

Fabulation in Postmodern American Short Stories

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá fabulací v postmoderních amerických povídkách po druhé světové válce. Jedná se o období, kdy se většina autorů ve svých dílech zabývala právě událostmi spojenými s válkou. Následně pak vznikla nová generace autorů s jiným pohledem na svět a jinými hodnotami. Tato skupina autorů byla unavená přišernostmi, které válka přinesla. Mnoho z nich se nebylo schopno vypořádat s realitou, která nastala po válce a uchýlili se proto ke skepticismu či černému humoru, do světa fikce. Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí. První teoretická část pojednává o vzniku a vývoji postmodernismu, fabulace a povídky a jejich dopadu na literaturu. Druhá část se zaměřuje na analýzu amerických postmoderních povídek od vybraných autorů. Cílem této práce je popsat prvky fabulace a postmodernismu, které můžeme najít v těchto amerických povídkách.

Klíčová slova: postmodernismus, postmoderní literatura, 2. světová válka, ontologie, postmoderní techniky, fragmentace, fabulace, povídka, Američtí spisovatelé, John Barth, Robert Coover, fikce.

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor thesis focuses on fabulation in Postmodern American short stories after the World War II. It is a period when most of the authors dealt with events related to the war in their works. Subsequently, a new generation of authors with different views of the world and values was created. This group of authors was tired of the horrendous events the war had brought. Many of them were unable to deal with the reality that came after the war and therefore resorted to scepticism or black humor, to the world of fiction. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first theoretical part focuses on the origin and development of Postmodernism, fabulation and short story and its impact on literature. The second part focuses on the analysis of American short stories of selected authors. The aim of the thesis is to describe specific aspects of fabulation and postmodernism present in these American short stories.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Postmodern literature, World War II, ontology, Postmodern techniques, fragmentation, fabulation, short story, American writers, John Barth, Robert Coover, fiction.

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The literature after the second world war II has significantly changed. A new generation of authors with different views, social and regional settings emerged, entirely different from the previous one. Many of them experienced the war themselves, which is also apparent in their works. Despite the conservative period, some younger writers had Jewish or African American origins. They were homosexuals, bisexuals, or women who tried to find their rightful standing within society with the rise of feminism. They used experimental methods and not exactly carefree themes in their work.¹

One response to the horrendous events of World War II was through realistic war novels. Many famous novelists wrote stories from the military environment, emphasizing the violence and terrible things happening there or just documenting what the war cost us. Many American authors were unable to look at the reality the same way because of the increasing consumer culture, partially owing to advanced technologies such as atomic bombs or the upcoming cold war. The traditional role of fiction was being questioned. Therefore, authors came up with some entirely new type or a somewhat different type of novel. Writers switched to using black humor and absurdist fantasy and developed their own kind of fiction with their own literary devices, such as imitating or parodying the traditional fiction. Thus, metafiction and postmodern literature in general emerged. Vladimir Nabokov or Jorge Luis Borges are the most influential individuals regarding metafiction. John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, John Fowles and such, being the typical representatives of postmodernism. World War II influenced not only novels and short story writing but poetry as well. Until then, poetry was mainly modernist, but same as with the novels, some poets rebelled and experimented with a different type of poetry using more open form styles or by trying to use a more informal style of poetry.²

When we are talking about literary movements, in general, it is difficult to define any of them, and the postmodern turn and postmodern literature especially is no exception. Postmodernism as a literary movement influenced almost every aspect of our lives, starting from art then moving to literature, cinema or philosophy. At first, the term was viewed rather negatively. We can even say as a something outrageous, as if people turned their back on modernism, which was sometimes associated with technological progress and embraced the

¹ Dickstein, Morris, Blair, Walter, and James R. Giles, *American literature: After World War II* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2018), accessed January 20, 2020.
<https://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature/After-World-War-II>.

² Dickstein, Blair, Walter, and Giles, *American literature: After World War II*.

delusions.³ Especially literary critics could not bring themselves to like this new literary movement. Expecting the excitement will not last for a long time. They could not be more wrong. Contrary to critics' expectations, the term became more stable and accepted during its calmer period of 1970s and 1980s. Also, it was at that time it became more used in other disciplines such as sociology or epistemology. Thus, a literary movement that was initially the dominant feature of American literature has spread on a global scale.⁴

First mentions of postmodernism are dated in the 1870s, concerning art. Since then, it was mentioned several times, usually referring to some changes within society. Though it was not actively used until after World War II in association with literature. Particularly around the 1980s, it spread like wildfire, and it was a discussed topic by everyone and everywhere, from the radio to newspapers. Today, the fuss about postmodernism has calmed down, but it remains a discussed topic in humanities throughout Western World. The meaning of postmodernism now and before could now mean the same thing. It developed throughout time and its meaning within society as well.⁵

Postmodernism is viewed as a successor of Modernity. Forerunners of postmodernism believed that it is a time for a new type of literary movement with Modernity being outdated. The modernity age is sometimes associated with the enlightenment period due to the similar ideas between those two movements, such as searching for knowledge or the development of society. Compared to modernity ideas, postmodernism is the exact opposite, holding completely different values sometimes associated with society's decline. That is also one of the reasons it was at the beginning viewed rather negatively by literary critics.⁶ The questions about what postmodernism is, how did it start, how did it developed and influenced our lives and what literary devices are used in postmodern works will be answered in this thesis.

The second part of my thesis will be dedicated to explaining the meaning and revealing origins and development within the literature of one technique used in Postmodern works. To be more precise, the talk is about fabulation. The fabulation was part of our lives for a long time. When people wanted to entertain themselves or to escape their troubles, they all sat down around a campfire and listened to a storyteller. As I am going to refer to him within my thesis, "the fabulator" tells an invented story. However, at that moment, it lacked a proper name, the name that would emphasize the importance of this narrative form. It is not so long

³ Ward, Glenn, *Postmodernism*. Teach Yourself Books (London: Hodder Education, c2003), 4-5.

⁴ Călinescu, Matei, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 266, 268.

⁵ Ward, *Postmodernism*, 4-10.

⁶ Ward, *Postmodernism*, 4-10.

before the term fabulation was reintroduced in literature again. At that time, teachers and critics were mainly focused on realistic works and did not bother themselves with fiction so much, and we can assume it has partly been because there was no name for this way of storytelling. However, it was a time when an alternative approach to fabulous fiction appeared. A type of fabulation from which we could learn something, or which could make us feel excited and thrilled. The one who could take credit for renouncing this word within the literary world is none other than the literary critic and theorist Robert Scholes.⁷

The third part will be about shortly describing short story. Its history, development, features, and relation to postmodern literature. And in the end, I am going to analyse a collection of short stories written by postmodernist representatives Robert Coover and John Barth.

⁷ Scholes, Robert, *Fabulation And Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 1.

I. THEORY

1 ABOUT POSTMODERNISM

When defining postmodernism first, we must realize how widespread the term became in the second half of the twentieth century. Its influence extends to art, literature, philosophy, sociology, or architecture. Be it philosophy, art, or literature, the meaning behind the term may differ. As the term became popular in every possible field, so did become the definition itself. Sometimes, especially when we consider literary critics, the definitions can even contradict themselves.⁸

As English author J. A. Cuddon states in his work, postmodernism is a term that shows some change, development, or movement that happened within the literature, art, philosophy, and so on. Furthermore, like any other 'isms' it is generally chaotic. The most prominent literary features are that some postmodern works are contemporary and tend to go against the authority or the concept itself. Other features used in literary works are spontaneous writing, parody, pastiche, or applying an eclectic style. Also, we should not omit the usage of magic realism in fiction and new modes in science fiction or neo-Gothic and horror story. Another indispensable part of postmodernism portrays criticism, criticism in connection to feminism, Marxism, or psychoanalytic criticism.⁹

Another author, the literary critic Linda Hutcheon refers to postmodern as: “a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges.”¹⁰ Or, according to Glenn Ward, which debates in his book, postmodernism might even be: “very set of concepts and debates about postmodernism itself.”¹¹

Brian Attebery talks about postmodernism as “a return of early narrative forms - the fairy tale movements and mythic structures,” although with the recognition of them being “artificial.” We can only be sure of one thing: the fact we cannot be sure of anything inside the postmodern story, resulting in postmodern delight in randomness, uncertainty, or even absurdity in a story.¹²

⁸ Bahadur Bist Resham, An-Anti Foundational Philosophy of Western Philosophical tradition, *Academia* (International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 5(3), 2020), 627, accessed March 20, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/43113290/Postmodernism_An_Anti_Foundational_Philosophy_of_Western_Intellectual_Tradition

⁹ Cuddon, J. A., *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (London: Penguin, 1992), 734.

¹⁰ Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (New York : Routledge, 1988), 3.

¹¹ Ward, Glenn, *Postmodernism*, Teach Yourself Books (London: Hodder Education, c2003), 6.

¹² Attebery, Brian, *Strategies of fantasy* (Indiana University Press, 1992), 40.

