

*AT SWIM-TWO-BIRDS & IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELER:*  
A STUDY OF METAFICTION THEORY, INTERTEXTUALITY AND  
AUTHORSHIP

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## Thesis Abstract

Nazım Çapkın, *At Swim-Two-Birds* & *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*:

A Study of Metafiction Theory, Intertextuality and Authorship

This M.A. thesis problematizes extant approaches in contemporary theories of metafiction to recent ‘metafictional’ works, Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-two-birds*, by studying them in their intertextual relation to their literary antecedents. Central to this study is the re-evaluation of the various definitions of the concept of intertextuality in the metafiction theories, which are overly formalistic. By exploring intertextuality in literary history, this study argues that its contemporary use does not constitute a radical break with former literary practices, as put forth by the theories. The aim of this thesis is to show that the common treatment of metafiction as a manifestation of postmodernism in literature stems from the imposition on the term metafiction of a single, coherent meaning which overlooks its historical complexity. Study of Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-two-birds* problematizes such indispensable notions of metafiction as self-reflexivity and self-criticism through rethinking the relationship between metafiction, intertextuality and parody.

## Tez Özeti

Nazım Çapkın, *At Swim-Two-Birds & Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*:

Üstkurmaca, Metinlerarasılık ve Yazarlık Kavramları Çalışması

Bu yüksek lisans tezi çağdaş üstkurmaca kuramının günümüzde üstkurmaca olarak tanımlanan metinlere bakışını Italo Calvino'nun *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* ve Flann O'Brien'in *At Swim-Two-Birds* eserlerinin edebi öncülleriyle olan ilişkileri vasıtasıyla sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın merkezinde üstkurmaca kuramının metinlerarasılık kavramına yönelik farklı tanımlamaların yeniden değerlendirilmesi yer almaktadır. Bu çalışma ayrıca metinlerarasılığa edebiyat tarihi boyunca kullanımı bağlamında yaklaşarak çağdaş kullanımının üstkurmaca kuramlarında iddia edilenin aksine öncül edebiyat geleneğindeki kullanımından ayrılmadığını savunur. Bu tez üstkurmacaya postmodernizmin edebiyattaki tezahürü olarak yaklaşma genel eğiliminin kavrama tarihsel çetrefilliliğini gözardı eden, bütünlüklü ve tutarlı bir anlam yüklemesinden kaynaklandığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Italo Calvino'nun *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* ve Flann O'Brien'in *At Swim-two-birds* eserlerinin incelemesi üstkurmaca kuramının zaruri kıldığı özdüşünümsellik ve otokritik kavramlarını, üstkurmaca, metinlerarasılık ve parodi arasındaki ilişkilerin yeniden düşünülmesi yoluyla sorunsallaştırmaktadır.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In this study I investigate the readings of contemporary metafiction in their intertextual relation to their literary antecedents by drawing particular attention to the centrality of intertextuality in them. In this vein, this thesis revises such widely used concepts as “self-criticism” and “self-consciousness” through a rethinking of the theories of metafiction and intertextuality. It investigates how a great number of works on metafiction is affected by the deconstructionist views of literature and relativism of the current critical practices in their belief in subversive energies of literary texts on their own, independent from the literary past. Hence at the center of this study lie the presuppositions of metafiction theories that regard postmodernism as the extension and diversification of avant-garde. The desire to create ‘a postmodern avant-garde’ in those who see postmodernism as the most effective way of explaining the contemporary world is in fact at odds with what *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* offer us in their pre-postmodern and postmodern condition. Within this scope, I will investigate the impact of the postmodern avant-garde in theories of metafiction mostly with regards to Patricia Waugh's take on metafiction in her influential book *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. I approach metafiction as a concept that integrates diverse texts and introduces a unified literary discourse, while at the same time limiting the individual interpretations of diverse texts. The selection of secondary literature on O'Brien and Calvino in this study partly adopts this frame.

The plenitude of studies in metafiction is a definite mark of the interest in the subject; however, in contrast, we have not been provided with the extent to which these studies can be applied to different literatures with peculiar traditions. As far as metafiction theory is concerned, some critical works have been more influential than others and have had a greater influence on the future practices of literary-critical studies. Therefore it is important to investigate briefly the impact of the theories of metafiction on literature. The main theoretical framework of this study can be summarized as a comparative study of the works of Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon whose works focus on literary self-consciousness. Critics in question are not alone in their configurations of the definition and function of metafiction, intertextuality and parody. Nonetheless, their works are foregrounded in this discussion inasmuch as they are widely taken as reference points. I would like to point to the dangers of doing so, because I find both Hutcheon's and Waugh's thoughts on metafiction contradictory.

The contemporary novel, for many scholars, seeks to subvert the idea of a monological, timeless, authorless, sacred and natural voice evident in the so-called realist novel. Contemporary novel achieves this subversion by revealing language to be temporal and prosaic. Thus, the 'monology' in the scheme above soon proves to be what Waugh and some other theoreticians seek as the condition of 'the traditional novel,' against which they compare the new writing, metafiction. A multiplicity of intertextual references, interpenetrating frame-tales, reflexivity and constant dialogue with the past are among the weapons of the would-be postmodernist anti-traditional writing.

The concepts of overt 'self-consciousness and 'self-reflexivity', central to metafiction theory, in fact, turn into blank assertions, in that they either chase after

the dichotomy of fiction and daily reality in contemporaneous postmodern philosophical terms or break off the line of historicity of the work and its past. In this respect, the tension between the literary text and its social context is silenced and the necessity of broader knowledge of the extra literary context is underestimated. As a general tendency, the “both/and” logic of postmodernism is employed as a formal innovation with the aim of ideological critique. *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and *At Swim-two-birds* test these ideas by their very formal experiment and close relations to the social realms and the literary past.

Patricia Waugh describes an orderly evolution of narrative and reflects literary past as a coherent story in her *Metafiction*. Waugh’s literary aesthetics is restricted to self-reflexive narratives of the modernist and postmodernist epochs and attempts to make a unitary definition of metafiction by assimilating the masterpieces of the self-conscious novelistic tradition to her current definition of the term ‘metafiction’, in order to come to terms with contemporary analytical philosophy and its reflection on literary studies. Linda Hutcheon, on the other hand, features a more history-specific theory of metafiction which limits the discussion to ‘historiographic metafiction’. Hutcheon’s differentiation between ‘metafiction’ and ‘historiographic metafiction’ is plausible for she makes clear that her remarks on the ‘problematization of historical knowledge through metafiction’ are limited to the modernist and postmodernist challenge to the individual interpretation and writing of history as against objective facts.

Nevertheless, Hutcheon’s readings of current self-conscious texts in her works *Narcissistic Narrative* and *A Theory of Parody* require the same cautious scrutiny on several occasions as Waugh, especially in the replacement of the act of writing with that of reading, parody and intertextuality. At this point, Marc Currie’s

emphasis on the impact of theoretical reading in interpretation of literary works, his scheme of Structuralist and Poststructuralist narratologies and remarks on meta-criticism in his works *Metafiction* and *Postmodern Narrative Theory* will be of great importance in analyzing the former two scholars' versions of self-conscious narratives within the wider frame of the contemporary criticism. Sean Burke's study *The Death and the Return of the Author*, takes the discussion one step further in examining the intellectual history, through Russian Formalism, Czech and French structuralists and poststructuralists practiced by Barthes, Derrida and Foucault in the 1960s. His work deciphers the mode of antisubjectivity that leads to the annihilation of the writing subject. Lastly, Graham Allen's introductory chapter "Origins: Sausurre, Bakhtin, Kristeva" sheds light on how the concept of intertextuality has been appropriated to the linguistic determinism of the theories of metafiction which have long been influenced by the postmodernist practices of writing and interpretation. My arguments are primarily informed by Waugh's discussion of metafiction. In search for a wider frame, I investigate theories of metafiction in the second chapter in an attempt to show how the concept of metafiction integrates diverse texts and introduces a unified literary discourse and how it limits individual interpretations of diverse texts.

The third and the fourth chapters are reserved for close readings of the texts to lay bare the neutral and homogenizing attitudes of metafiction theory towards different works of literature. Considering the frame of these theories of metafiction, my choice of the primary texts *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and *At Swim-two-birds* has not been haphazard. These two novels are among the best examples of the fictional works that have a say about the nature of the critical practices in the twentieth century, and especially those which came after the Second World War - an

era which is accepted to mark the end of literary Modernism. Both writers had considerable insight into the process of literary criticism, which is reflected in their works. While Flann O'Brien had produced in late Modernist period, Calvino was under significant influence of postmodernist views on literature and his writing cannot be fully evaluated without investigating the ways he responded to the deconstructionist tendencies in various schools of criticism in his time. I bring together the interesting conclusions of the study of these two novels to re-visit the theories of metafiction discussed in the first chapter. O'Brien's postmodern practices of writing, as the claim is, in pre-postmodern times together with Calvino's postmodern practices offer direct challenges to Waugh's unified discourse of literary self-consciousness.

Whereas *At Swim-Two-Birds* anticipates the postmodernist preoccupations of metafiction, or metanovel in its distortion of Aristotelian categories, it does not question the existence of the novel in its attempt to prove the constructedness of truth in the dichotomy of fiction and reality, but demonstrates that reality has many forms within a work of literature and each form might refer to the context or the real world to an extent. The main concern of the novel is the clash between the complex web of themes in the historicity of the work and the complicated forms for its intertextual references. Being a book about other books, it acknowledges the common limitations of the novel as a genre and depicts the writer's awareness of the norms of fiction writing in an experimental way. At the same time, O'Brien presents his work as feeding upon the literary tradition behind it.

