METAFICTION IN FOCUS: TRAITS, FEATURES, AND LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract. *This article explores the defining features and key characteristics of the metafiction genre. Metafiction is a self-conscious literary style in which the narrator or characters are aware that they are part of a work of fiction. Often most closely associated with postmodern prose, metafiction involves a departure from standard narrative conventions, in which a self-aware narrator infuses their perspective into the text to create a fictional work that comments on fiction. This kind of fictional writing can appear in novels, short stories, plays, video games, film, and television. The article analyzes the main elements of metafiction, its purposes, and its significance in modern and postmodern literature.*

Keywords: *Metafiction, self-reflexivity, postmodern literature, narrative techniques, fiction and reality.*

Introduction. The roots of metafiction can be traced back to the modernist literary movement, which sought to break away from traditional narrative forms and explore the subjective nature of reality. However, it was during the rise of postmodern fiction in the 1960s that metafiction truly came into its own. Postmodern literature, characterized by fragmented narratives and unreliable narrators, provided a fertile ground for the development of self-conscious fiction.

Metafiction is closely linked to postmodernism, as postmodernist authors use metafictional techniques to challenge perceptions of reality and fiction, provoking readers to question what is real within the narrative and in the broader societal context. The purpose of this article is to examine the main features and characteristics of the metafiction genre and to highlight its role in shaping contemporary literary discourse.

Main Body. Metafiction is a form of narrative that deliberately draws attention to its own fictional status. One of the most significant characteristics of metafiction is self-reflexivity, through which a text comments on its own structure, language, or process of creation. Authors often interrupt the narrative to remind readers that what they are reading is a constructed artifact rather than a representation of reality. This technique challenges traditional storytelling conventions and encourages readers to question the nature of fiction itself.

The focus in self-reflexive texts is on "the imaginative process", instead of on that of the product which means that how the story is told is much more important than what is told in it. In some self-reflexive works, as in the one this article regards, storytelling process is so emphasized that there is almost no story to be found throughout the pages, at least not in the conventional sense.

Self-reflexive narratives, novels in particular, employ numerous techniques such as addressing directly to the reader, mentioning the phases and struggles of writing process, parodying traditional narrative systems, digressing often, using a non-linear setting, distorting the typography and containing multiple genres within. Patricia Waugh notes that self-reflexivity allows literature to examine both fictional worlds and the theoretical principles behind narrative creation. Another key feature of metafiction is the breaking of the "fourth wall." In many metafictional works, narrators directly address the reader, comment on the act of writing, or openly discuss narrative choices.

This direct interaction reduces the distance between author, text, and reader, transforming the reader from a passive consumer into an active participant in meaning-making. As a result, readers become more aware of how narratives influence perception and interpretation.

Intertextuality also plays a central role in metafiction. Metafictional texts frequently refer to, imitate, parody, or rewrite earlier literary works. By doing so, they highlight the idea that literature is built upon existing texts rather than created in isolation. This practice emphasizes the artificiality of storytelling and demonstrates how meaning is shaped by cultural and literary traditions.

Notable examples in literature that James Joyce's "Ulysses" (1922) is a complex work of intertextuality, Jorge Luis Borges's short stories, such as "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" (1939), explore the nature of authorship and the relationship between texts, Vladimir Nabokov's "Pale Fire" (1962) is a metafictional novel consisting of a poem and an unreliable commentary, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Italo Calvino's "If on a winter's night a traveler" (1979) is a metafictional novel that directly addresses the reader and plays with narrative conventions. In this novel, second-person narration makes "you" the protagonist-Calvino directly addresses the reader as a character trying to finish a book that keeps fragmenting. Ten incomplete narratives structure the novel, emphasizing the act of beginning over the satisfaction of ending.

Reading as theme becomes the central subject, exploring how readers construct meaning from texts they can never fully possess. And also John Barth significantly shaped postmodernism through his metafiction, self-reflexivity, and influential essays like "The Literature of Exhaustion," (1967) which argued for new narrative forms beyond exhausted modernist conventions, advocating for playful, complex storytelling that blurred fiction and reality, as seen in works like "Giles Goat-Boy" (1966). John Barth's fourth novel is a prime example of the metafiction characteristic of postmodernism, featuring several fictional disclaimers in the beginning and end, arguing that book was not written by the author and was instead given to the author on a tape or written by computer.

In addition, metafiction often employs nonlinear or fragmented narrative structures.

Traditional plot development may be disrupted through digressions, alternative endings, or multiple narrative voices. Such techniques reflect the postmodern belief that reality is subjective and unstable. By rejecting linear storytelling, metafiction mirrors the complexity and uncertainty of human experience. To recognize metafictional elements, readers should look for: Self-aware characters who acknowledge their fictional nature. Characters who engage directly with the audience. They show awareness of the narrative structure. Characters that understand their roles within the story. These elements add layers of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity.

Metafictional works often blur the lines between fiction and reality, prompting readers to reflect on the nature of truth in storytelling within a fictional work. By identifying these key features, readers can deepen their engagement with the narrative and appreciate the unique experience that metafiction offers.

Finally, metafiction raises important philosophical questions about reality, truth, and authorship. It challenges the assumption that literature can objectively represent the world, suggesting instead that all narratives are selective and constructed. Through irony, parody, and narrative experimentation, metafiction exposes the limitations of language and storytelling, inviting readers to critically examine both fiction and reality.

Conclusion. In conclusion, metafiction represents a significant departure from traditional narrative forms by openly acknowledging its own fictional nature. Through techniques such as self-reflexivity, direct reader address, intertextuality, and nonlinear narrative structures, metafiction challenges conventional ideas about storytelling, authorship, and reality.

Rather than offering a simple imitation of the real world, metafiction exposes the processes behind narrative construction and highlights the role of language in shaping meaning. Moreover, metafiction encourages readers to become active interpreters who critically engage with the text.

By questioning the boundaries between fiction and reality, it reflects postmodern concerns about truth, subjectivity, and representation. As a result, metafiction not only expands the possibilities of literary form but also deepens readers' understanding of how stories function. Its continued use in modern and contemporary literature demonstrates its lasting relevance and importance in literary studies.

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