Christopher Butler claims postmodern writers can see the world in their own specific way. By devoting themselves to philosophical thoughts, they can analyse cultural conditions in which they find themselves. Though, in the information society, where most information is manipulated to benefit influential figures, postmodernists take a stand that of suspicion, sometimes bordering with paranoia. When comparing modernist writing with postmodernist, the most significant variable lies in the values each group embraces. Modernists were not willing to change with the upcoming changes arising after the war.¹³

After the war, a group of influential figures, namely Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, or Roland Barthes, focused on modernism's indications, each focusing on different works of a specific author. It did not take long for postmodernism to be in chaos without realizing what has the most considerable value. The structure of ideas moved from French experts to the United States and Europe. The fundamental thought shifted from “strongly ethical and individualist existentialisms,” typical after the war, to scepticism. Thus, the deconstructive and post-structuralist theory came to exist. This proves that postmodernism has its origins in many philosophical, sociological, and political ideas.¹⁴

1.1 Ontology in Postmodernism

Ontology could be generally described as a philosophical discipline dealing with the questions about our existence of being, whenever some entities or concepts truly exist. It is concerned with question such as whether God is real or questions about the very existence of the universe. Albeit ontology is not concerned only with such vital questions about the universe or individuals, but even more trivial ones, such as a relation between two existing entities, entity and event or worlds.¹⁵

Ontology is an inseparable part of postmodern literature. Using Thomas Pavel's definition, McHale characterizes ontology as “a description of a universe, not of the universe; that is, it may describe any universe, potentially a plurality of universes.” In this sense, to “do” ontology may mean “describing other universes, including impossible and possible,” not only focusing on our universe. The opinions about using ontology in fiction differ from author to author. As a result of the rejection of determinacy and stability,

¹³ Butler, Christopher, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3,5.

¹⁴ Butler, Christopher, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, 6,7.

¹⁵ Hofweber, Thomas, *Logic and Ontology*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2021, accessed March 20, 2021
<https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=logi-ontology>.

postmodernist authors had more freedom and opportunities to express themselves. Although each postmodernist may take the opposing view, there is still one element common to them all, “foregrounding the ontological concerns.” Therefore, postmodernists have to work with theories and strategies of literary ontology. These techniques exploit “general ontological characteristics shared by all literary texts and fictional worlds.”¹⁶

1.1.1 Theory of heterocosm

One of the oldest themes used way back in Renaissance considers ontology as heterocosmic. Ontological themes are identified by “the otherness of the fictional world,” and “its separation from the real world of experience.” The theory of heterocosm, however, only implies the contrast between fictional and real world. A connection between the real world and fiction is possible through individuals. The problem lies in the appearance of the individuals in the fictional world existing in the real world. As the individuals are being integrated rather than reflected into the fictional world. Therefore, the heterocosm theory had to be adjusted to admit an overlap between the real world and the fictional one. Therefore, literary texts “inevitably refer outside their internal field to an external field of reference: the objective world, the body of historical fact or scientific theory, an ideology or philosophy and other texts.”¹⁷

Another theme appearing in ontological theory deals with the interpretation of the author as a God. Furthermore, as the author is the world’s creator, he reflects himself in the fictional world. But the real author is superior to his represented version within the fiction, so we can even say that he is “doubly superior” to the world of fiction on the ontological level. As McHale explains this on Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist (1796)*, where on one level is Jacques and behind him on the next level is “the author” and somewhere behind the author stands “the real Diderot.” As the author is the creator of the fictional world, the world itself changes to “something made” and therefore can be interpreted as an artwork. Thus, we can say that fiction can not only describe a world but even fiction itself. As an example, the author voices the poetry of romantic irony.¹⁸

1.1.2 Relationship between fiction and the reader

Even though romantic poetry a bit disrupted the classical model of heterocosm theory, the theorists were still more focused on the relation between the world of fiction and its author.

¹⁶ McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 26-27.

¹⁷ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 27-29.

¹⁸ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 29-30.

The change began in the twentieth century because of the phenomenologist Roman Ingarden and his focus on the internal ontological structure. He stresses the interaction between the piece of art and the reader himself above the relationship between the author and the artwork on which ontological theory was focused before. He also states that artwork is “not ontologically uniform or monolithic but polyphonic, stratified.” Therefore, according to their ontological status and functions, he categorized literary artworks into four layers, or strata. They are stratum of word-sound, schematized aspects, presented objects, and the meaning-unit stratum.¹⁹

The stratum of word-sound emphasizes the importance of word-formations and semantic units that build the “material base” of literary work needed for advanced stages of the text. Word-sounds are realized by graphic signs and hereafter by the typography of the physical book.²⁰ The meaning-units, like nouns, form a “concept of objects and “states of affairs.” However, that is attainable only if the meaning-units become “intentional objects of the reader’s consciousness.” The third layer is about presented objects. This layer is helping us realize that artwork does not only provide information, but it can even “project objects and worlds.” As the meaning-units project the presented objects, they are partly indeterminate. Compared to real-world objects, they can be seemingly absurd or ambiguous. They may create “ontological gaps” in the fiction, giving space to reader’s own interpretation and imagination. The presented objects are overly simplified—schematic and lacking all the important aspects of the real-world objects, but they can imitate reader’s experience with real objects. According to Ingarden, such objects have “metaphysical qualities.”²¹

1.1.3 Theory of possible worlds

Now moving from the relation between reader and the text to the theory of fictional world in literature. A theory that looks at the text with “suspension of belief and disbelief.” Regarding the narrative structure of fictional worlds or reality, all sentences are dependent on the “logical modality,” on the semantic meaning of the worlds. Necessity, possibility, and impossibility are three classical modalities acknowledged in relation to fictional worlds. Hypotheses in fiction are determined by the modality of possibility, hypotheses about the real-world fall to the category of the modality of necessity. But in terms of the third choice, the impossibility, the opinion differs depending on the expert. For instance, Umberto Eco

¹⁹ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 30.

²⁰ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 30-31.

²¹ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 31-33.

excludes logical impossibility and impossible worlds as he claims every hypothesis must be true or false and nothing in between. According to Eco world containing impossibility lack independence. But linguist Lubomír Doležel is of the opinion that logical impossibility is doable and that worlds of fiction can float somewhere between existence and nonexistence.²²

For possible worlds, it is necessary to have a human agent. But it is improbable if the human agent does not believe in, imagine, or dream about the world. The human agent is usually a reader, but it can even be character who dream of or imagine a world. Eco refers to these worlds as “subworlds” whereas Pavel uses term “narrative domain.” The theory of possible worlds also diminishes the external boundary between real and fiction. The diminishing boundary leads to a problem of the “same” entity being in both worlds. Therefore, Eco introduced a term “transworld identity,” when two entities distinct only by nonessential features or some communication between the entities in a different world can be identical beings despite living in separate worlds. For example, when a historical figure can be to some extent the same as his representative within the world of the novel. The accessibility of transworld identity, though, is possible one-way only, which means we can reach the fictional world but not the other way around. In this case we are talking about “asymmetrical accessibility.” Accessibility of transworld identity is also possible between two fictional worlds, provided they differ only by nonessential features as mentioned above. In case they have essential differences, we do not talk about transworld identity but about homonymy instead, typically used in literary parodies. Another level of transworld shift is on historical dimension. The possibility of transmigration on the ontological level, from one realm to another. Such as when real-world entities experience “mystification”, advancing to a higher level “from profane realm to the realm of sacred,” or the opposite, “fictionalization,” when a mythical entity is deprived of its status of “superior reality” and regress to the level of mere fiction due to the “erosion of belief-system that sustains them.”²³

1.2 Postmodernism in connection to language disorder

The postmodernist writing is being compared to and shares some traits with insanity. French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, who is considered to be the person who contributed the most within the field of postmodernism, argues in his book *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1989), that we find ourselves currently “in a new form of schizophrenia.”

²² McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 33.

²³ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 34-36

Furthermore, he is not the only one. In the *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), G. Deleuze and F. Guattari talk about schizoanalysis, which depicts a comparison between mental breakdown and present-day. And finally, in postmodernism, or the *Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson uses schizophrenia as an analogy for “the collapse of traditional socio-economic structures.” The connection between schizophrenia and postmodernist techniques is not coincidental as a temporal disorder, fragmentation, looseness association, paranoia, or pastiche are features that can be used to describe both. Modernists experimented with the temporal disorder, fragmentation, or pastiche as well, but their impulse was different, such as to “protect culture against the chaos of technological change and ideological uncertainty” as a result of World War II. On the contrary, postmodern writers when facing their fears and uncertainties resulting from the second World War lost faith in the old cultural values and simply “delighted in delirium.” Their estrangement in the fiction depicts the estrangement of themselves.²⁴

1.3 Postmodern techniques

This part will be divided into two sections. The first one will be focused on techniques of world making, such as Chinese boxes and its layered structure of narrative levels. Defining strategies such as frequency, trompe-l’oeil or metalepsis.

The second section will be focusing on foregrounds stylistic means and textual techniques aiding in the construction of worlds. Postmodernism explores different layers of worlds and focuses on the “linguistic turns” happening in the twentieth century by using precisely these stylistic means and techniques for foregrounding ontological themes in the fiction.²⁵

1.3.1 Construction of worlds

Following on from previous chapters that dealt with worlds in fiction, I would like to mention one technique postmodernists use to create the worlds— Chinese boxes or Russian babushka doll. This technique aims to disrupt and make the fiction more complicated on the ontological “horizon” or “multiplying its worlds.” McHale calls it a “recursive structure.” The structure of both Chinese boxes or Russian babushka is built on the same principle when within one Chinese box or doll, we can find another smaller one and again within another one and again and again and again. The same rule can be used when constructing worlds. For instance, when an author creates a world in a form of a movie or a book, and then the

²⁴ Sim, Stuart, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 132-133.