Similarly, Calvino's aestheticism covers the materials he inherits from the literary past and his thoughts on these materials in the frame of contemporary controversies about literature. He filters his materials from the literary heritage with

irony and creates his own experimental novelistic strategies and forms. Issues of closure, linearity and intertextuality are kept in tension even to the last sentence of the novel. His task is of writing what has not been written before. In the Calvino chapter, contradictory nature of the metafictional description of the structure of the text are studied to resolve the association of reading and writing, intertextuality and the concurrence of the realm of fiction and reality. Like metafiction theory, Calvino's text does not seem to offer solutions; it is descriptive and does not set norms. The novel's pluralist structure enables multidimensional readings on the level of motives, thus problematizes blind approaches that come up with blank, commonplace assertions. Finally, in a brief concluding section, I summarize my findings and review them in the light of the conclusions of the chapters to provide answers to the questions asked at the beginning.

## CHAPTER 2

### RE-THINKING METAFICTION THEORY AS POSTMODERN

In this chapter, within the wider frame of theoretical studies of literary critics who wrote on literary self-consciousness, I explore how the auto-representational, narcissistic, introverted and introspective nature of metafictional texts are overemphasized as the essential feature of narrative and how this, in turn, problematizes the validity of the term ‘metafiction.’ I argue, the idea that literature changes developmentally causes the postmodernist metafiction to be overvalued and to be tagged as the prominent narrative mode. In this vein, I further investigate two serious problems in the theories of metafiction: First of all, literary tradition and the concept of ‘the traditional novel’ are homogenized in these theories to have a unified definition of metafiction. Thus, the univocal language of today’s literary studies in metafiction runs the risk of anachronism and fails to analyze the complexity and interaction in literature. Secondly, I claim, the contemporary take on the self-conscious narratives as metafiction is one of the various incarnations in which literary techniques appear. What transforms the narrative consciousness into what is understood from metafiction today is the mode of reading in the light of recent philosophical and social discussions.

The term metafiction was first coined by William H. Gass in his essay “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction” in order to emphasize the particularity of the recent writings that were emerging to be more and more self-critical and self-conscious compared to the previous novelistic discourses. As a literary term,

metafiction refers to the system of embedded narratives cross their own borders and join to the framing narrative in a paradoxical way, thus, for many scholars; by this technique it reflects the central conflict between fiction and reality within the framework of the text. Through diverse strategies the novelist exposes the creative process of the novel and the ontological status revealed turns into an epistemological problem. David Henry Lowenkron summarizes this relationship between the form of the novel and its epistemological outcomes as follows: “Whereas the micronovel is a fictional version of reality, the macronovel represents reality for the micronovel. Thus, the micronovel occupies a place in relation to the seeming reality of the macronovel that is analogous to the macronovel’s situation, vis-à-vis reality” (354). Another common description of metafiction derives from its inclusion of self-criticism in the fiction itself. Nowadays, it is a common practice to juxtapose text on its own form to the realism practiced in the earlier centuries. This involves the absorption of the critical process within the text and the challenge to the literary techniques used by previous authors. The author image reflected in metafictional readings has a double mission: being the author and the critique at the same time.

At a general level metafiction, however, as a new way of doing literary studies is more concerned with literary criticism with special emphasis on the relationship between fiction and reality. Much of the critical writing on metafiction in general and on the works that are defined to be metafictional displays a philosophical language that is strategic in that it reveals the connection of metafiction to modernist and postmodernist movements to form a cultural critique by means of revisiting these movements. Thus, what metafictional literary criticism achieves is to define the characteristics of the modern literature and modern philosophy as the descriptive of metafiction and underline the formalistic and structural qualities of the

literary works and renounce the content. This adds “meta” to the “fiction” and the external criticism is assimilated in the fictional process. In doing so, as Robert Scholes argues in his article “Language, Narrative and Anti-Narrative”, that those metafictional narratives “force us to draw our attention away from the construction of a diegesis according to our habitual interpretative processes [...] they bring the codes themselves to the foreground of our critical attention, requiring us to see them as codes rather than as aspects of human nature or the world” (211). A text is expected to produce effects instead of conveying normative meanings for it is constructed as a collection of narrative strategies to produce effects. The conclusion that follows is that the content and the transformation of narrative strategies and genres are silenced through the prominence of the contemporary theories of literature that purports to explain the aspects of the modern culture and philosophy.

In her study *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh, one of the most prominent literary critics who focuses on the metafictional aspects of the novel, defines ‘metafictions’ as types of fiction that self-consciously strive to lay bare fictionality in narrative and to reveal their own status as artifact that “not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction”, but also “explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (2). Although the existence of tendencies towards self-consciousness throughout the history of the novel from *Don Quixote* to *Tristram Shandy* is admitted in the recent theories of novel as “less centrally metafictional, but still displaying ‘meta’ features” (5), it is remarkable to see the immediate celebration of the term “metafiction” as the identifying feature of the “postmodernist” narratives. This celebration can be evaluated on the ground of the nature of the novel which “notoriously defies definition” (5) and its compatibility with the discourses that surround the postmodern

era in which a number of institutions and structures have been thought to be provisional. Waugh argues that “contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” (7). Having traced auto-representation, self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in the older literary works such as the seventeenth century novel *Don Quixote* and described the historical background relatedly in terms of metafictional “tendencies”, Patricia Waugh goes on to claim that, “by studying metafiction, one is, in fact, studying that which gives the novel its identity” (5). In Waugh’s scheme, the metafictional tendencies observed in early examples of the novel genre evolve into the ideal novel, one which she defines as metafictional.

In the first chapter of her study “What is Metafiction”, Waugh provides us with the first problem in the discussion of metafiction, namely the claim that metafiction “explore a *theory* (Waugh’s emphasis) of fiction through the *practice* (Waugh’s emphasis) of writing fiction” (2). The traditional metaphor of ‘the world as book’ is treated in Waugh’s frame as the basis on which the metafictional self-exploration comes to the prominence and it is achieved through contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory (3). In a sense, Waugh’s take on metafiction rests on the so-called function and the power of language in constructing the sense of reality. Literary fiction is presented as the ground to explore the limits of the illusion of the daily reality since fiction is also mediated through language. Although Waugh does not state it openly, this version of metafiction is poststructuralist in overtone due to its constant stress on the linguistic analysis and is imposed a didactic function at the same time, for metafiction is thought to be a

“useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself” (3). The reason why Waugh juxtaposes the poststructuralist interest in performance in writing and meta-criticism to the fictional world can be explained with the concerns of the time she was writing when uncertainty, insecurity, and self-questioning were academically at the centre of attention. In Waugh’s scheme, reflection of these discussions appears in the form of a radical opposition to the conventions of ‘the traditional novel’, especially of the “nineteenth-century realist view of the world” (9).

The ruling feature of the nineteenth-century realist novel is defined by Waugh as “ordered reality (the well-made plot, chronological sequence, the authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are’, the casual connection between ‘surface’ details and the ‘deep’, ‘scientific laws’ of existence” (7). In the section sub-titled as “Why are they saying such awful things about it?”, Waugh’s version of metafiction sets up an opposition to the language of the realistic novel in order to define how “the novel itself is positively flourishing” (9). Metafictional deconstructive strategies are specifically expected to provide the writer and the reader with “a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative” and “accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems” (9).

Waugh’s conception of metafiction builds upon Bakhtinian formalism and diverges to the poststructuralist outlook in respect of text’s intertextual connection to its literary antecedents. Waugh claims that metafiction is capable of offering “both an innovation and familiarity through the individual reworking and undermining of familiar conventions” and it turns “the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of potentially constructive social criticism” (12). Why

Waugh is saying such ‘awful’ things about ‘the’ traditional narrative conventions can be best explained by her seemingly conviction in the subversive textual energies of metafiction and enquiry of reality: “[Metafictional novels] show not only that the ‘author’ is a concept produced through pervious and existing literary and social texts but that what is generally taken to be ‘reality’ is also constructed and mediated in a similar fashion. ‘Reality’ is to this extent ‘fictional’ and can be understood through an appropriate ‘reading’ process” (16).

Similar to Kristeva, Waugh presents an essentially language-oriented analysis inexorably. When Waugh inserts intertextuality into her theory in order to emphasize the deconstructive nature of the metafictional practice, however, her reading comes to have roots in two distinct, incompatible realms, namely deconstructive and historicist conceptions. This dilemma negates her claims about the essential self-exploration of the metafiction led by the claim that its meaning is mediated through the language itself. This dilemma manifests itself more significantly in Kristeva’s take on intertextuality. She defines intertextuality as a text’s reaction to its own hybrid consistence, since every text is essentially admitted to be a collection of forms and themes from already existing texts. Having this conception in mind and having presented an unbroken line of textuality self-consciousness throughout literary istory, Waugh hardly presents a consistent definition of metafiction.

Another problem is that, re-examination of ‘the’ traditional novel requires one to have an understanding of a homogenous literary tradition that is culturally comprehensible to the readers and the writers in the same way. To begin with, in defining the “identity” of the novel, a purposiveness along with historicity is imposed on the term ‘metafiction’ as it is visible in Waugh’s take on literary modernism as the source of the enquiry of ‘reality’ and consciousness on both narrative and social

levels. Though they arrive at different ends, the general picture drawn by Linda Hutcheon, Mark Currie and Patricia Waugh emphasizes the auto-representational, narcissistic, introverted and introspective nature of metafictional texts as the essential feature of narrative. This is crucial in that it fashions the unified representation of literary forms. These features are repeatedly emphasized and to this end, literary modernism is shown to be the break with the legacy of Enlightenment thought and the realist textual strategies. I argue, it is of great importance to decipher the codes of these presumptions to get the full understanding of how the term 'metafiction' is problematic.

