experimental texts of the writers such as Robert Coover, John Barth, Raymond Federman, William Gass or Ronald Sukenick since the established terms like post-

modern novel, new novel or anti-novel were not enough to explore the narrative innovations of the several writers. The social, political, cultural and philosophical changes in the 1950s gave birth to the appearance of the first metafictional views that explicitly displayed scepticism toward traditional realist fiction, which is based on the mimetic principle of art. After the questioning of the conventional realism, metafictionists began to shape their texts by taking multidimensional structures into consideration and also by resisting any kind of linearity. Since contemporary reality does not confine itself to cause and effect principle, metafictionists have omitted this principle from their creative process. Metafictionists have rejected the mimetic assumption of realism and language; hence, changed the previous notion of language from a transparent tool for conveying meaning to an active medium for generating multiple dimensions. Hence, the key binary opposition between the “content” (fabula) and the “form” (sjuzet) is questioned and deconstructed as well.

The main argument in the discussion of metafiction is framed around the changing idea of reality and meaning. In this respect, the French linguist Saussure’s theory, as it is based upon the disjunction between the world of reality and the world of language plays a crucial role. Saussure proposed that the relation between the sign itself and what it refers to as the physical object is arbitrary and problematic as well. The signified is not encapsulated in the sign so the signified of a sign can be reached through its difference from the other signs in the system. Since language is arbitrary, there is no natural tie between words and things, and there can be no connection between language and reality. Developing on the structuralist idea, Derrida claims that concepts are nothing more than words. Signifiers are regarded as words that refer to other words or other signifiers and never to material objects or signifieds (logos/ meaning creating centre). Therefore, Derrida introduces the term *différance* to indicate the relation between the signifiers as difference and deferral.

The term metafiction, as discussed earlier, refers to the fictional writing which self-reflexively and systematically brings its own formal devices into prominence, poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality and

draws attention to its own status as an artefact. Since the relation between the word and the object is arbitrary, a novel cannot mirror the realities of the outside world. For metafictionists, through utilizing self reflexive devices, a writer should underline that what is created is just an artefact, not the illusion of reality. In a way readers should be defamiliarized from the automatized view of the novel, and notified that what he is reading is a construction. Therefore, metafictionists not only deconstruct the dominant conventions of the previous understandings of novel writing, but also overtly discuss the act of experimentation while performing it.

With regards to these ideas, the particular techniques which were applied by Gass and Federman to scrutinise the metafictional self-reflexivity constitute the main part of this thesis. As for Gass, the indicators of a metafictional text are the self-reflexive language full of the play of signifiers, a metaphor that incites the reflexive writing process, a self-conscious narrator and characters operating as linguistic entities. All these devices are employed to attract the attention to the point that metafiction is a “meta” form which reflects upon the distinction between fiction and reality. Federman, like Gass, harshly criticizes the conventional mimetic principle of novel writing. Unlike Gass, Federman mostly deals with the formal devices which give birth to metafictional self-reflexivity to indicate the constructedness of reality. In his theory, Federman abolishes the traditional reading habit of starting at the top of the first page, and moving from left to right, top to bottom, page after page to the end in a consecutive prearranged manner in order to give the reader a sense of free participation in the writing/reading process. To achieve this, traditional word order, punctuation, page set-up should be changed to draw all the attention to the creative process of the text and to remind readers that what they are reading is just a formal construction. For Federman, a writer should attract the attention to the formal qualities of a text and readers should not be lost in the linearity of the conventional story telling. Thus, according to Federman, the habitual activity of reading and the notion of paginal syntax should be deconstructed through typographical plays and visual effects.

After the discussion of the definition and the devices of metafictional self-reflexivity in the previous chapters, there arises a question. Although the term metafiction is quite a new phenomenon in the field of literature, the self-reflexive devices of metafiction are not new in application. In the case of a metafictionist, the aim is to reflect the awareness of the devices governing the creation of an artefact. So as to direct readers' attention to the formal properties of a work, metafictionists employ self-reflexive techniques such as a conscious narrator, reflexive language, characters as linguistic entities, visual plays, innovative page-set-up, new word order, unusual divisions, different typefaces, digressive discourse and so on.

While metafictional self-reflexivity has been playing its tricks during the past three decades, insisting on drawing the reader into the confidence that the text is the only reality (not a mirror-image), as it is shown in the last chapter, there is nothing new in that; it was all done two centuries ago by the self-reflexive fictioneer of *Tristram Shandy*. Both *WMLW* and *Tristram Shandy* act as a performance where the narrative constantly deviates from linearity and sequential logic into a spiralling mode of digressions and releases energies into the language of fiction. The devices of metafictional self-reflexivity such as the application of a self-conscious narrator, typographical plays, visual illustrations, the direct contact with the reader, making prominent all the writing devices, an innovative paginal syntax, unusual punctuation, announcement of the formal construction, drawing attention to the form, rejecting linearity, abandonment of linear and causal plot structure, etc. are firstly examined in *WMLW* since the book is considered as one of the significant examples of metafiction. When *Tristram Shandy* is analysed under the guidance of these self-reflexive devices, the case is not different from the analysis of *WMLW*. These two novels explicitly deal with the process of writing, and in so doing unveil the mechanism of their constructions. Although there are a few differences in the application of the self-reflexive devices and the process of presenting them, these two novels can be accepted as significant exemplifications of metafictional self-reflexivity. The major difference between the two is that, although Babs does not try to invent stories to prolong her existence, Tristram struggles to carry on various stories within the same process of writing construction. By doing so, Tristram employs an explicit digressive style

which contributes much to the novel's self-reflexive nature. Tristram divides his narration, distorts the linearity, creates fragments and overtly lets his readers know his movements between these fragments. However, in *WMLW*, Babs cares only for the shapes of the words in her act of writing and does not worry about the story telling. Babs of *WMLW* is involved only in the physical charms of language so as to draw all the attention to the formal qualities of the page and to force her readers to see the text as a fictional product entirely concrete in itself. The main reason for this divergence may be the stages of sophistication that the self-reflexive fiction has undergone. Though Sterne disrupts chronology with digressions and opinions, while narrating his fragmented stories he refers to time and place, in a way he cannot totally tear his ties with the realistic presentation. Babs of *WMLW* creates a world only out of words to extricate herself from the postures and impostures of realism.

If a list of the certain self-reflexive devices of metafiction should be given in order to compare the two novels produced in two different centuries, the result will be astonishing. The same self-reflexive devices - the lack of an obvious and conventional plot, the use of diffused episodes (especially in *Tristram Shandy*), a minimal development of character, detailed surface analysis of objects, many repetitions, various experiments with vocabulary, new and experimental punctuation and syntax, variations of time sequence (especially in *Tristram Shandy*), typographical alterations (especially in *WMLW*), self-conscious narrator, self-reflexive metaphors - can be observed in both *WMLW* and *Tristram Shandy*. It is obvious that although *Tristram Shandy* was written before the use of the term "metafiction", these two books show similarities in terms of the self-reflexive devices. The list demonstrates that metafictional self-reflexivity has not been absent from the literary output before the invention of the term metafiction; on the contrary, it was there as a practice. All the listed metafictional techniques were made use of by Sterne long before the emergence of the term metafiction. It is apparent that self-reflexivity is not the invention of the 60s or 70s. In the light of this study, as has been shown, metafictional self-reflexivity is not unique to the twentieth-century novel.

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