²⁵ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 141.

characters in that movie or book create another world, in whose characters create another world and so it can go indefinitely. The recursive structure can be described by using Gérard Genet's "metalanguage of narrative levels." The initial world is "diegesis," while the following one is called "hypodiegetic," which is one position lower than the diegesis world. A world within a hypodiegetic one is called "hypo-hypodiegetic," and so it goes on continuously with adding prefix "hypo."²⁶

When we talk about a change of narrative level, a change on ontological level must, of course, also take place. A world following after the initial diegesis is either a continuation of the initial one or a slightly or entirely different world. One strategy used to foreground ontological dimensions of fiction is frequency. Its purpose is to repeatedly disrupt the primary diegesis, using hypo-diegesis world, "representation within representation" and so on. In terms of fiction's ontological horizon, the understanding depends on the frequency of interruption. If the interruption is a mild one, understanding the ontological horizon is effortless, but if the disturbance happens more frequently, the fiction's ontological horizon is utterly lost. Other recursive strategies involve paradoxes, "effect of trompe-l'oeil" or "metalepsis."²⁷

It is not too difficult for a reader to keep up with recursive strategies and differentiate each level due to his "subconscious mind," but in case of the strategy of trompe-l'oeil, it is no longer applicable there. It is basically a strategy of deception used to confuse the reader into thinking that a hypo-diegesis world is a diegesis one. The purpose of trompe-l'oeil is again "foregrounding of ontological dimension." Another term used for defining this strategy is "strategy of variable reality." A strategy where we apply first "mystification" - creating a world "seemingly" real to a reader and then "demystification" - exposing this seemingly real world turns out to be "virtual," just an illusion and contrarily. Many examples of variable reality include erotic, ridiculous melodrama, or violent elements. The elements here behave to highlight the instability of the ontological dimension, to stimulate or horrify the reader. Other device used to confuse the reader is "missing end-frame." In this case, we have an initial diegesis world and several more "hypo" worlds. During the reading process, the reader goes further and further "down" into hypo-diegesis worlds, and as he climbs back up again, he ends up in one of the virtual worlds without being able to get to the first layer of the original diegesis.²⁸

²⁶ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 112-113.

²⁷ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 113-114.

²⁸ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 115-117.

“Strange loops,” or “metalepsis,” is another recursive technique achieved by “violation of hierarchy of narrative levels,” It means moving up and down between narrative levels and suddenly find ourselves at the beginning but at the wrong level. As a result of the interaction between initial diegesis and “nested” hypo-diegesis, a “paradoxical continuity” can be born. In this case, a character in the text goes through multiple narrative levels and ends up returning to his level reading about himself.²⁹

1.3.2 From metanarrative to scepticism

First technique I choose is scepticism and its journey in postmodernist fiction in connection to metanarrative— a term introduced by Jean-François Lyotard.

Grand narratives are often implied in major philosophies such as Marxism and their Utopia, claiming that knowledge is liberating and has a “secret unity” or that history is progressive. It denies any space for disputes and often leads to “totalitarian persecution.” As a result, postmodernists became wary and sceptical of devotion to the grand narratives, especially in Western countries, due to being exposed to ideologies of a precisely grand narrative. They sided with the minorities that did not fit in against those in power that propagated “master narrative.” This announced a beginning of the pluralistic age, with narrative viewed as pseudo-narrative, despite historians’ and scientists’ efforts, all due to scepticism. The narrative had to compete with other types of narrative to be recognized, lacking any conformity to reality. To quote Butler: “it became just another kind of fiction.” Although, many postmodernists moved to use scepticism for traditional liberal concerns. For instance, Edward Said shows in his work *Orientalism* (1978) the distorting effects of imperialist Western grand narrative placed upon Oriental society. Where imperialist is viewed as an intelligent, peaceful, and devoted in contrast to Oriental society that represented the opposite. The imperialists believe that their interpretation of the “grand narrative” of Oriental society is the right one. This work proves Said’s belief in this type of grand narrative being able to influence social groups and their standing to some degree. In the story, the ones in power were the imperialists, while orientalist were below. However, as the story points out the imperialists’ superiority, we do not know if the orientalist really were simple and deviant, as the story implies. And here, we can apply one typical feature of postmodernism - relativism.³⁰

²⁹ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 119-120.

³⁰ Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, 14-16.

1.3.3 Deconstruction

“Truth itself is always relative.”

Deconstruction is based on relativism. Its basic belief is the fact that something like an ultimate or final correct definition about anything is improbable because there is always room for speculations and further analysing of the language. Language is a cultural construct, so in terms of its relation to the world is viewed as unreliable in deconstructor’s eyes. Butler also claims that philosopher Jacques Derrida, who focused on the subject, created his own “grand narrative” about the relationship of language and the world. Derrida believes that in Western countries the philosophy and literature are based on the relationship of language and reality being reliable. The word is recognized as a mirror of reality and therefore has its origin in its structure. Then it creates that ultimate truth “directly present to the mind.” Though this Derrida’s notion is basically false “metaphysics of presence.” But contrary to Derrida’s assumptions that no philosophy ever questioned how the language fits in the world, nominalism and essentialism have dealt with those questions for a long time. This gave Derrida a reason to accuse those who “naively” believed a novel could mirror the world as it is. People like that simply did not “appreciate the nature of language from which they derive their false confidence.” Postmodernist deconstructors aimed to express how can a relationship of language to reality “go astray.”³¹

Whenever we talk about “common knowledge” or even scientific or philosophical theories, all are based on a particular “origin.” One purpose of deconstruction is to point out those origins do not have a grounding in reality. Ward Glenn argues that the purpose of deconstruction is about demonstrating the fact the grounding of text is changeable and “shifting” rather than about digging up the hidden meaning behind the text. There are two ways to accomplish it. One option is “imaginary oppositions” such as good vs. evil. Using imaginary oppositions, we conclude about one being superior in a sense to the other one. From there, we perceive it as a basis for further argumentation and definition, even though it does not reflect reality, but constructs created by society with a tendency to bias. Another option is through “recognizing the active role played by the invisible and marginalized.”³²

1.3.4 Historiographic Metafiction

Historiographic novels are both popular among people and in the academic field. Such fictional novels use the full potential of “characterization techniques” and “plot structure.”

³¹ Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, 16-18.

³² Ward, *Postmodernism*, 94, 103, 106, 108

It is the use of irony and parody challenging the very same popular techniques inside a novel that makes them intriguing for academic analysis as well. This technique is related to the reader's point of view and the society he finds himself in at the moment. Historiographic metafiction shows that "every representation of the past has a specifiable ideological implication." Therefore, reader's best interest is to re-read some important narrative histories and look at them differently and re-think what they mean to us now. It is common for postmodernism to question narrative histories because, according to postmodern theory, history is an "unreliable narrative construction." Historiographic metafiction applies different techniques, such as changing the narrator or parodic reflexivity. Nevertheless, the fundamental technique is an intertextual parody. To fully recognize historiographic fiction, first, the reader needs to recognize the original utterances, which are being relocated in a different form to fit in another work of fiction. But contrary to what it looks like, the intertextual parody used here is not meant to ridicule the previous narrative histories but more to show the different points of view and perspectives that were not recorded before.³³

Other means used to achieve this type of narrative also connected to intertextuality are apocryphal history, anachronism or merging history with fantasy.³⁴ Historical fiction tries to create an illusion that something impossible, like a character leaving a fictional house and appearing in a real cafeteria, is actually possible. In such occurrences, we can say that "a boundary between the real and the fictional has been transgressed." In contrast to classic historical fiction, postmodernist fiction tries to foreground the passage between real and fictional as much as possible. We can say a postmodernist historical novel is "revisionist" in a sense. These revisions take place on two levels. On the level of content, where it demystifies a generally accepted version of historical events. The second level alters "the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself." It is the apocryphal history that exploits revision. It can both "supplement" the original history, uncovering what has been supposedly unknown till then, or disrupt the original history. The first means function in the "dark areas" of history in favour of classic history at first glance but in real parodying the history. The second one "violates" restrictions of those dark areas. Apocryphal history also gives space for paranoia and conspiracies, sometimes associated with another term "a secret history." Many postmodernists viewed history with suspicion and full of conspiracies happening

³³ Thaden, Barbara Z, *Charles Johnson's Middle Passage as Historiographic Metafiction* (College English, vol. 59, no. 7, pp. 753–766, 1997), 753-756, accessed Mar. 15, 2021. https://www-jstor-org.proxy.k.utb.cz/stable/378634?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents.