As Ann Jefferson illustrates in her review of Waugh's *Metafiction*, Patricia Waugh proposes a definition of postmodern writing as the continuation of the cultural context dating back to Enlightenment and of postmodern literary texts as the workings on this cultural context with deconstructive strategies (574). Amy J. Elias, in her article "The Postmodern Turn on (:) Enlightenment" claims that postmodernism is obsessed with the past, and together with the aesthetics of experimentalism, market capitalism, postcolonial and race and gender discourses, fin-de siècle anxieties, metafiction contribute to this obsession. According to Elias, in the postmodern age the current state of the contemporary societies are explained by turning back to the Enlightenment. As the latest phase of modernity's self-questioning, contemporary novels, for Elias, break entirely with the Enlightenment. The main problem with the standardized description of metafiction as a revolution in consciousness is precisely the absence of alternative forms that do not fit perfectly in the sequence that many postmodern scholars have committed, which is the chronological association of humanism to formalism and formalism to poststructuralism. Humanism becomes the spokesman of major text of realism

formalism is invented by the practitioners of modernism and postmodernism joins to poststructuralism (Richardson, 292). Agreeably, not content with this scheme, for instance, Brian Richardson outlines the problem underlying this line by highlighting the heterogeneity of the British literature in ages consisting of all different types of narrative practices at once: “In Britain one observes, in or around 1939, major works of realism by Graham Greene, modernism by Elizabeth Bowen, expressionism by Jean Rhys, and postmodernism by Flann O’Brien” (303). Richardson further claims that postcolonial literatures are judged against a progressive trajectory of narrative forms that turns out to be a fabrication: “Salman Rushdie’s postmodernism is not more advanced or developed than the modernism of Anita Desai and Michelle Cliff, the expressionism of Bessie Head, or the realism of Chinua Achebe or Ama Ata Aidoo” (301-2). There are two very crucial discussions here; one regarding the presence and possibility of different poetics in a given literary period and the other, that is the power of the reigning paradigm in placing the authors to the canon. The very same paradox about the metafiction theory and practice is presented by Marc Currie in his work *Metafiction* as follows:

If the seeds of historiographical metafiction were planted in modernism, they flowered so spectacularly only because events in the related but non-fictional fields of philosophy, linguistics, and literary and cultural criticism created the right conditions to give historiographical metafiction new theoretical scope. Hence, the works of Robert Coover, Umberto Eco, A.S. Byatt, John Fowles, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, Julian Barnes and others who have ruminated self-consciously on the fictional representation of history are contributors to a new philosophy of historical representation in which the ideological function of story-telling is central. [...] If modernism strove for a kind of disjunction from history (social and literary), that project has now itself become part of history, supplanted by a postmodernism which strives to return to history having assimilated the self-conscious textualism that modernism formulated. (14)

In a general frame, this situation is instructive also in the study of metafiction as the master narrative of the modern literature. The ideological function of story-telling is

in line with the subversive role of metafictional criticism as in Waugh's discussion of metafiction. That is why Patricia Waugh's version of metafiction as a master narrative also maintains a totalizing narrative history and ignores the forms that fail to fit the pattern. We cannot easily gather literary works under the title of metafiction because the current definition and the application of metafiction are so limited whereas the narrative forms and concerns about the content are so diverse. Other than the rejection of the conventions of realism, the texts that involve parody or reflexivity can have radical dissimilarities with the postmodern writing in their contents. This in return requires a rethinking of what postmodernism's place really is in literary history. Just like a literature can be ruled by distinct poetics such as realism, expressionism, modernism or postmodernism in the same period, the reigning paradigm can defer from one literature to another. In this frame, the investigation of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* and O'Brien's *At Swim-two-birds* will be an attempt of illustration of these distinct paradigms. The assumption that literature changes developmentally causes the postmodernist metafiction to be overvalued and to be tagged as the prominent narrative mode compared to the previous self-conscious narratives. While the current study of metafiction strives to prove that no single unchanging rule is possible and there cannot be a linear account of historical events in theory, the aforementioned sequence in literary history applied by the same study proves the opposite in practice. Instead, what is to be emphasized should be the investigation of the circumstances under which literary works transform and interact with literary history. This interaction is not evolution with a natural selection at the end and appropriation of diverse forms into one ideal model shaped by one particular historical moment but a

transformation, a transformation that embraces distinct poetics at once without overrating one over others.

Another problem arises when Waugh presents metafiction as an inherent characteristic of narrative fiction, a tendency within the novel as well as a response to contemporary cultural context and the literary past. Such characteristics of metafiction defined by Waugh as contradiction, paradox and intertextuality regard the genre as an inseparable part of the contemporary writing. However, the historicity attached to metafiction that focuses the study of the social and the cultural conditions is incompatible with her claim that metafiction is a tendency towards self-consciousness within novel. This raises the question of what makes modern metafiction distinct from realism to which metafiction is reacting considering that metafictional devices have varied in realist, modernist and postmodernist fictions. Clearly, Waugh's two separate models, one being the social theory and the other fictional practice, raise serious questions if taken into consideration separately. The unificatory attempt of Waugh's take on metafiction needs to be tested within her own frame through both deconstructionist and historicist readings of which she makes use in her conceptions. Paradoxically Patricia Waugh is reluctant to avoid both modes of readings in her theoretical frame, thus making it difficult to know she is putting her effort to question the contemporary social circumstances in terms of contemporary texts' response to them or all literary works which are self-reflexive in different degrees.

Secondly, the 'current' metafiction is defined by Currie and Waugh as a borderline between the theory and the practice of fiction writing. Yet to argue that metafictional texts posit themselves between theory and fiction should demand a sort of self-consciousness on behalf of the theoreticians. How the partly self-reflexive

texts are different from the texts which are metafictional in substantial proportion can be explained through the prefix ‘meta’ meaning beyond or transcending. Being posited beyond ‘fiction’, metafiction describes the nature and the purpose of fiction as fiction in itself. However, metafictional texts are not alone in blurring the line between fiction and reality. Rather, the attempts of literary critics to describe this phenomenon are more effective in posing questions about the relationship between the fiction and reality than texts themselves. Even if there is an apparent response of contemporary fiction writing to the novelistic discourse, it also addresses to the presence of literary criticism whose aim is not merely explanation, but also constitution of its own politics. Italo Calvino’s criticism of act of professional reading by diverse schools of criticism in his novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler* is an example of this response among many others as it will be illustrated in its appropriate space.

Though it is plausible that metafiction as such is neither solely a genre nor representative of postmodern literary mode, but rather one of the ways of crossing the narrative borders, the recent general picture drawn by contemporary critics reflects the authors’ awareness of the theories underlying the construction of fictional works. Just as metafictional works are claimed to be questioning themselves essentially as the result of their enquiry of literary canon in which they are taking part, literary theories are also supposed to be self-conscious in that they have the subject matter of the relationship between fiction and reality in common with fictions. Contemporary criticism is not innocent in dividing contemporary metafictions from previous self-reflexive texts and marginalizing the former for the sake of identifying it with the current social and cultural visions. In other words, despite the acknowledgement of older self-reflexive texts, “metafiction” as a radical

definition helps classifying such other postmodern fictions as “surfiction, antifiction, fabulation, neo-baroque fiction, post-modern fiction, introverted novel, irrealism, or as the self-begetting novel” (13). In the second chapter of her work where she explains the development of literary self-consciousness Waugh says: “Although metafiction is just one form of post-modernism, nearly all contemporary experimental writing displays some explicitly metafictional strategies” (22).

These metafictional strategies are on the other hand listed with reference to various narrative techniques and patterns from the same range of experimental writing. In other words, while diverse sorts of writings are traced to supposedly pre-existing metafictional devices, they actually help defining what metafiction really is. Patricia Waugh lists the characteristics of metafiction as follows:

[...], the over-obtrusive, visibly inventing narrator [...], ostentatious typographic experiment [...], explicit dramatization of the reader [...], Chinese-box structures [...], incantatory and absurd lists [...], over-systemized or overtly arbitrarily arranged structural devices [...], total breakdown of temporal and spatial organization of narrative [...], dehumanization of character, parodic doubles, obtrusive proper names [...], self-reflexive images [...], critical discussions of the story within story [...], continuous undermining of specific fictional conventions [...], use of popular genres [...], and explicit parody of previous texts whether literary or non-literary [...]" (22).

In this vein, these characteristics gathered together from various literary texts with their peculiarities are stripped from their contexts and these characteristics are reduced to the definition of metafiction. Examination of fictional systems and frames, creation of imaginary writers and texts by them, commentary on the text itself, question of the theory and the practice of writing, grotesque representations of the characters, framing plot and the distortion of temporal and spatial organizations, escape from the ‘real’ have come to be existing all throughout the novelistic discourse in different ages with different ends. The problem here arises when proponents of the post-modern metafictional theories presents metafiction as a thing

in itself and occasionally displays that self-reflexive texts have always contained intertextual references and allusions to the literary grand narratives preceding them. These occasions on the other hand are restricted to the illustration of how contemporary metafiction and authors violate narrative traditions for the salvation of the novel as a genre. According to Mark Currie, once identified with metafiction, the novel today is presented to be more promising in that it enables the reader to comprehend the structures and the experience of the world by representing the construction of the text itself (Currie, *Metafiction*, 7). He goes on to say that metafiction is the source of an “unlimited vitality: which was once thought introspective and self-referential is in fact outward looking” (2). Similarly, Patricia Waugh states that “... far from ‘dying’, the novel has reached a mature recognition of its existence as *writing*, which can only ensure its continued viability in and relevance to a contemporary world which is similarly beginning to gain awareness of precisely how its values and practices are constructed and legitimized” (19). Their expectation from the current novel is to demolish the established conventions of narrative fiction, to find new ways of storytelling, to open the ground for new practices and to work against the tradition of realist novel which is described to be transparent as opposed to the heterogeneity of metafictional practices in Waugh’s chapter called “Why are they saying such awful things about it?”.

