

“METAFICTION AS A SELF-REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE MODE: FEATURES AND CHARACTERISTICS”

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Abstract. *This article explores the defining features and key characteristics of the metafiction genre. Metafiction is a significant narrative mode that foregrounds the artificiality of literary texts and reflects on the process of storytelling itself. Gaining prominence in twentieth-century literature, particularly within postmodernism, metafiction challenges traditional realist conventions by exposing the constructed nature of fiction. This article examines the major features and characteristics of the metafiction genre, including self-reflexivity, narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, the questioning of authorship, and reader participation. Through a theoretical and analytical approach, the study highlights how metafiction reshapes the relationship between author, text, and reader, and why it occupies an important place in modern and postmodern literary discourse.*

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

Introduction. The twentieth century witnessed profound changes in literary form and narrative technique, resulting in the emergence of experimental modes of writing that challenged conventional realism. 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.

One of the most influential of these modes is metafiction. The term “metafiction” refers to fictional writing that consciously reflects upon its own status as fiction and draws attention to the processes involved in narrative construction. Rather than presenting an illusion of reality, metafiction exposes the artificial and constructed nature of literary texts. This article aims to analyze the key features and characteristics of the metafiction genre and to demonstrate how these features distinguish it from traditional narrative forms.

Main body. Metafiction is a distinctive narrative mode that deliberately draws attention to its own fictional status and narrative construction. Emerging prominently in twentieth-century literature, especially within postmodernism, metafiction challenges traditional realist conventions by foregrounding the processes of storytelling, authorship, and textuality.

Rather than concealing its artificial nature, metafiction exposes the mechanisms through which fiction is created, thereby encouraging readers to question the relationship between reality, narrative, and meaning.

According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact”. This self-awareness transforms the narrative into both a fictional story and a critical commentary on fiction itself. John Barth’s works provide a clear example of narrative self-reflexivity. In his essays and fiction, Barth emphasizes the exhaustion of traditional narrative forms and proposes metafiction as a way to renew literature through self-conscious experimentation. By exposing narrative techniques rather than hiding them, metafiction invites readers to reflect on how stories are constructed and how meaning is produced.

Metafictional works often comment on their own narrative structure, language, or status as fictional texts. Authors may interrupt the story to address the reader directly, discuss the act of writing, or reflect on narrative choices. This self-awareness transforms the text into both a story and a commentary on storytelling itself, blurring the boundary between fiction and literary criticism. Metafiction became especially prominent in postmodern literature, where writers questioned traditional notions of truth, authorship, and representation. Authors such as John Barth, Italo Calvino, and Jorge Luis Borges employed metafictional strategies to explore the limits of storytelling and the instability of meaning.

Another key characteristic is the breaking of the illusion of reality. Unlike traditional realist fiction, which seeks to immerse readers in a believable fictional world, metafiction intentionally disrupts this immersion. Techniques such as authorial intrusion, fragmented narratives, and contradictory plot developments remind readers that they are engaging with an invented construct. As a result, readers are encouraged to adopt a more critical and active role in interpreting the text.

Intertextuality is also a prominent feature of metafiction. Metafictional texts frequently reference, parody, or rewrite earlier literary works, myths, and genres. Through these intertextual connections, metafiction highlights the idea that literature is created from existing texts rather than from an objective reality. This reinforces the postmodern notion that originality is rooted in reinterpretation rather than pure invention. 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” is a prominent example of intertextual metafiction. The novel consists of multiple interrupted narratives, each imitating a different literary style or genre. Through this technique, Calvino exposes the conventions of storytelling and demonstrates how readers’ expectations are shaped by literary tradition. Intertextuality in metafiction thus functions both as homage to and critique of earlier literary forms.

The questioning of authorship and narrative authority further defines the metafiction genre. In many metafictional works, the author’s role is destabilized or problematized. Narrators may be unreliable, fictional authors may appear within the text, or characters may become aware of their own fictional existence. Such strategies undermine the traditional concept of an all-knowing, authoritative narrator and suggest that meaning is unstable and open to multiple interpretations. Another significant characteristic is reader involvement and participation.

Metafiction often demands an active reader who can recognize narrative games, allusions, and structural experimentation. By refusing to offer a single, fixed meaning, metafiction invites readers to collaborate in the construction of interpretation, thus transforming reading into a self-

conscious intellectual activity. Finally, metafiction is closely associated with postmodern skepticism toward grand narratives and absolute truths. By exposing fiction as a construct, metafiction reflects broader philosophical concerns about the nature of reality, language, and representation. It questions whether objective truth can be fully represented through narrative and emphasizes the subjective and constructed nature of human experience. The metafiction genre is characterized by self-reflexivity, narrative disruption, intertextuality, unstable authorship, and active reader engagement. These features distinguish metafiction from traditional narrative forms and establish it as a powerful literary mode for exploring the limits of representation and the complexities of storytelling in modern and postmodern literature. Another significant characteristic of metafiction is its demand for active reader participation. Metafiction does not offer straightforward narratives or clear resolutions; instead, it invites readers to interpret, analyze, and question the text. The reader becomes a co-creator of meaning, engaging with the narrative on an intellectual and critical level.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the metafiction genre is characterized by self-reflexivity, narrative disruption, intertextuality, the questioning of authorship, and active reader involvement.

These features distinguish metafiction from traditional narrative forms and reflect broader postmodern concerns about truth, representation, and meaning. By exposing the constructed nature of fiction, metafiction encourages readers to reconsider the relationship between literature and reality. As a result, metafiction remains a powerful and influential mode of literary expression in twentieth-century and contemporary literature.

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