³⁴ Sim, *The Routledge companion to postmodernism*, 124.

behind the scenes, including Ishmael Reed or Thomas Pynchon, whose works are full of secret society operating in dark areas.³⁵

Another device anachronism is not very popular among postmodernists, although there are some exceptions as always. It creates “tension between past and present” when a thing from one era is “superimposed” on another era. For example, a twentieth-century device is superimposed to the fifteen-century history forming an “impossible hybrid.” Nevertheless, this device can be used in a more creative way preferred by postmodernism in connection to view or ideology. For instance, when a character living in one period already has ideals and psychology as someone from an era that is yet to come. Other ways to use this form of anachronism include allusions. However, allusions are on the narrator’s level thus the fictional ontological level remains undisrupted.³⁶

1.3.5 Irony, Playfulness

Playing with the text or irony falls to the category of features typical for postmodernist writing. However, these techniques appeared in literary works long before postmodernism. For instance, even modernists used playfulness and irony. Postmodernists often use irony or playfulness on a serious subject. A postmodern writer, Thomas Pynchon is known for his “silly wordplay” used on a serious subject, same for Donald Barthelme and his use of irony or black humor.³⁷ Playfulness also relates to deconstruction. As deconstruction refused any literary text organization into a “hierarchy of concepts,” it disturbed the text’s organization. The words within the text or language field, in general, being linked together and “potentially unlimited” enabled many artists to experiment on the field of text.³⁸

1.3.6 Fragmentation

A typical postmodern work lacks classic narrative structure – “the wholeness and completion” of the story. One way to disturb the wholeness of the story is through using multiple ending structures. By providing multiple possibilities of different endings, it goes against the conclusion. For instance, in his work *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), John Fowles uses multiple ending structure due to his refusal to choose between two possible

³⁵ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 90-91.

³⁶ McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, 93-94.

³⁷ Sharma, Ramen, and Dr. Preety Chaudhary, *Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare*, (In International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration., Research India Publications, no. 2, pp. 189–198, 2011), 193, accessed Mar. 15, 2021.
https://www.ripublication.com/ijepa/ijepav1n2_11.pdf

³⁸ Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, 22-23.

conclusions. There are also extreme examples where authors fragment the page itself with some illustrations, mixed typography - a pattern of columns, footnotes, different font, utterly unrelated to the initial story. Although Sims argues the fragmentation could be fitting for modernists with their need for “continuity in the absence of old linear plots.” But looking at it from the other side, it could be expressed as scepticism or cautiousness against the wholeness.³⁹

³⁹ Sim, *The Routledge companion to postmodernism*, 127-128.

2 FABULATION

The second part will be focused on fabulation in depth, mostly based on the argumentation of the literary critic and theorist Robert Scholes who first introduces the term and categorized authors who were indispensable part of this literary narrative. First, I will describe the development of narrative in literature through time, from oral to written tradition. Then I will move to the fabulation itself and its characterization in literature through history and its connection to and mutual influence of other common techniques of postmodern writing. Next section will be about important modes of fabulation such as allegory, humor, or picaresque.

2.1 Development of narrative literature

In connection to fabulation, let me start this chapter with a few sentences about “the nature of narrative.” Narrative literature has a real tradition in the Western world. Narrative in this sense is represented by two discerning features, “the presence of a story and a storyteller.” The authors have in common that they all learn from their predecessors, during their growth coming up with new possibilities sometimes, but still starting within their predecessors’ tradition. The twentieth-century narrative is marked by an escape from attitudes and techniques typical for realism and the hostility and wariness of reviewers and critics against the new literature - a fiction that followed.⁴⁰

An inseparable part of literature is language. We do not know the exact origin of language, though we can assume it is even older than human himself, a creation of some “missing link,” an entity that is a part of the phylogenetic tree. Literature is only possible with using words; therefore, it is an “art of letters.” In the past, it was believed literature is divided into “written verbal art” and “oral verbal art” based on cultural differences. The foremost a civilized and reasonable narrative form and the latter a more primitive and uncivilised one. But nowadays, it is apparent the cultural distinctions do not play a significant role in the separation of literature. The separation is due to two different forms, a written one and oral one, rather than cultural distinctions.⁴¹

A written narrative has its origins in oral tradition, and it takes on a form of epic. Consequently, epic can appear in many narrative forms such as myth, fictional folktale, or quasi-historical legend. The storyteller of epic re-tells the traditional story as it was preserved

⁴⁰ Scholes, Robert, Phelan, James, and Kellogg, Robert, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-5.

⁴¹ Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 17-19.

in history. When recreating a traditional story, a transmission of the plot is necessary. According to Aristotle, a myth or plot is a “soul of any literary work that was an imitation of an action.” Thereafter written narrative literature moved in a different direction from traditional storytelling. Specifically, in the Western world, the literature has moved in two “antithetical directions” defined as “empirical and fictional.” The empirical narrative builds upon reality and is further divided into two units, the “historical” - which basically builds the narrative on the truth of fact and actual past and “mimetic” - mirroring the past based on our observation and representation rather than the truth of the fact. In contrast, a fictional narrative build on an ideal without any connection to tradition or empiricism. Consequently, fictional narrative can also be further divided into two forms - “the romantic and the didactic.” A writer of fiction is fixated on the reader rather than the external world, presents him with either what he wants or needs. A fictional narrative concentrate on the “beauty or goodness.” The beauty and the artistic aspects are precisely what defines fabulation also; thus, fiction is frequent in fabulation.⁴²

The ideal world is present in romance narrative, where “poetic justice” prevails, and any stylistic devices used are for embellishing the narrative. The empirical and fictional narratives are basically the opposites, similarly to scientific and truth of fact approach and inclination to imagination and art, both attitudes used to find the “ultimate truth” within the narrative literature. Whereas the didactic form of fiction or fable, in other words, concentrates on morale and one’s intelligence. The romantic and didactic forms of fictional narrative are dependent on each other, one seeking the other for “mutual support” and justification in a sense.⁴³

2.2 Characterizing fabulation

The fabulation and fabulators themselves build on the design and entertainment of the audience. The difference between a fabulator and a satirist or novelist is explicitly emphasized in art compared to other narrative forms. One of the inseparable features of fabulation is their delight in form. The “shapeliness” of the structure will provide us information about its creator - the fabulator behind it. The fabulator himself is irreplaceable, and it depends on his ability to sell the story to the audience and how they will enjoy the story. His role is to help the reader to brighten up and relax, forgetting about his everyday

⁴² Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 14-15.

⁴³ Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 14-15.

struggles. The fabulation is also interconnected with other postmodern literature methods, such as intertextuality, satire, irony, or humor.⁴⁴

As the times change, the new modern approach of fabulation takes place as well. In ancient times fables were used to educate children throughout preaching, and in one way, it can be said that modern fables could be interpreted the same way. Modern fables tend to drift away from reality, and they have no boundaries or restrictions but even though the fables return to the very existence of a human being. Most modern fabulous writers also try to convey a hidden meaning for the reader within their works inquisitively.⁴⁵

To be more artistic and to get away from realistic fiction, fabulation had to return to the power of words and their representation in a story. Words are bound to refer to human meaning, and they cannot express the entire meaning of something, and they cannot be regarded as neutral because of being a human creation. Still, as it is a human creation, every word will be humanized, so the writers had to come up with a compromise. The fabulators decided to use words as a medium inside their story. They returned to a more subjective way of looking at the world, focused on ideals and ideas with shapely structure rather than a realistic perspective and things happening. Many readers were ashamed of themselves for reading this type of fiction and had a tough time adjusting to it. They have not properly appreciated its value, partially because of the term not being explained adequately.⁴⁶

2.2.1 Allegory and fabulation

Allegory looks at life through philosophy and theology. Compared to realism, allegory focuses more on the “ideals and essences.” And relies on types devoted to the invisible world. Allegory was most attractive in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. It is a form of narrative best suited to deal with overlapping of the invisible and visible worlds. For example, the world of Christianity, which is related to the invisible world of eternity and humanism, a movement highlighting a man and his visible world, when clashed, allegory can help control and reconcile these two opposite visions. But with the loss of faith in theology and philosophy representing the invisible world, the visible world became more real, and allegory was substituted by a visible world of positivism and pragmatism. Nevertheless, with time even positivism and pragmatism faded becoming a “tired old dogma” and attention refocused on the invisible world, this time on psychology and the

⁴⁴ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 10.

⁴⁵ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 10-11.

⁴⁶ Scholes, Robert, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 11-13.

human psyche's depth. However, allegories based on psychology are gloomier and more tentative. Thus, a new type of allegory based on archetypes of Jung about the collective unconscious emerged. Symbols of the unconscious can be found in James Joyce's book *Finnegans Wake*, where Joyce adopts archetypes from Jung "to organize materials drawn from throughout history and pre-history." Joyce's inclination to delight for language could be also considered as another sign of allegorizing. With depth psychology, linguistics, semantic, and philosophy of language became a so-called "pseudo-science" with an enormous impact on the literature. This resulted in philosophy questioning language as a medium and focusing on two different approaches. The first one created a "pure language" - symbolic logic for philosophical brooding, and the second one focused on using language as a mirror of reality.⁴⁷

The allegoric fabulation builds on the fiction and though being interconnected, pervading one another. This essentially means that part of fiction is found in the meaning and part of the meaning in the fiction. If an allegoric character is going through some unfortunate event, it happens both on fictional and thought levels. Characteristic representatives of allegoric fabulation are Iris Murdoch and Edmund Spenser. As fabulation is a technique used in postmodern writing, it can be irrational, "full of meaning but devoid of meaning" simultaneously. To understand the allegoric implications within a fabulation story, the reader must fully understand the structure of its characters and events. At the beginning of a reading, the reader must connect to the story, finding its logic or coherence. As he gradually becomes involved in the story, he begins to have certain expectations with no solid structure. Next, he tries to match his expectations with the details of characters or events depicted in the story. The reader modifies the structure of his expectations involuntarily by details that do not fit. Then he strives to polish them to perfection as he is getting closer to the end of the story. This logic is quite nicely illustrated in Iris Murdoch's gothic romance *The Unicorn*.⁴⁸

Compared to a realist, a fabulator looks at the world from a different perspective, refusing the concept of reality and capturing the truth just by recording how things are. The fabulation is demanding for both the writer and the reader. It requires control on one side and "intelligent interference" on the other side.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 100-105.