Most of the practitioners of metafiction today are very well aware of the theoretical agenda behind literature and their response to this phenomenon is shaped accordingly. If, for instance Don Quixote is taken to be partly “self-reflexive” instead of “radically metafictional”, the reason could be that it was not written in an age when neither ‘death’ nor ‘rebirth’ of novel or author was under question in Barthesian terms. Although the term “metafiction” is relatively new compared to the

long literary history, the practice of self-reflexiveness has always been a part of the mass consciousness in literature. What makes the “small doses” of self-reflexiveness “radical” in contemporary practices of fiction and literary criticism is the way and the tenor of the time in which writings are evaluated. The literary strategies that are attributed to the contemporary metafiction have always existed within certain disguises and contexts. The postmodern take on the self-conscious narratives as metafiction is one of the various incarnations in which literary techniques appear. What transforms the narrative consciousness into what is understood from metafiction today is the mode of reading in the light of recent philosophical and social discussions.

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes continually relates his narrative from multiple perspectives, evident in the author’s representation of human perception as in the famous example of windmills which are giants for Don Quixote while Sancho perceives them as they are (Reed, 786). Philosophically, Don Quixote’s world anticipates the twentieth century reconsideration of the determinism in classical science. When taken into account with in the light of the contemporary interdisciplinary theories the novel challenges the determinism and objectivity adopted by Newton and Descartes later (Reed, 738). Embedded texts within the novel by fictional characters, Cervantes’s personification of himself within the novel, interplay of different genres and the parody of various conventions all highlight the complexity of systems in which the text is written. The complex and unpredictable system of *Don Quixote* can prove that reality cannot be explained through reductionism or determinism of a single model. The powerful draw of fiction led by the multiple levels of fiction provides wealth and license for the novel in relation to the preceding conventions. However, contrary to the present practice of

interpretation, it is such works as *Don Quixote* that contributes to construction of a literary and cultural poetics as complementary, rather than models like Waugh's which assimilate all self-reflexive narratives with different ends to a single interpretation. The univocal language of today's literary studies in metafiction runs the risk of anachronism and fails to analyze the complexity and interaction in literature. Cervantes's world in the work might anticipate our own, however, on narrative, social and philosophical levels there are multiple things happening at once and it is most likely to sacrifice other aspects while making one comprehensible to the contemporary audience. The employment of the patterns of epic and romance in *Don Quixote* should not merely be thought as normative fictions against which Cervantes is constructing his text; rather they are literary givens which are ripe for parody and through which Cervantes achieves sophistication by being a part of them.

Another important figure in the study of metafiction, Linda Hutcheon's theoretical frame is as valuable as Patricia Waugh's for the discussion of metafiction for its typology of self-reflexive fiction. Compared to Waugh, she tends to draw less clear boundaries of the self-consciousness in the novelistic. Her critical pluralism embraces such variable aspects of the postmodernist text writing as "documentary historical actuality", "formalist self-reflectivity and parody" (*The Politics*, 7). She maintains the interrogation of historical representation in the text with its own act of narrativity in the context of parody. Hutcheon argues that in our day, parody is "a form of imitation but imitation characterized by ironic inversion not always at the expense of the parodied text" (*A Theory*, 6) and she goes on to define parody as "probably a genre, rather than a technique" (19). In this vein, parody is interpreted as a deconstructive effort to reread historiographic writing in a way that both makes use of and challenge the historical representation. The case is the problematization of the

epistemological certainty of history particularly and writing in general through questioning in a differential and ambivalent way.

First of all, different from Waugh, Hutcheon's differentiation between "metafiction" and "historiographic metafiction" is plausible: "... historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to what I call late modernist radical metafiction (American surfiction), attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 289). A direct comparison to Waugh shows that Hutcheon's main concern here is with history and conscious self-reflexivity in historiographic metafiction. The supposed 'objectiveness' of history writing and the 'subjectivity' in fiction are presented as the ground for examining these novels both thematically and formally, namely both the epistemological and ontological status of them. As stated earlier, Waugh also poses her questions in terms of both ontological and epistemological lines; however hers is more a sort of reluctance to choose one of two possible ways. On the other hand, Hutcheon makes her points more explicit in juxtaposing the ontological characteristics of historiographic metafiction to its epistemological grounds. Historiographic metafiction engages "a questioning stance through their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as textuality, and even of their implication in ideology" (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 286). In this framework, the focus of historiographic metafiction is on the knowability of the past with regards to ideological circumstances. Through the rediscovery of history in fiction, Hutcheon believes that historiographical metafiction, "plays upon the truth and lies of historical record. Certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both

deliberate and inadvertent error” (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 294). In Hutcheon’s framework, the past is re-introduced into present “to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 209). Thus, Hutcheon is also self-conscious while theorizing within certain boundaries. She makes it explicit that she combines metafiction and history writing to operate within the categories of contemporary philosophical and literary enquiries that challenge the authority of “facts”. Hutcheon’s remarks on the problematization of the historical knowledge through metafiction come to terms with the modernist and postmodernist challenge to author’s subjective interpretation.

Similar to Waugh, on the other hand, Hutcheon provides an opposition to the realistic novel tradition for it has come to be representing the “mimesis of product” whereas the contemporary narcissistic narrative can be defined as the “mimesis of process” (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 70). However, she is highly self-conscious of her typology which embraces overtly or self-reflection, parody, mise-en-abyme, allegory, detective story, phantasy and so forth. She makes it explicit that she is operating within the boundary of 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural visions and defines her theories accordingly. She denies defining “metafiction” as a general term that applies to all historical periods other than contemporary writing. Since her focus is on the confrontations of postmodernism, she prefers to dwell on the “documentary historical actuality” with “formalist self-reflexivity and parody” (*The Politics*, 7). Since it deals with questions of historiography, subjectivity, literary tradition and epistemology, historiographic metafiction provides Hutcheon with the tools through which she can present historical representations and their being bounded to the politics of narrativity. The focus being on the narrative, the discussion is directed to discursive theory, politics and history. Especially, history as context becomes of crucial

importance for Hutcheon, for she believes that postmodernism is highly historical. Once again, Hutcheon does not claim that postmodernism questions the ontological status of the past and older narratives. Rather, the epistemological certainty of history is reconsidered in the light of fiction writing and narrativity not as a given but as constructed discourse.

In interpreting the society's entire discursive practices, Hutcheon highlights parody and its codes. Her explanation of parody as a more socially oriented rather than being a narcissistic form requires the investigation of discursive context. Partly, she falls under the same category with Waugh when she targets the Romantic idea of individual genius as a countercurrent to constructs of the language and to the idea that "self-reflective fiction does not mean the death of the novel as a mimetic genre but... its salvation" (*Narcissistic*, 70). However, she generally sheds light on postmodernism's engagement with ideological issues in parodic ways and asserts that "there are probably no transhistorical definitions of parody possible" (*A Theory*, 10). The scope of parody contains the revision of not only the narrative codes but also the grand narratives such as classics. As aforementioned, Hutcheon's primary aim is to illustrate the paradoxical ways in which parody affirms and challenges historiography. Yet, her configuration of parody is related to the works of art in that "an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" is constantly at work (*A Theory*, 11). It is related to burlesque, travesty, pastiche, plagiarism, quotation, and allusion. Although Hutcheon does not make it explicit, due to its relation to the literary discourse, and its being part of parody creates an ambiguous situation for the idea of self-consciousness.

Michele Hanoosh argues in his article “The reflexive function of parody” that parody possesses a dual function: the parodist’s presence in the text as reader and author (113). The treatment of the parodied text deals with the parodist’s own model of interpretation of another text as reader and his transformation of it. According to Hanoosh, the parodist inevitably presents his/her own work as target to the same interpretation and transformation and demanded by the form itself parody cannot provide a definitive model for the line of the works that it critiques as a comical retelling. He argues that “parody actually rebounds upon itself, calling itself into question as it does the parodied work, and suggesting its own potential as a model or target, a work to be rewritten, transformed, even parodied in its turn” (114). The extent to which parody can implicate itself in its treatment of the parodied work is debatable because within the boundaries of a literary work, it is not likely that a text proposes a further parody of itself while it is itself a work in process. The image of a text analyzing its own reality of fiction is so much like a serpent devouring itself. A text completes its function as parody when it parodying itself. Then the parody is left to the hands of the later parodists though it cannot be assured if later works would follow the same model of interpretation of the previous parodist. Parody’s distance and relation to the master narratives interrupts it from being fully transgressive or solely self-reflective. Parody that creates the metafictional paradox in a sense is neither fundamentally indifferent to the discursive theories nor its affirmative.

Related to the distance of literary works to other works and their intertextual relations, another point foregrounding Hutcheon’s thoughts is the place of the reader in the framework of parody. What is being parodied should be decoded by readers who are competent in literature or at least with a general background to do so. In *Narcissistic Narrative*, the act of reading is attributed such a crucial role that it is

unlikely for a text to communicate. However, Hutcheon's theorization of the reader deserves cautiousness for the authorial presence directs serious questions to the 'ideal' reader in *Narcissistic Narrative*. While the parodied text requires the active involvement of the reader in identifying the intertextual framework, on the other hand, as Hutcheon acknowledges in *A Theory of Parody*, it is the authors as the encoder who possesses a fundamental authority: "If the desired response is a reaction to the recognition and interpretation of parody, then the producer of the text must guide and control the understanding of the reader" (89). Throughout the novelistic discourse this control on the understanding of the reader has been evident in thousand shapes. In the case of self-reflexive fiction, this control is evaluated differently. To constrain the reader, the author hides his "generic or rhetorical competence" so that the reader can activate his awareness of the "institutionalized set of values" in order to understand the generic and social sides of parody (*A Theory*, 94-5). In other words, parody can only function not only within the literary and artistic context, but also with allusions to the world around it. This is again tied to Hutcheon's visions of the historiographic metafiction: "A parody historicizes by placing art within the history of art; its inclusion of the entire enunciative act and its paradoxical authorized transgression of norms allow for certain ideological considerations. Its interaction with satire overtly makes room for added dimensions" (*A Theory*, 109-10).

Throughout, despite Hutcheon's shift in attitude towards the role of the reader from *Narcissistic Narrative* to *A Theory of Parody*, the stress has been on the contemporary self-conscious narrative in positioning the reader to somewhere else other than their positioning in the older self-reflexive works. The binary opposition between the "freedom" of the reader led by the narcissistic narratives and the

“manipulation” of the reader by earlier works of art and the direct comparison of the traditional and contemporary texts are meant to be the “salvation” of the novel. Hutcheon asserts that the “near equation of the acts of reading and writing is one of the concerns that sets modern metafiction apart from previous novelistic self-consciousness” (*Narcissistic*, 27). The sole intention of the politics of postmodernism is in a way held to be the creation of an awareness of ideological, social and also literary constructions around the audience in a didactic way. Besides, postmodernism as presented by Hutcheon is over-generalizing due to the potential ideological implications evident in all texts. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she says that postmodernism does not deny “autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin” (57). The paradox here is led by having the homogenous representation of postmodern writing on the one hand and having the general claim that postmodern thought and writing highlights individual differences on different levels on the other. According to the conceptions of the aforementioned critics, through the dialogical relationship between the text and the reader, metafictional novels, which are depicted as the embodiment of postmodern writing, control the reception of the professional reading effectively. In this sense the general picture is familiar with the modernists’ conception of art with an emphasis put on individual and their elitism. The deconstructive gesture that is attributed to the metafictional texts in general is not so revolutionary knowing that self-reflexive experimentation is inherited from modernism’s critique of the realist novel tradition and adopted by postmodernist writers to challenge the literary modernism.

First of all, defining an orderly “evolution” of narrative is an evidence of how the past is reflected as a coherent story in the postmodern writing of fiction and of

criticism. The nature of the novel as not easily definable prevents any continuous history of the novel; rather it presents a collection of works that bear resemblances to each other, thus creating an uncanny effect and ambiguity for straightforward interpretations. It is true that in certain epochs certain conventions are overvalued and these conventions let the critics codify its rules of that time. However, the novelist sets his/her work in opposition to itself by parody not solely because the author aims to target at the “pure” genres or master narratives of the time, but also the codifications of the critics that has an effect on the ways a text can be experienced. Thus, the text may neutralize the theories that would explain them or question the validity of these theories and their norms as both case is observable in the self-conscious texts including the modern metafiction. The scheme presented by the contemporary theoreticians of metafiction advocates that historically narratives had stable social and literary conventions, and they developed in line with conflict and crisis and arrived in a permanent openness. Such an assumption is only possible by disregarding novels like Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* or Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, or framed tales such as Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, or *One Thousand and One Nights*. Marc Currie alludes to Chaucer’s elaborate framings of *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare’s plays within plays, the use of epistolary forms in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries and so on as the precursors of the metafictional paradox. Likewise, *Tristram Shandy*, or Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* do not make the paradox less visible compared to the present practices. Currie describes the theoretical path that leads to the announcement of the metafiction or self-conscious text as it is today as follows:

Many commentators have looked to such precursors for the origins of postmodern sensibility, and to parody in particular as an intertextual mode of writing with a clear critical function. But when postmodern retrospect discovers proto-postmodernism in this way it produces a

spurious self-historicising teleology which confirms that critical texts construe their literary objects according to their own interests and purposes: Postmodern discourses are seen as the endpoint of history and all prior discourses are construed as leading inexorably towards the postmodern. (*Metafiction*, 5)

In his article “Origins, Sausurre, Bakhtin, Kristeva”, Graham Allen provides a systematical analysis of the evaluation of intertextuality by the Russian Formalism, Czech and French Structuralism and Poststructuralism as practiced by Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault and Derrida in 1960s. Allen repeatedly draws attention to the fact that all these thinkers studied and wrote in a context which was dominated by political and social crises culminating in the revolutionary events of 1968 (16). This period of transition is worth notice in our discussion since the term intertextuality also emerged at this very time as the result of Kristeva’s initial discussions of Bakhtin. Whilst Bakhtin’s dialogic take on subjectivity, communication and human consciousness was based on the embodiment of language as an on-going clash between ideologies, opinions and interpretations (32), Kristeva seems to evade human subjects in favor of abstract terms such as text and textuality. According to Kristeva authors do not rely on their own originality in creating their texts but compile from other already existing texts. Thus, a text is to be understood as an intertextuality by itself, taken from other texts and neutralizing the act of writing. As defended by Hutcheon, self-conscious textual production embraces the interference of the readers also in Kristeva’s framework, inasmuch as it was an article of faith for her to distrust minds of the authors. The moment the reader steps into the production meaning, the text turns back on itself. This idea of enunciation is very much in the same line with Barthes’ announcement of the death of the author. And as part of a cultural critique, it helps the metafiction theoreticians lift the border between the fictional and the real worlds. Kristeva’s configuration of intertextuality points to a

model of referentiality which does not distinguish between references to the real world or to the fictional one, because the presumption is that textuality is woven into all. This version of intertextuality complicates the validity of the terms ‘metafiction’ and ‘self-consciousness.’

Consequently, the following chapters will mostly concentrate on two chief challenges: Firstly, metafiction is not an easy term to coin to refer to the self-conscious narratives of all ages despite the theoretical acknowledgement of peculiarities in different literary epochs, inasmuch as the 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural and social aesthetics has been imposed on the term. Secondly, even if the first dilemma is disregarded, configurations of metafiction is so restricted to certain narrative forms and strategies that either only a certain number and collection of works fits perfectly to the general picture or when all the self-conscious narratives are appropriated to these configurations, most of them lose their contacts with their contexts. In other words, a sort of evolution is employed within the literary world where the fittest survives and the weak fades away. The first problem, namely the validity of metafiction as a general definition, will be dealt here through the in-depth reading of the critical writings and major literary works with special emphasis on the inherent idealism of the theories and its relation to literary texts. The second problem regarding the defined characteristics of metafiction will be investigated in detail within individual chapters on the novels, *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, in the light of the thoughts on narrative rationality and structures and through the association of the literary writing and criticism, which is heavily concerned with contemporary writing strategies, intertextuality and the literary past. In the following chapters, as response to my pervious negative findings, I aim to demonstrate firstly the foregrounding of the act of authorship as response to the

questioning of the idea of the author; secondly, the paradox and impossibility of having ‘self’ and ‘consciousness’ with reference to intertextual readings; thirdly, the place of intertextual performance in postmodernist narratologies and how it is negated by the presence of literary antecedents and authorial presence; fourthly, the loose interpretations led by the current definition of metafiction and finally its impact on defining the characteristics and canonization of the novel today.

## CHAPTER 3

### *AT SWIM-TWO-BIRDS*

In this chapter I revise such widely used concepts as “self-criticism” and “self-consciousness” through rethinking the theories of metafiction. I will investigate how a great number of works on metafiction is affected by the linguistic idealism and relativism of the current critical practices, and attempt to demonstrate how Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* posits theories of metafiction as part of broad cultural reproduction. Hence at the center of this chapter lie the presuppositions of metafiction theories that regard postmodernism as the extension and diversification of Modernist avant-garde. I approach metafiction as a concept that integrates diverse texts and introduces a unified literary discourse, while at the same time limiting the individual interpretations of diverse texts. Keith Booker’s reading of metafiction in *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin, and Menippean satire*, partly adopts this frame. Thus, in the course of this paper, I will offer diverse interpretations of the text in comparison to those of Booker and Waugh. Later, I will adopt Waugh’s general framework which I have mentioned above. I then will briefly discuss Booker’s significant points that are essential to my reading of *At Swim*.

Among Flann O’Brien commentators it is common to juxtapose Flann O’Brien to two other great Irish writers, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, and to connect his writing to the long “Irish comic tradition” as Vivian Mercier defines it. O’Brien’s biting satire, use of ancient Irish literature and folklore, employment of metafictional strategies and grotesque imagery prepared the ground for multiple and

colourful readings of his masterpiece *At Swim-Two-Birds*. For some critics like Keith Booker these elements recall the tradition of Menippean satire, especially as described by Bakhtin. Among his contemporaries he was regarded as an odd figure who “hit upon the notion of metafiction at least twenty years before its subversive conventions became *de rigueur* in the realm of experimental literature” (Lanters, 173). Although this chapter acknowledges the presence of metafictional strategies, and elements in *At Swim-Two-Birds* that overlap with the elements of the tradition of Menippean satire and the Irish comic tradition, in the light of the second chapter, where theoretical implications of metafiction theory has been discussed at length, it will concentrate on the narrow and sometimes blind arguments of some of the secondary literature written on the novel. This will be overlooked through highlighting what has consistently been ignored or less studied, namely the context in which Flann O’Brien was producing his works, and the social and political atmosphere that dominated the minds of the authors as citizens of the newly liberated Ireland.