⁴⁸ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 105-108.

⁴⁹ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 137.

2.2.2 Black humor and Satire

There is a general opinion that lessons are learned from fables, though it is not always the case. Some fables are so amoral as they could ever be. According to Scholes moral fables are acquaintances of a “larger satire,” whereas the amoral ones are connected to the picaresque tale. Nevertheless, both are affiliated with a movement called black humor. Scholes claims that black humor is an outcome of the absurd events occurring around the world, but also the fact of humor being with us all the time. Although Friedman contradicts himself when he characterizes black humor as both a modern literary mode as well as a “development of continuing tradition,” Scholes claims it is reasonable. Overall, most literary modes are with us the whole time, but in every period, some modes become more visible and popular, and others are forgotten for a while. From a historical point of view humor and western literature are intertwined from the beginning from intellectual comedy of Aristophanes, Imperial Rome satire to humanistic allegories in Middle Age or picaresque in Renaissance. All these literary modes can be perceived as predecessors of modern black humor.⁵⁰

Black humor started to reshape novels, with its wit and wickedness in the nineteenth century. The changes of the point of view showed novels in a new light. We also need to differentiate black humor from satire and picaresque as they are definitely similar, but the latter regarded as more of a “separate branch” of humor. A modern fabulator using satirical humor is more playful and cunning in creation than his predecessors. Fabulators use esthetics and playfulness as a way to change satirical work into a comedy. They refuse the notion of traditional satire as a means for change. Instead, their belief concentrates on the “humanizing value of laughter.”⁵¹

Common theme used by satirists for ridiculing is progress or a war. As war is one of the cruellest events humankind can experience, it did not escape a satirist or picaresque author’s critical eye. A black humorist focuses on accepting what life offers rather than “what to do” with it. They claim a human should look at the world and life with laughter instead of scorn. But first, one must understand the joke. Playing the part, one is supposed to such a degree “as to turn the humor on the joker or to cause it to diffuse itself harmlessly” within the group presented during the joke. Dominant of joke is the figure Joker, which may turn his figure into a divine being, someone above us - a God. But this does not seem to be the case as it

⁵⁰ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 35-39.

⁵¹ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 39-41.

would underground the perception of a world as a “cosmic joke.” Sometimes we cannot differentiate between an accident and a joke. The example is in a science-fiction novel *Sirens of Titan* from Vonnegut where humankind was formed by “interventions from outer space” only for the purpose of providing the spacecraft spare part needed for continuing the travel of one traveller to the faraway galaxy. The notion of all humanity being created only for this purpose is undoubtedly a cosmic joke, nevertheless an accidental one, without any God-like figure pulling strings for his own purposes. This novel quite beautifully pictures that whenever people attribute purpose to either accidental things or things expressing quite a different purpose for their own benefit, they will become a laughingstock.⁵²

The most discerning feature of traditional satire is “rhetoric of moral certainty.” In comparison, humourists do not defend the morality of their book as the only correct one. Instead, they believe their work itself is the test and not the morality it carries out. Moreover, the results should make us feel healthier and satisfied. Scholes also believes a comedy is a symbol of life and health rather than a disease, as other critics often refer to it.⁵³

2.2.3 Picaresque tradition

A great example of picaresque features can be seen in *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932), written by Louis-Ferdinand Céline. It perfectly depicts the bizarre exaggeration of misfortune - an escalation of everyday struggles turned into an ironic view of the universe where “poetic injustice” prevails with any attempt to revolt ending in destruction. Picaresque fiction is fond of depicting bizarre details, the cruelty and darkness of everyday life, and appreciate that life is unpredictable. A satirist pictures his own Utopia, but a picaresque novelist knows something unpredictable may happen even there. A typical picaresque work usually has loose and episodic structure, giving the author freedom to present his “despairing imagination.” From now onwards, modern fabulators move away from picaresque tradition to different directions - to allegory or comedy.⁵⁴ The picaresque novel’s main character sees himself as a Godsend messenger behaving in his name and punishing bad people in the “wicked world.” The punishment is usually exaggerated, not really reflecting the nature of the evil deed, the same goes with rewards. However, be it the seriousness of the punishment or reward, it does not have to represent a genuine picaresque world.”⁵⁵

⁵² Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 43-46.

⁵³ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 54-55.

⁵⁴ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 60-61, 63.

⁵⁵ Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 66.

3 SHORT STORY

A short story is a narrative form shorter than a novel with fewer characters. Its typical feature is the omission of a complex plot, brief narrative, and undeveloped characters. It was not until the nineteenth century that a short story was finally seen as a genre despite its origins dates way back before humans were able to write. Before its recognition, literature produces many genres from anecdotes, short myths, fairy tales to historical legends, neither of them regarded as a short story since its late recognition. Since its recognition short story kept a low profile among critics, most valuable studies were usually restricted by region or era.⁵⁶

To analyse a short story, first, we must look at two dominant forms in nineteenth-century literature - "sketch" and "tale." A tale is considerably older, presenting a culture's unaging desire to name and conceptualize its place in the cosmos, containing symbols, uniquely stationed motifs, and personages. Tales are coherent only for people who are part of the culture from which the tale emerged. Its purpose is to maintain the values and identity of the culture it emerged from, a means for elders to address the young ones. In addition, a "primary mode" of a tale is spoken, whereas a sketch is mainly written. A sketch usually foregrounds facets of one culture to the other, while a tale focuses on bringing the past and present one culture together. Meanwhile, in the nineteenth century, the "fathers" of modern short stories - Gogol, Hawthorne, Irving, or Poe, decided to mix both forms. The purpose was to diminish fantasy and ridicule "conventionality" of the tale and to help sketch break free from its inclination to rigid factuality. Each author more inclined to either sketch type of short story or a tale type of short story. Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that modern short stories nowadays are independent and still evolving genre.⁵⁷

3.1 A journey from India and beyond

The story's roots go back to Egypt itself. One of the first stories preserved so far is *The Shipwrecked Sailor* (c. 2000 BCE), an inspiring and comforting tale about the bad luck that can eventually become good luck. Other surviving short stories from Egypt, such as *King Cheops [Khufu] and the Magicians* or *The Tale of Two Brothers* use morals and folk motifs, typical features for tales. Stories from India are incomparable in age to those of Egypt. One of the first ones - *The Brahmanas* - dating from (c. 900–700 BCE), or one very popular around the world with its "anthology of amusing and moralistic animal tales" resembling

⁵⁶ Hansen, J. Arlen. Short story. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12 Nov. 2020), accessed April 5, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/art/short-story>.

⁵⁷ Hansen, *Short story*.

Greek's Aesop - *Panchatantra* (c. 100 BCE–500 CE). Most ancient short story's main purpose was to lecture ordinary people, often through introducing a model character for them to follow. Alternatively, illustrate how life could be all shiny and full of happiness if a reader behaves as is expected of him or conversely horrendous if they do not behave.⁵⁸

Greek also used the same pattern of “moralizing animal fables” as India. The first recognized collection of fables attributed to Aesop (4th century BC), contained mythological tales about Gods and their life. Greek is frequently considered as a cradle of romance. Ancient Greek romance stories typically used a form of short stories for their collections of fables. Compared to India or Egypt, Greeks were less attracted to the morality hiding in short fiction and focused more on plots about love, disaster, and reconciliation. As for Rome, its contribution to shorts stories is relatively limited. Besides as well as Greek, they mostly abandoned morality in their narratives.⁵⁹

3.2 Toward Middle Ages, Renaissance and later

Short narratives flourished during Middle Ages and Renaissance. People exploited short stories as a form of distraction and entertainment. In fact, each culture utilized short stories for their own benefits. Whereas in Island and Scandinavia, tales exploit aggression predominantly, Celts still insisted on using “chivalric romance,” magic, and magnificence in stories. Nevertheless, most romances are way too long to fall into a short narrative category. Besides, another popular form called “exemplum,” a short didactic tale with a purpose to “dramatize or otherwise inspire model behaviour” emerged.⁶⁰ Along with romance and exemplum, another short narrative emerged - “ribald fabliaux,” marked by “vivid detail and realistic observation” with humorous and cynical elements, captivating poets such as Chaucer or Boccaccio.⁶¹ In his work *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), Chaucer demonstrates the “versatility of age.” One tale is an illustration of a typical moralizing animal fable, another is a combination of fabliaux, and some are a didactic exemplum and others in a different form of narrative usual for the middle Ages. In addition, Boccaccio's Decameron is also a combination of stories full of exempla, fabliaux, or short romances. In Italy, most writers dedicated themselves to writing “nouvelle” - a name adopted by writers of short stories, for three

⁵⁸ Hansen, *Short story*.