The discussion of modernist literature and Flann O’Brien’s ambiguous relation to this movement along with the Revivalist literature and to the moralist tendencies in the literary arena are of crucial importance in attempting to propose a wider frame for the discussion of the novel. The fact that he was writing in the 1930s at the height of modernist literature often tempts critics to put O’Brien in direct comparison with literary figures like James Joyce, or representatives of the Irish Literary Revivalism like W. B. Yeats. In this respect, one part of the discussion in this chapter will focus on the argument whether Flann O’Brien constituted a single approach in his work to test the conventions and notions of modernist literature, or the Revivalist literature or the realist novel. In this line, it would be appropriate to

read José Lanthers's description of post-independence Ireland, where authority was narrowing the minds of authors and "writers could no longer expect their works to be read and debated widely and enthusiastically: literature was regarded with suspicion, while enthusiasm—for anything—was in short supply" (Lanthers, 4).

*At Swim-two-Birds* is presented as a first-person narrative by an unnamed student of literature who lives together with his uncle, a typical middle-class man. The novel recounts the autobiographical details of the unnamed narrator's life. However, his narrative consists of the stories written by Trellis, his author-character, and those by Trellis's characters. The narration and the characterization of all these stories later intertwine with each other and open ontologically and epistemologically ambiguous worlds in the novel. Trellis, who makes his characters to live with him in Red Swan Hotel, rapes his own character Sheila who later gives birth to Trellis's ontologically ambiguous son, Orlick. After Trellis is put to asleep, Orlick, who was born a gifted author, torments his father and puts him to trial by writing according to Trellis's laws in fiction together with other characters who suffered under Trellis's tyranny. Then and before, "...all things change, making way for each other" throughout the novel as O'Brien quotes from Euripides's "Heracles" in the epigraph at the very beginning.

O'Brien pushes the novel to the limits of possibilities in narration. The three separate beginnings later spread throughout the novel and stand as the representatives of diverse narrative conventions. The well-known configuration of this diversity is that the Pooka Mac Phelliney "a member of devil class" embodies the mode of fantasy; John Furriskey who "was born at the age of twenty-five and entered the world with a memory but without a personal experience to account for it", the mode of realistic narration and Finn Mac Cool "a legendary hero of old Ireland," the myth.

The wide range of characters in Orlick's writing like Mad Sweeney, Finn Mac Cool, and Mr. Tracey have their roots in the literary aesthetic past. Their presence in the novel, as observed in Sweeney's position as a counter figure for Trellis, leads to multiple readings of narrative stance and voice. Outlining three entirely dissimilar openings in the beginning, one romantic-folkloric, one realistic-scientific, one heroic-mythic, leads to three hundred times as many endings and are all united in the prescience of the writer, Flann O'Brien.

*At Swim-Two-Birds* is among the best examples of the fictional works that comment on the critical practices in the twentieth century, especially those which came after the Second World War — an era which is accepted to mark the end of literary Modernism. The novel, for many of scholars, seeks to subvert the idea of a monological, timeless, authorless, sacred and natural voice found in the so-called realist novel. As such, 'monology' soon proves to be what Patricia Waugh and some other theoreticians seek as the condition of 'the traditional novel,' against which they compare the new writing, metafiction. Intertextual references in excess, interpenetrating frame-tales, reflexivity and constant dialogue with the past are among the weapons of the would-be postmodernist anti-traditional writing. The concepts of overt 'self-consciousness' and 'self-reflexivity', central to the theories of metafiction, turn into blank assertions in that they either chase after the dichotomy of fiction and daily reality or break off the historically established bond between the work and its past. In this respect, the tension between the literary text and its social context is silenced and the necessity of broader knowledge of the extra literary context is underestimated.

Some of those who take the novel as an example of Menippean satire tend to define *At Swim-Two-Birds* as against the conventions of modernist literature by

disregarding the fact that O'Brien, in fact, works within and as part of this movement, in a way that reflects both the characteristics of the movement itself and its connection to the social and literary context from which it emerged. O'Brien's ironic distance to such modernist figures as Joyce and to his own writing is reduced to the typicality of Menippean satire and the text's play with the realist and the modernist writing is overemphasized. In O'Brien's case this move is only possible by juxtaposing the fantastical, parodic and satirical elements of Irish comic tradition to the material significances in Menippean satire and thereupon to the material significance of language in the theories of metafiction. In this vein, the idea of rationality is linked to the literary modes in which a monological authorial figure is discredited.

Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* is often associated with Menippean satire in its secondary literature and its partly satirical elements are repeatedly emphasized to draw attention to the so-called 'deconstructive' effects, especially in the critique of Cartesian body and soul duality. In this vein, physicality and the grotesque portraiture in the novel are thought to be continuous attacks on epistemological inquiry into reality. As stressed in the second chapter, the scientific thoughts and language of the Enlightenment thinkers are rife for subversion in this framework. The idea of rationality is linked to the literary modes in which a monological authorial figure is discredited in line with this philosophical inquiry. The author figure targeted here is one who presents himself as the sole creator of the fictional world he fashions in his narratives. In Menippea, according to many critics like Booker, on the other hand, author's role is merely to test ideas with an ambiguous, anti-monological voice.

Much of this discussion is informed by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts such as heteroglossia, dialogy and carnival along with his discussion of the conventions of Menippean satire. This type of satire was named after the cynic philosopher Menippus of Gadara who was greatly affected by the philosophy of Diogenes. It forms a parody of the presentation of the philosophical ideas for a public audience and mocks established institutions and ideas in its structure through dialogy. Given that dialogy is a central concept also in Bakhtin's theoretical frame and he makes the relation between language and ideology his subject matter, the form of Menippean satire offered Bakhtin the best opportunity to reflect upon literature. In his work *Unauthorized Version: Irish Menippean Satire 1919-1952*, José Lanthers outlines the fourteen principles of Menippean satire in Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* and for the remarks on the secondary literature on *At Swim-Two-Birds* and its relation to the Irish literary heritage:

(1) There is generally an increased comic element. (2) Menippean texts are not hampered by demands for realism or verisimilitude; consequently, (3) their plots are often extraordinarily fantastic. (4) They juxtapose extremes of "high" and "low": baseness and vulgarity rub shoulders with lofty symbolism and philosophy; on the textual level, this hierarchical leveling translates into (5) the widespread use of inserted genres and parody, and (6) the mixing of many different styles and registers. (7) Often Menippean texts feature a tree—planed construction analogous to heaven-earth-hell (8) in order to ask "ultimate questions" about existence. (9) They present unusual viewpoints as well as (10) abnormal moral and psychic states, (11) scandal scenes, an inappropriate behaviour as a way of presenting experiences from unexpected angles and perspectives. (12) For this reason, too, they contain sharp contrasts, abrupt transitions, and incongruous juxtapositions. (13) They feature elements of social utopia; (14) and they show a concern with current and topical issues. (5)

The stress here on the nested structure of Menippean narratives and the multiplicity of genres in it are specifically crucial in terms of the idea of intertextuality. Despite the fact that Bakhtin emphasizes the diachronical dimension of language, his theory is hardly compatible with the Structuralist and Poststructuralist view of language as

the generator of meaning as discussed in the second chapter in Kristeva's take on Bakhtin. Meaning in Bakhtin's terms is produced by dialogism arising from the combination of previous statements, which in our case is other literary works. This combination of statements is conceptualized as heteroglossia in Bakhtinian framework to draw attention to the carnivalesque nature as essential to each and every narrative. This is where Bakhtin's reflections on narrative come closest to the conventions of Menippean satire, for Menippea also consist of incompatible styles, voices, characters in its transgressive body. In the case of Menippean satire, however, the sole aim is to subvert established philosophical or social institutions. Such juxtaposition inevitably transfers the use of Menippean satire for philosophical ideas to the literary world, thus imposing the same missions to work of art, which is predominantly the novel as a genre in contemporary literature. While carnival in literature, specifically in novel, can be evaluated as transgression of literary conventions, critique of the literary canon in question and (sometimes) ontological ambiguities, every aspect of the usage of Menippean satire for philosophical reasons cannot be easily adapted to the literary world. Rejection of authorities and hierarchical structure in a social world and testing philosophical ideas through heteroglossia might have been new and refreshing to philosophical queries, however direct comparison to the literary world would come short, for they talk to similar but still different pasts and conventions. A clear negative example of this attitude is investigated in the second chapter on metafiction theory's relation to contemporary philosophical questions. As different from deconstructionism in philosophy, though it is debatable for philosophers, deconstructionist theories of literature run the risk of reducing the whole corpus of literature to the product of the self-referential system of language as in the description of anti-novel, meta-novel or metafiction. Before

continuing with this discussion, however, it is of crucial importance to glance at the Irish comic tradition in its relation to Menippean satire in order to decipher the approaches of the secondary literature on *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

Vivian Mercier, in his work *The Irish Comic Tradition*, traces an unbroken comic tradition in Irish literature from the ninth century down to modern times. Among the twentieth century authors who came from this tradition Mercier lists Joyce, Synge, O'Casey, George Moore, James Stephens, Lady Gregory, Frank O'Connor, Yeats and Beckett. In the nineteenth century, Mercier claims, this tradition remarked most of the masters of English theatre since the Restoration—Congreve, Farquhar, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw. Wild humour, witty word play, and a tendency toward satire are three components of this book which, according to Mercier, have been continuous due to the conservatism of Gaelic literature. The use of archaic diction and orthography, of archaic allusions, and recurring archaic subject matter have been performed for centuries by men of letters who have been the inheritors of the druids, bards. Oral literature, idioms, metaphors, proverbs, folk tales and beliefs, have both preserved the continuity of the Gaelic literary tradition, and at the same time have been preserved by this very tradition.

Vivian Mercier examines a variety of works by Irish authors on the common ground of archaic Irish comic tradition after introducing his differentiation between wit, humour, irony, parody and satire. Though each definition attributed to these concepts are worth notice, for our current discussion, the relationship between parody and satire is more promising. Mercier's following definition of parody within the context of Irish literature is informative in general for the act of reading:

[the reader] must recognize the work or the genre parodied; then he must see the absurdity of the parody by comparison with the original; finally, this absurdity must be reflected back from the parody on to the

original, so that he can see in the latter the inherent tendency to absurdity which made the parody feasible to begin with (2).

The reader here is expected to possess the necessary background and the ability to recognize different styles and genres in narrative. According to Mercier, a similar formation proves to be necessary, for the poet since “satire, unlike wit or humour, is an official function of the trained poet, though one which he soon begins to exercise for his own power and prestige rather than for those of his patrons or his tribe” (7).

Mercier links the wide use of old spells of druids in Irish folk culture to later poets’ satiric strategies. Just as the former directs old spells against individual or specific groups, satire in Irish literary tradition attacks individuals rather than general vices and follies as in Menippean satire. Moreover, Mercier claims that in this way “satire ensured for the poet the same respect that his supposed occult power had obtained for the druids” (8). The impact of the ancient belief in magic has been continuous all throughout early and later Irish literature to such an extent that even the realism in hagiography was corrupted by this comic tradition, even in the case of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland (12). Irish comic tradition is heavily affected by the prestigious status of poet and poetry and the obsession with technique due to common parodic aspects in this tradition. Similar to the Humanist movement in the Renaissance period in imitating Latin and Greek masterpieces in order to master technique through *copia*, Irish poets have always been in contact with study and practice of technique along with a living folklore, a living folk speech and a prestigious place for poetry and learning (242). Mercier argues that

[...] whereas the writers of other Western countries have lately striven to re-establish contact with primitive modes of thought and feeling through the study of mythology, anthropology, and psychoanalysis, the Anglo-Irish writer has the past always at his elbow—in cold storages, so to speak—preserved in the Gaelic language and literature, in bilingual folklore, in Gaelic modes of thought and feeling and speech which have become part of the rural Anglo-Irish dialects (241).

Mercier goes on to claim that contemporary Anglo-Irish literature cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of that tradition (246) and any archaizing movement is to come to existence as a comic revival, otherwise it loses its generic nature and this archaicism falls under suspicion. One particular, and maybe the most notable, example of this is the Irish Literary Revival, which Mercier defines as self-conscious archaizing of Gaelic literature. For him, without such an attempt as against the nature of Gaelic literature, Irish comic tradition had already gained its renowned position in Anglo-Irish literature and owed its achievements to this very realm of comic. Working within the archaism and conservatism of the homogenous and old Gaelic literature brought limitation to the works of the Irish authors; however, the richness and complexity in oral culture provided them with freshness and innovation in technique. Thus, Mericer finds it ironical that “world critical opinion has admired twentieth-century Irish writing specifically for its freshness, unaware that this quality was derived in large part from the imitation of literary sources unfamiliar to the world at large. Anglo-Irish writers had fallen deliberately so far behind the times that when the wheel of fashion turned they suddenly found themselves ahead” (238).

In the light of these two established traditions, namely Menippean satire and the Irish comic tradition, along with the formalist Bakhtinian and post-structuralist connotations anchored to Menippean satire, we can turn back to the criticism of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in secondary literature which offers false problems for literature with the impact of philosophical controversies. Keith Booker is a distinguished critic with his sole concentration on the tradition of Menippean satire and the Bakhtinian interpretation of dialogism in literary works. Similarly, in her thesis *The Embowelled Brain : the Carnavalesque in the Works of Jonathan Swift and Flann O'Brien* focusing on the reflections of the critique of Cartesian body and soul dichotomy in

Menippean satire with reference to Jonathan Swift's and Flann O'Brien's place in the Irish comic tradition, Rukiye Aslihan Aksoy explores the carnivalesque nature of these authors' works to detect the deconstructive operations in rational thinking and dominant literary forms. The abjection of body in the Cartesian conception has been evident and attacked repeatedly by the disciplines in social sciences and also by some literature written as satirical critique of this phenomenon. Aksoy studies Swift and O'Brien as part of this critique having presented the Menippean tradition and the Irish comic tradition, and she contends that in their writing, bodily functions and mental processes in human beings are put forth to erase and ridicule the idea of demarcation between these two strata (68). At this point, Aksoy refers to Bakhtin's thoughts on "unfinished and open body" to draw attention to the dominant portraiture of grotesque images as opposed to the demarcation mentioned above.

It is an actual fact that both Swift and O'Brien were nourished by the rich oral and written culture in Ireland in selecting fantastic places and characters to a different extent with different purposes. Aksoy aims to create a commonality in these two authors by claiming that they both emphasize the importance of physicality in their works and disturb the separation of the rational upper stratum and material lower stratum. This illuminates one part of the problem aroused by the false equation that can be found in any wholistic approach in dealing with a long tradition. The take on the Irish tradition with a homogenous reading proves to be problematic not only by comparison of two literary figures like Swift and O'Brien but also by the study of different works by the same author, as in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*. Scientist de Selby's treatment in *The Third Policeman* as a representative of 'philosophus gloriosus,' which Menippea strives to mock, lends credit to the idea of questioning epistemology and scientific language as the novel

takes these inquiries in its centre. Pseudo-scientific theories of de Selby in the footnotes of the novel, the impossibility of even in the afterword and the inability to explain reality, the fantastic setting and time in rural Ireland all contribute to the skepticism toward human understanding. de Selby's Atomic Theory is an open illustration of the dissolution of the boundary between the realm of rationality and grotesque physicality, thus laying bare the pretensions of 'knowing.'

The fact that Flann O'Brien was writing at the peak of the modernist movement in literature and when the criticism of this movement had already begun has often been perceived and reflected as O'Brien's hostility towards it. Those who take the novel as an example of Menippean satire (which is true to a certain extent) tend to define *At Swim-Two-Birds* as against the conventions of the modernist literature by avoiding the fact that O'Brien, in fact, works within and as part of this movement, in a way reflexive of both the characteristics of the movement itself and its connection to the context in which it is written and this context's relation to literary past. O'Brien's ironical distance to such modernist figures as Joyce and to his own writing is reduced to the typicality of Menippean satire and the text's play with the realist and the modernist writing is overemphasized. In O'Brien's case this move is only possible by juxtaposing the fantastical, parodic and satirical elements of Irish comic tradition to the material significances in Menippean satire and thereupon to the material significance of language in the theories of metafiction.

R.A. Aksoy claims that the fiction-writing process of the student narrator and troubles in Trellis's novel-within-the novel undermines the literary conventions and the idea of full authorial control in writing fiction. She arrives at this conclusion by interpreting the diversity of characters and narratives from other literary works as 'carnavalesque' and in doing so, O'Brien's strategies in inserting these elements into

the narrative come to be mere polyphony that breaks off the thematic and history-specific references in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. For instance, Aksoy acknowledges that Pooka brings fantasy into the narrative; John Furriskey, the mode of realistic moralist and Finn MacCool, the myth, but for limited conclusions. Her acknowledgement soon narrows down to the “carnavalesque mise-en-abyme” and metanovel (76). Together with characterization, the confusion between narrative levels and the ontological ambiguity thus aroused are claimed to be illustration of “the futility of the idea of authorial control in narrative” (76). As an example, Aksoy show Trellis’s chracters’ rebellion to him, and for her, this creates a carnivalesque ambiguity through which “no ontological and hierarchical configurations concerning the distinction between fiction and reality are established” (76).

Trellis’s novel project works against his intentions as the characters behave in contrast to the author’s intentions for them. John Furriskey pretends the immoral to deceive Trellis, but at the same time marries Peggy in secrecy. Finn MacCool, who was hired by Trellis to be Peggy’s father assaults her. Furthermore, Trellis’s intentions for the Good Fairy and the Pooka are incompatible with what they actually are as evident in the poker game when the supposedly virtuous Good Fairy cheats and offends the working class, whereas the Pooka, the embodiment of evil defends the workers’ rights. Another example Aksoy gives as the disturbance of authorial control is when Trellis cannot control his own sexual appetite and rapes Sheila Lamont. She later gives birth to Orlick who starts writing a novel in which Trellis is put on trial before a jury consisting of his characters. For Aksoy, the chaos occurring when Trellis is put to sleep and the uncontrollable sexual appetite of Trellis imply “the uncontrollability of the physical as well as the inability of the rational to capture imagination” (78).

Similar to Aksoy, , Keith Booker underestimates the function of dialogism in the novel in dramatizing ideological struggles in the society in his Bakhtinian reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in his work, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire*, although he acknowledges Terry Eagleton's warning that "carnival [...] is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art" (quoted in Booker, 4). The second flaw in Booker's reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* is his assertion that O'Brien's literary career was shaped as reaction to the overwhelming influence of Joyce, though he offers less illustration than pre-understandings (6). Thirdly, when he juxtaposes Beckett and O'Brien as two Irish writers, despite the partial affinities in this juxtaposition, he over-generalizes in arguing that O'Brien was as skeptical about the modernist notions as Beckett was in philosophical terms (12). In this reading Joyce is offered as emblematic of the attempt of art to reach Truth, and accordingly is connected to Descartes' role for philosophy (18). Fourthly, Booker argues that O'Brien has been "ahead of his time as a Joyce critic in realizing the potential ridiculousness of Stephen's artistic poses, but he seems to have failed to take the additional step of acknowledging the ironic gap between Joyce and his character, never understanding that Joyce might have been ridiculing Stephen" (13). He further argues that O'Brien's take on Joyce is shaped by his identification of Joyce with Stephen. However, in the chapter entitled as "Sliding Signification," he paradoxically claims that O'Brien comes up with the parody of parody of parody in the self-parodic aspects of *At Swim-Two-Birds*: "There is, of course, an element of parody in O'Brien's narrator's description of modern writing, but the principal object of that parody would appear to be O'Brien's own text. So, once again O'Brien reproduces Joyce's technique (self-parody), rather than parodying it" (30). Last but

the most important issue in Booker's reading is his argument that "O'Brien participates in a central way in the rise to prominence of metafiction in the past few decades [...] for which O'Brien, especially in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, can also be counted as a major modern inspiration" (122). In the same line, this kind of metafiction's linkage to the characteristics of postmodernist fiction in its interrogations of different levels of existence is to be discussed in the frame of Menippean satire and Booker's Bakhtinian terminology (122).