⁵⁹ Hansen, *Short story*.

⁶⁰ Hansen, *Short story*.

⁶¹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Fabliau*. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 25 Dec. 2011), accessed May 7, 2021.
<https://www.britannica.com/art/fabliau>.

centuries. In Spain and France, an infatuation with short stories also occurred. Their short fictions probed “the nature of man’s secular existence,” a new way how to approach short stories.⁶²

Regardless of the variety of stories that evolved, short stories were soon forgotten as a new narrative form - a novel, appeared. Therefore, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could be characterized as fruitless. A novel was not the only obstacle for short fiction; the incapability of Boccaccio tradition to create something original rather than well-worn imitations, journalist inclination to sketch or Renaissance attraction to poetry and drama are also responsible. As an age of Renaissance and Enlightenment are marked with explorations of new lands and actual living conditions, focusing on the realistic aspects more, stories meant to entertain and distract people were no longer appealing. It appeared again during the nineteenth century, transformed as a “modern short story,” without its typical features meant for diverging attention.⁶³

3.3 The Rise of Modern Short Story

In America, France, Russia, Germany, the rise of the modern short story happened about the same time. A modern short story in America has developed in two different directions. First, a realistic approach aims to look at people, places, or events more objectively. The second direction reaches the impressionism realm, a story formed by the narrator’s “consciousness and psychological attitudes.” Therefore, it is more subjective and less inclined to realistic features. The father of modern short story is definitely Poe. He excelled in both poems and short story writing. He was the first one to realize the artistic potential a short story offers. As more and more writers practiced short stories, it also captured the attention of critics. Paradoxically the primary critic was Edgar Allan Poe himself. Moving to twentieth century, a short story continued to grow. With its growth, a new wave of authors from countries with little influence over this form, for example, Franz Kafka - Czech Republic, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke - Japan, or Jorge Luis Borges - Argentina, emerged evicting America, Germany, France, and Russia, who previously claimed supremacy over it. With its popularity, a short story became complex and varied. The twentieth century story is more dedicated to form and experimentations with it. Of course, many writers remained faithful to structuring stories around plot. At first glance it may appear that structuring story according to a form creates

⁶² Arlen. *Short story*.

⁶³ Arlen, *Short story*.

an impression that nothing happens in the story, the truth is opposite. These types of stories are structured around psychologic aspects rather than physical ones - a struggle or disagreement. With the rise of television, which could provide the audience with motion pictures, the interest in periodicals declines, while short story became more appreciated for an audience of intellectual and more demanding readers. Overall, this genre reached maturity and recognition in the twentieth century due to the writer's profound interest in the form.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Arlen, Short story.

II. ANALYSIS

4 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

This section will be focused on the analysis of fabulation in selected American short stories from postmodern representatives Robert Coover and John Barth. The selected stories are *The Magic Poker* (Pricksongs & Descants, 1969) and *Lost in the Funhouse* (Lost in the Funhouse, 1980). My focus will be primarily on fabulation but even on other aspects which are related to it as well as the explanation of what makes the stories postmodern. First of all, I will briefly summarize the plot of both stories and then continue with the analysis.

4.1 The Magic Poker by Robert Coover

The Magic Poker is a short story about an invented magical island, full of parallels, repetition, illusions, mixing of timelines of each scene, or the possibility to choose the continuation of the storyline of a character based on presented possibilities within the story. Therefore, we can even say that a reader is partially an inventor of the story as well.

The first two characters of the story are males, inhabitants of the island, then we have pair of sisters who came to this island for adventure. Both pairs are complete opposites of each other, a classic theme used in tales. On one hand, there is a male inhabitant referred simply as caretaker's son described as a crouching naked hairy creature obsessed with sex and on the other hand, we have a tall, slim and handsome man wearing a white turtleneck shirt and navy-blue jacket smoking a pipe, appearing when the girl in gold pants kisses the magic poker. One is representing elegance and the other animal instincts in connection to sexual motives appearing in the story. The other pair are sisters, one of them simply referred to as the girl in tight gold pants, a little bit flirty, which was given quite an unfortunate fate of three failed marriages by the inventor of the island and her sister Karen with a yellow dress and beige cardigan, plain and shy girl more mature and calm-headed compared to her sister. The story involves another character of the island - the creator-narrator. The creator of the island is present thorough the whole story. The story begins with two sisters arriving on the abandoned island, without any kind of backstory regarding from where or why they arrived. The island is completely destroyed by the hands of its inventor and is surrounded by many mysteries about its previous owners, some inhabitants, or some objects which are located here, such as the green piano. Both sisters exploit the island, first the guest cabin and then the old, abandoned mansion, and subsequently stumbles on the magic poker, an object that is the centre of this story. Several times in a grass outside or inside the mansion.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Coover, Robert, *Pricksongs and Descants* (New York: Dutton, 1969).

Now to the analysis of the story. Coover's fictional world presents us with many possibilities and the notion that anything can happen. Despite the many possibilities present, the reader is left hanging in the end, without any certainty that anything "concrete" really happened. The only certain thing happening is when "a frog dies" and a "strange creature lies slain" at the end of the story. But as for the further interpretation of this statement, we do not know what exactly the narrator means by it. Does he mean an enchanted toad that turns into a prince after the princess kiss it like in fairy tales or is it just a normal frog? Is the caretaker's son the creature being slain? Does it refer to the fairy tale about the princess in tight gold pants, whose tight pants were removed with the help of the strange creature and the magic poker that turned into a "knight in shining armour" after the kiss? A handsome knight that slays the monster. A fairy tale told by the grandmother about the girl in gold pants who is imagined by the creator. And is the fairy tale supposed to be a joke on the handsome knight as he turns into a human being after a kiss, to turn back into a poker only after another one? Again, the story presents us with one illusion after another. This leads us to the main focus of this story, the magic poker. A magical object or a wand that can change the course of the story in the hands of the creator, just like in fairy tales or just a normal iron poker for stirring the embers. It also symbolizes a "phallic object" within a story. Both girls play with it and turn it back and forth into a human. For example, in one scene Karen "takes hold of the man and lifts her skirts.... POOF! From her skirts Karen withdraws a wrought-iron poker, long and slender (...)"⁶⁶ Or when "she kisses the handle, the shaft, the tip...takes a firm grip on the poking end and bats the handle...against the stone parapet...Oh, Karen! Oh!"⁶⁷ And many more examples are present thorough the story, evoking the imagination of the adult reader.⁶⁸

As I mentioned before, *The Magic Poker* offers us numerous storylines and each one is developing several other storylines, therefore we can find ourselves in several different stories. I am going to describe the main storylines offering multiple possibilities for further continuation of the story that are interconnected. The storylines create a colourful and very complicated and confusing story, which makes the reader constantly occupied. The whole story is fragmented and therefore it is even more confusing for the reader.

One of the main and most important storylines is the situation when a girl in tight gold pants finds a magic poker. She has to choose one path to reach the iron poker. Between the

⁶⁶ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 44.

⁶⁷ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 37.

⁶⁸ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 22.

dark side or the “sunny side,” her choice is the sunny side, where she finds the poker. From there a story presents us with four alternative outcomes.⁶⁹ First outcome - “she kisses it—poof! before her stands a tall slender man”⁷⁰, or she kisses several times and nothing. “Only a harsh and unpleasant taste”⁷¹ But then she kisses the tip and poof, tall, handsome, smiling man appears before her. The third outcome after the kiss is nothing, only the rotten taste in the mouth, and the last one results in her picking the poker up, but after seeing millions of bugs crawling over, throws it away.⁷² The same as the behaviour of the girl in tight gold pants differ in each alternative, the behaviour of the tall handsome man is also different depending on the alternative present. In one case he thanks her and takes her hand or in the other case he takes her hand and kisses her cheek.

Another storyline is centred around the green piano. The piano is introduced to the reader in two different timeframes. In one case, it is destroyed by the creator, and in the other, its state is completely normal. The piano is interconnected to the storylines of the girl in tight gold pants and the caretaker’s son. However, in both cases, the piano becomes “an object of interest of another sort.” In one scene a girl in tight gold pants “props the piano up” with the poker and “playing” it. In the case of the caretaker’s son, the piano is not yet destroyed. The scene returns to the times where the piano was still functioning, and children played on it. Their grandmother is stirring the embers with the iron poker, this time the poker represents a normal object for everyday use, and then they are interrupted by the caretaker’s son. They run away and he plays on it with his fists. Exited he pulls out the wires.⁷³ “He holds his genitals with one hand,” pulls out the wires, “grunting in delight”.⁷⁴ This time his intentions are based more on a pure delight and lust in his destructiveness rather than his animal instincts to destroy. In this sense, we can differentiate the caretaker’s son and the narrator. One uses creative destruction to set up the scene for the story, whereas the other lusts in destructiveness. In the end caretaker’s son is chased out back to the forest by the girl in tight gold pants, and we move back to the original timeframe when the sisters were on the island.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 19.

⁷⁰ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 24.

⁷¹ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 24.

⁷² Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 19.

⁷³ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 22.

⁷⁴ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 38

⁷⁵ Kennedy, *Robert Coover : a study of the short fiction*, 22-23.

The next storyline focuses on the handsome, tall man leaning against a parapet, smoking a pipe, gazing out, and thinking when he notices a boat has arrived on the island. This scene is fragmented into sub-scenes which are mixed up throughout the story.

The storyline following the journey of the girl in tight gold pats into the mansion also offers various alternatives. In one alternative the girl discovers a snake and runs away after Karen. Or another example when she is being watched by the caretaker who is being watched by Karen while is heading to the mansion.

Some most significant storylines were introduced; therefore, my focus will be on the role of the narrator. Whether the role of the narrator is a reflection of Coover himself is a difficult question to answer. For example, Richard Andersen believes that the “I” represented in the book stands for Coover himself therefore they are one person. Although Kennedy is of a different opinion. He believes that Coover and the narrator are two different entities. Coover is the creator of the narrator who is the island’s creator. Even if the narrator and Coover are two different beings, Kennedy believes that some aspect of Coover’s identity, such as his joy of destruction is reflexed in the narrator.⁷⁶ I am of the same opinion as Andersen that the narrator and Coover are one persona. Coover camouflages himself as the narrator – a tall, handsome man, smoking a pipe. The narrator is present throughout the story and represents two roles – the role of the creator/destroyer and the role of the character.

I wander the island, inventing it. I make a sun for it, and trees—pines and birch and dogwood and firs—and cause the water to lap the pebbles of its abandoned shores. This, and more: I deposit shadows and dampness, spin webs, and scatter ruins. Yes: ruins. A mansion and guest cabins and boat houses and docks. Terraces, too, and bath houses and even an observation tower. All gutted and window-busted and autographed and shat upon. I impose a hot midday silence, a profound and heavy stillness. But anything can happen.⁷⁷

This is also a clear implication to the reader that he finds himself in the world of fiction from the very beginning and his creative destructiveness in order to create the scene for the arrival of the characters. He also states that anything can happen, an indicator to the reader, to brace himself for all the alternative storylines with different outcomes. Although the creator-narrator invented the story, he makes clear that at some point the grasp of his own invention falters and he loses sight of where the story was originally headed. The characters’

⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Robert Coover : a study of the short fiction*, 18.

⁷⁷ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 20.

actions are no longer in his hands. The story and its characters are creating their own story. The caretaker's son wants to give the love letter to one of the girls, but the narrator does not like the idea of turning the story this way. He claims that it would only hinder his story and therefore returns to the poker and the meaning it represents in the story. The reader is witnessing the narrator's difficulties with his narrating process, and these constant changes and going back and forth also influence him. His expectations of the story's continuation or even reaching closure are constantly disrupted by the unexpected polemics of the creator.

A love letter! Wait a minute, this is getting out of hand! What happened to that poker, I was doing much better with the poker, I had something going there, archetypal and even maybe beautiful, a blend of eros and wisdom, sex and sensibility, music and myth. But what am I going to do with shit in a rusty teakettle (...) Back to the poker.⁷⁸

Then the process of fabulation changes and the narrator comes to a self-reflection. He becomes confused about the reality and fiction, forgets the fact that the island is his own creation and considers it as a real place with real objects. He admits he created them and given them identity and then contemplates about his own existence, his death and the possibility of his creation remaining even after his death.

At times, I forged that this arrangement is my own invention. I begin to think of the island as somehow real, its objects solid and intractable (...) I find myself peering into the blue teakettles, batting at spiderwebs and contemplating a greenish-grey growth on the side of the stone parapet (...) "I have brought two sisters to this island," I say. This is no extravagance. It is indeed I who burdens them with curiosity (...) I wonder if I might die and the teakettle remain.⁷⁹

The third example shows the confusion and uncertainty the inventor himself is going through in the story. For instance, in a paragraph where he suddenly panics about the whereabouts of the caretaker's son. He is full of uncertainty about his own invention and in case of the caretaker's son begins to question if he is truly his creator or if it is not the other way around and he himself is an invention created by the caretaker's son instead.

But where is the caretaker's son? I don't know. He was here, shrinking into the shadows, when Karen's sister entered. (...) This is awkward. Didn't I invent him myself, along with the girls and

⁷⁸ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 30.

⁷⁹ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 33.

the man in turtleneck shirt? Didn't I round him back and stunt his legs and cause the hair to hang between his buttocks. (...) But the caretaker's son? To tell the truth, I sometimes wonder if it was not he who invented me.⁸⁰

The next example follows the inventor's delight in destruction and his description of the historical background of the whole island. At the beginning is stated how he invented the whole place, the characters, objects, the sun, and trees, but then he almost immediately switches to the destruction mode with no compelling reasons but the fact he enjoys it.⁸¹ "Really, there's nothing to it. In fact, it's a pleasure"⁸² From there he moves to the narration of island's history, describing its previous owners.⁸³ "Once earlier in this age, a family with great wealth purchased this entire island (...)"⁸⁴

At some point, the invented island becomes real as it suddenly appears on the "real" map, and as a result, the author lets us know he is disappearing and his worst nightmare – the possibility of his invention becoming real really happened. But contemplating more about the issue, he realizes he is the inventor of the "real" map, and therefore his world falls back into a world of fiction, a created story. "I look on a map: yes there's Rainy Lake, there's Jackfish Island. Who invented this map? Well, I must have, surely."⁸⁵ Therefore, the narrator goes from creation immediately to destruction, back to the creation of history, follows by destroying this illusion of created history and labelling it as real, only to change it to the creation of the narrator back again.⁸⁶

The story also offers us "once upon a time" fairy tales, a classic beginning used in fairy tales. Each tale reflecting to a certain degree one of the characters.⁸⁷ For example, a story about the princess in tight gold pants is full of references - a prince who turns into a knight in shining armour after a kiss, comedy - a situation when she cannot take off her pants. It can be also viewed as a ridiculing tale if we look at the situation when the knight is turned back into a frog after another kiss. At the same time, Coover retells an originally known tale and makes it into something different, something comic.

⁸⁰ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 27.

⁸¹ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 16.

⁸² Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 22.

⁸³ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 16.

⁸⁴ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 22.

⁸⁵ Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants*, 40.

⁸⁶ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 16.

⁸⁷ Kennedy, *Robert Coover: A Study of the Short Fiction*, 15.

The magic poker is a story offering various alternatives, fiction within fiction, mixed timelines, using literary devices typical for postmodern writing such as comedy, ridicule, playfulness or repetition. The story does not have a conventional narrative structure. It has an open-ending structure, another feature typical for postmodernism. The major symbol is the magic poker – a magical wand, ordinary iron poker or phallus symbol. The author constantly confuses the reader and makes him disappointed, but at the same time hungry for more. He reminds us we are in the world of fiction through the narrator. The narration becomes a part of the story, and sometimes even he becomes confused about the flow of the story and his own existence. He becomes a medium and characters begin to tell tales themselves as is demonstrated in the case of the grandmother and her “once upon a time” tales. Coover’s fabulation in *The Magic Poker* constantly confuses the reader by using fragmentation and symbolism, offering various alternatives, spinning one tale after another, retelling stories that were originally different with a different purpose, and make them entertaining and ridiculous. He tries to catch the reader’s attention and keep him in suspense. He uses intertextual references to other tales. – a frog turning into a prince after a kiss, a reference to Grimm brothers’ *The Frog Prince*, to entertain the reader and to keep him occupied. Coover guides us, readers, through the story while destroying it for the purpose of creation but at the same time reminding us, he invented it, its characters, and objects. Sometimes he himself becomes lost and confused about the flow of the story and his own existence. His fabulation and focus on the art of storytelling, using many literary devices previously mentioned, gives the reader a lot of space for imagination and his own interpretation of the story.

4.2 *Lost in the Funhouse* by John Barth

Cut on dotted lines

Twist end once and fasten

AB to ab, CD to cd.⁸⁸

This is the beginning of Barth’s collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse*. The author suggests the reader to cut out the dotted part of the page which has written “once upon a time there” on one side and “was a story that began” on the other side. By obeying this suggestion,

⁸⁸ Barth, John. *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice* (Toronto; London: Bantam, 1981)

the reader will create a “Moebius strip” – endless loop, presenting stories about stories about stories, as is visible in *Lost in the Funhouse* collection of short stories.⁸⁹

The story revolves around a thirteen-year adolescent Ambrose and his family going on a family trip to the beach on the fourth of July. The year is not specified, but from the text, it is apparent it is during World War II. Together with Ambrose are his mother and father, his younger brother Peter, their neighbour Magda, a fourteen-year-old girl with a “very well developed body for her age,”⁹⁰ and Uncle Karl. However, instead of going to the beach which is stained with oil and tar from tankers torpedoed offshore, they go to the funhouse. Both Ambrose and Peter are infatuated with Magda and are really looking forward to going into the maze with her. Besides Ambrose is gathering his courage to confess his love for her in the maze but fails and is full of self-contempt. Ambrose also realizes he does not like funhouses, and he quite misunderstands the whole point of it. He realizes that Magda and his brother are different from him, and while turning the wrong way gets lost. As Ambrose tries to find his way back to his family, he contemplates more about himself and funhouses and comes to a revelation. Although he is not exactly “athletically and socially inept” or the brightest kid, his imagination and understanding are astonishing.⁹¹

This story of Ambrose and his realization is but only the first layer of the story. If looking more closely into the story, there is more to it. The story is constantly disturbed by the narrator and his statements about the story’s own construction, references to how to write a handbook, and the narrator’s attempt to catch the reader’s attention by using different literary devices. And “the story itself becomes a funhouse of language through which the reader must find his or her way.”⁹²

Lost in the funhouse is one of those stories about stories. How I mentioned previously, the narrator always tries to disrupt the narrative to “comment on its effectiveness” and attract the attention of the reader using various literary devices. The constant interruption of the story indicates the author’s playfulness with the text.⁹³ But it is exactly that interruption or description about how to write fiction that reassures the reader and even the characters that they are in a fictional world. They become conscious of this fact, of self-referentiality.

⁸⁹ Encyclopedia.com. *Lost in the Funhouse*. (Encyclopedia.com, 15 Apr. 2021), accessed May 7, 2021. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/lost-funhouse>

⁹⁰ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 71.

⁹¹ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*.

⁹² Encyclopedia.com, *Lost in the Funhouse*.

⁹³ Encyclopedia.com., *Lost in the Funhouse*.

The function of the beginning of a story is to introduce the principal characters, establish their initial relationships, set the scene for the main action, expose the background of the situation if necessary, plant motifs and foreshadowings where appropriate, and initiate the first complication or whatever of the “rising action.”⁹⁴

But of course, narrator also plays with the reader by confusing him between what is reality and what is fiction. “Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author’s imagination? Was it Assawoman Bay or Sinepuxent? Are there any other errors of fact in this fiction?”⁹⁵

The examples below show how the narrator continues with his story and suddenly out of nowhere switches to his explanation and description of how to write fiction and what devices should he use.

Their mother, (...) Magda in the second only with her arms on the seat-back, (...) on the other hand she can do without Autogiros too, if she has to become a grandmother to fly in them.

Description of physical appearance and mannerism is one of several standard methods of characterization used by writers of fiction.⁹⁶

One of the most common literary devices used in the story are metaphors and symbolism. Just at the beginning when the narrator describes how Ambrose came to the seashore, it could be viewed as metaphor for his adolescent struggles on a new path, a step towards independence and growth, away from his insecurities. “He has come to the seashore with his family (...) the occasion (...) Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America.”⁹⁷ The naming of characters is also symbolic. Magda with a mature figure, from B___ Street symbolizes Mary Magdalene, a sinful woman. And the “B” can also symbolize her developed figure. Although, the main metaphor is concentrated around the funhouse itself. The story itself can be metaphorically speaking a funhouse for its readers, and the narrator occupies a position of its secret operator-the God, who is an inventor of the funhouse.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 73.

⁹⁵ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 84.

⁹⁶ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 70.

⁹⁷ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 69.

⁹⁸ Encyclopedia.com, *Lost in the Funhouse*.

Another meaning for the funhouse is that the character is literally lost as well as metaphorically. He is an adolescent who realizes he is different from Magda or Peter. At the same time, it can represent the narrator's breakdown, anxiety, his inability to lead readers and Ambrose through the labyrinth. His exasperation and anxiety are revealed in the text. "winds upon itself, digresses, retreats, hesitates, sighs, collapses, expires."⁹⁹ Or "at this rate our hero, at this rate our protagonist will remain in the funhouse forever."¹⁰⁰ And as his anxiety grows, he hopelessly calls "what is the story's theme?"¹⁰¹ And at this point the story itself become a funhouse.

The story starts with a question - "For whom is a funhouse? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of fear and confusion."¹⁰² This also implies that funhouse may have another meaning, a symbolic one – a pleasure house, therefore for lovers it is fun but as for Ambrose, who is going through puberty, and the fourth of July symbolise his transformation into an adult, it is more of a scary and confusing place.¹⁰³ Basically the whole story revolves around sex. Ambrose realizes this fact on his journey. "The girls were upended and their boyfriends and others could see up their dresses if they cared to. Which was the whole point, Ambrose realized. Of the whole funhouse!" He notices everybody is in pairs and all that was normally revealed "was merely preparation and intermission."¹⁰⁴

Another important symbol is a mirror in the maze. Ambrose has a fragile mind and is quite awkward, does not fit, unlike his brother and Magda. When he sees himself in the myriad of mirrors, he sees his fragmented personality. Each mirror represents a fragment of his personality, and he is utterly lost, unable to comprehend who he really is. He is full of uncertainty - another feature essential for postmodern literature and the same feeling as Ambrose experiences even the author.¹⁰⁵

Now a little bit about intertextuality and deconstruction. Barth introduces Freitag's Triangles – a diagram that describes the process of story writing from exposition, conflict, growth, climax, and conclusion. He reflects on conventional narrative structure in connection to the Triangles and how the story does not follow it, he is deconstructing the

⁹⁹ Encyclopedia.com, *Lost in the Funhouse*.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 75.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 76.

¹⁰² Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 69.

¹⁰³ Meltem Uzunoglu Erten, *Postmodern Structures in Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth* (Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 9/1) pp.149–156, 149, accessed May 03, 2021 <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/45394>.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁵ Meltem, *Postmodern Structures in Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth*, 154.

stories. Nevertheless, no matter how much he deconstructs them but telling stories no matter the structure is crucial for him. A matter of life or death. The same goes for Ambrose, even lost in the funhouse, he is telling one story after another.¹⁰⁶ “This can’t go on much longer; it can go on forever.” “He died of starvation telling stories to himself in the dark”¹⁰⁷

Other literary devices typical for postmodern literature and fabulation are, for example, open-ending structures. The story does not seem to come to any conclusion, to some end. Throughout the story the author uses sentences without proper ending and just ends in the middle of the sentence, such as “the reader may acknowledge the proposition, but.”¹⁰⁸ Another literary device, repetition, is also present. “We would do latter. We would do latter. We would do latter.”¹⁰⁹

In the end, Ambrose comes to terms with himself, the fact he does not like the funhouse, the fact he is different, and he entraps himself and others with storytelling. Well, at least he has a better imagination than others. In the last paragraph, Ambrose talks about him becoming the secret operator of funhouses, creating words for others despite the fact, he knows they are not real. He is aware of his own fictionality, he wants to be the narrator, a God who creates worlds for others.¹¹⁰

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. The he wishes he were dead. But he’s not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator-though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed.¹¹¹

To summarize, *Lost in the Funhouse* is a story with lot of hidden metaphors, symbolism, self-referentiality, open-end structures, repetition, fiction within a fiction theme, intertextuality, uncertainty, constantly confusing the reader about what is real and what is fiction. These are the main points that signify the process of its fabulating. Together with the author’s addressing the readers, and experiencing the same feelings of loss, exasperation, and uncertainty as Ambrose did. It is a story without much progress and plot, the narrator is more focused on his storytelling, he fabulates the story, plays with the text, applies different literary devices, and addresses the reader or the character rather than the plot, and also experiences the same pain as his character. It is a work written more subjectively, focusing

¹⁰⁶ Meltem, *Postmodern Structures in Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 91

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 75.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 76.

¹¹⁰ Meltem, *Postmodern Structures in Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth*, 156.

¹¹¹ Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live*, 94.

more on coming-of-age process in connection with sex and self-awareness rather than dealing with some more serious issues such as war. The same as *The Magic Poker*, the title of the story can be perceived sexually. These sexual implications are used to entertain the reader and give him space to his imagination.

CONCLUSION

Postmodernism is a literary direction with an impact on almost every field of education from philosophy, sociology, and sociological changes happening, many political ideologies, and life. Many theorists dedicated their work to explain the term, but until today, it is not entirely clear what falls into this category and what does not, what is still modern or work of realism, and what already goes beyond that boundary. Nevertheless, a few aspects of postmodernism are generally agreed on both by critics and authors. A group of authors who were tired of realistic works, war, threat, and massacres it brings, and growing consumer society decided to try going for fiction. Therefore, they immersed themselves in the world of fiction. Using many tools such as scepticism, fragmentation, metafiction, uncertainty et cetera. An audience for these kinds of works has to be patient and more perceptive. Postmodern works break free from reality and nothing is impossible, they give space for more imagination and it is up to the reader how he understands it. The postmodern works also look at the world more subjectively and lot of them contain sexual implications, vulgarism, or black humor. Nowadays, postmodernism is an inseparable part of literature, many authors falling into this category which granted us many works evaluated with critics' high praise. Postmodernism is undoubtedly connected to fabulation. Fabulation focuses more on the art of storytelling, entertaining and interacting with the reader, story after story, and so it goes on. Its origins go back to days of verbal storytelling. The term itself was not very well known, in fact, the one who properly named it was Robert Scholes. The purpose of fables was mostly to reprimand and scare people so they would behave. But as times changes a new approach of fabulation emerged – a modern fabulation that does not necessarily preach or offer some moral lesson at the end. Nevertheless, it usually contains some hidden meaning behind the scenes. Its main purpose was to escape from reality and diminish the boundaries between fiction and reality and working with words in stories again. Both short stories analysed above were written by masters within their field. They use the devices to foreground the very text of their stories, the implications behind it, references, the unwholeness, the comedy, and the irony.

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