Booker's claim that O'Brien's different identities moved toward the multiplicity of discourses that make up *At Swim-Two-Birds* and that it is foremost a book about other books is agreeable, having in mind a total number of forty-two textual extracts within *At Swim-Two-Birds*, combined with thirty-six different styles (29). Another significant, though unoriginal claim of Booker, is that such metafictional texts as *At Swim-Two-Birds* interrogate various language and discourse structures that constitute the contemporary social and historical moment in which they are produced (31). In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, this is achieved through the appropriation of forms and themes from other texts and the disturbance of normal textual boundaries. In this frame, texts generate meaning in dialogue with other texts. However, in the continuation of this configuration Booker asserts that this dialogue exceeds authorial control and he links this argument to the metafictional strategies.

Still in Bakhtinian sense, Booker argues that the counterpoint of narratives in *At Swim-Two-Birds* sets up a cultural dialogue between the Irish mythical past and present, especially as put in the contrast between Sweeney's lyrical lays and "Casey's prosaic poem in praise of 'pint of plain'" (34). Reception of these pieces of literature emphasizes the gap between the audience of the Middle-Irish tale and the modern poem. However, Booker is soon tempted to read this gap "as an indication of

the degraded state of modern Irish culture in relation to the mythical past, somewhat along with the lines of T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, or of Eliot's interpretation of Joyce's use of the mythic method in *Ulysses*" (34). These arguments are re-visited by Booker in the same chapter in a way paving a path to a more democratic reading, to the understanding of the impossibility of a definitive reading. One particular example of this is presented again in relation to the case of Sweeney and Jem Casey; Booker offers two possible readings of the aforementioned contrast between these two characters:

The dialogue between modern and medieval Irish culture might be taken to indicate that modern culture is hopelessly degraded relative to its grand ancestry, or might be read to suggest that grand past is irrelevant and that a nostalgic longing for it is silly at best. It may be true that modern Dubliners like Furriskey and Shanahan show no respect for the mythic past as represented by Finn, disengaged from reality and unable to escape the solipsistic world of his own storytelling. (42)

In this multiplicity of meanings, characters might signify a number of figures from the literary past and the intertextual connection can lead in numerous directions. These possibilities depend on a given reader's background and formation in reading literature and the cultural background, but this idea does not necessarily mean that the text is beyond authorial control. Such an assertion is not necessitated by the text itself rather it is critics' motivation in approaching a text. This is the case for Booker when he argues that the overt textuality of the novel calls attention to its artificial construction links it to the assertion that "the language of the text does not yield a representation of reality but merely a demonstration of the author's dexterity with words" (34). In claiming words can have a life of their own and need not depend for their sustenance upon any direct connection to reality (34), Booker poses the views of poststructuralist attitude toward language, and the literary language

indirectly, thus breaking text's relation to the reality in literary cosmos, no matter it alludes to the reality of the daily life. He further claims that "the comparison of modern life to life in the mythic past effected by O'Brien in *At Swim* can thus be read as an attempt to encourage readers to look at the present from new and potentially energizing perspectives" (35). In this way, O'Brien's use of multiple styles and multiple ontological levels is said to be the reminder of different ways of describing and perceiving reality, "as well as suggesting that language is rich and flexible tool for the evocation of reality that need not consist of a mere stream of clichés and stereotypes" (35). A few pages later, Booker's narrowing point of view clearly refers to the origins of these configurations, especially in Foucault's discussion of the medieval philosophy and its relationship with the perception of language at the time. In this vein, Booker claims, "one could then read O'Brien's critique of modern language in Ireland as a nostalgic lament over the fact this divine guarantee has been lost in the modern secular world" (37).

Another negative conclusion drawn out of Booker's reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* is that the novel is a novel discussing the nature of fiction writing, revealing a self-referential aspect within its own narrative structure (78). It is true that the text does not follow a linear plot line and discusses the notions of fiction writing and emphasizes the material nature of the narrative. As Aksoy illustrates the formal joke in the beginning, the novel opens with "Chapter 1," but we do not see a second chapter. However, this basic formal joke cannot provide a general framework for the claim of "self-referentiality" of the novel. Firstly, every time the narrative turns back on itself as the claim is, in fact, it most of the time poses a question of other contemporary works or attitudes towards fiction writing. Secondly, even when this

case is acknowledged by Aksoy in hesitation, she directs the emphasis on O'Brien's so-called attack as a writer of Menippean on the modernist writer, which generally means James Joyce for the professional readers of Flann O'Brien. In order to unify the reading, Aksoy assimilates the Bakhtinian principles of Menippean satire and looks for their demonstration in the text, which most of the time appears to be far-fetched. In an attempt to meet Swift's concerns in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Aksoy claims that the novel's opening is "illustrative of the subjugation of physicality to the ascendance of the rational faculty and their appropriate demarcation, and the mind's belittling towards the physical" (79): "Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression" (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 9). She continues with her argument by presenting the novel as showing the "pretensions claimed by the modernist artist as well as his predecessors in romantic and realist literature" and, for her, the following quotation let us meet the modernist notion of the creator-artist who asserts his own style in the writing, as if it was possible to claim the opposite for any fiction writer: "I reflected on the subject of my spare-time activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings" (9). Carnavalesque scenes throughout the novel are interpreted here as deflation of the idea of controllability of different elements and characters coming from different backgrounds and the characters' rebellion against Trellis is linked to the pure parody of the modernist project.

The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. A satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. It was undemocratic to compel characters to be uniformly good or bad or poor or rich. Each

should be allowed a private life, self-determination and a decent standard of living [...] Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 32-3).

Aksoy asserts that Trellis's is illustrative of the principles set forth in this manifesto and links the literary principles of the unnamed student narrator to "the limited authority of the author over the narration" (81). While by giving characters their 'democratic' rights, and thereby destroying Trellis's plans, Aksoy says, the unnamed narrator himself assaults these principles in his own narrative, by ending his novel abruptly when he finishes the academic year, which is the nine-month time span of the narrative. Then, without offering any explanation or illustration from the novel Aksoy argues that O'Brien first illustrates the carnivalesque and dialogic aspects of the narrator's principles, who is reminiscent of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, in Trellis's novel. Thereby, for her, O'Brien introduces the idea of carnivalesque and dialogic nature of fiction writing in opposition to the monologic mode of fiction writing and the modernist writer who constantly fails to keep his principles (82).

Booker, on the other hand, takes goes one step further in appropriating the text to his reading in claiming that the book is "a strong authoritarian statement" (44) in the light of the tradition of Menippean satire, the polyphony of styles, discourses and carnivalesque energies. He concludes his argumentation in Bakhtin's concept of dialogic discourse which, for him, implies that "there is something in the propriety of language itself that tends to work against the imposition of narrow, authoritarian, monologic points of view" (44).

He further argues that the pretensions of would-be controlling authors are mocked consistently in the text and Joyce is presented as the embodiment of this sort of author figure. Interestingly, he acknowledges that O'Brien was intending to

achieve the goals of this kind of authors which modernists like Joyce failed to do in his view. It is clear from this acknowledgement that whereas Booker is aware of the ironical gap between O'Brien and his author-cum-characters, he avoids the very same relation between James Joyce and his character, Stephen Dedalus. As a result, he takes Joyce as what he sees in Dedalus, thus ignoring Joyce's aesthetical views on writing and diminishing his attitudes towards Irish Revivalist movement and the domineering role of the Catholic Church. In this line, in his direct comparison of Joyce to Stephen, Booker finds it appropriate to juxtapose O'Brien's themes, forms and characters to Joycean concerns in *Ulysses*. He re-works these concerns for instance in the frame of the Holy Trinity in *Ulysses*, by offering multiple but haphazard figurations for Trellis, Orlick and Furriskey, as an attempt to illustrate O'Brien's 'mock criticism of Joyce.' Although O'Brien's ambiguous relation to Joyce is a significant and unavoidable issue in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and O'Brien's criticism, Booker's juxtapositions prove to be blind and simple configurations which avoid O'Brien's multiple concerns and themes at work.

The most significant example of these simple assumptions is Booker's insertion of Joycean Holy Trinity in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. For him, the sufferings of Trellis and the torments he undergoes at the hands of his characters recall the tribulations of Bloom in the "Circe" episode, which echoes both Christ and Parnell, and this leads to an association of Trellis with these figures and since 'Trellis' as a name suggests 'cross' and it is linked to Christ (39). At this end, the first question arising is what its relation is to Trellis's career as a writer and his 'dictatorship' in fiction writing.

Though haphazard, Booker's equation of Trellis to Stephen's Dedalus's God-like artist is more plausible, providing a link between Trellis and God himself (39). In this light, Trellis's theory of aestho-autogamy echoes the Creation of God, and for

Booker, it might be read as a parody of the Virgin Birth which is so central to Catholicism (39). According to this reading, the evil figure Furriskey-a product of aestho-autogamy-is a figure of Christ. However, Booker does not provide us with a reason for what this equation works for in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Apparently, these juxtapositions prove to be applicable to *At Swim-Two-Birds* but it is so far from offering a parody of Joyce with for a valid reason. This reading merely serves to Booker's task of depicting the so-called Menippean principles in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and his need to present modernist authors, especially Joyce, against which he could prove his arguments.

In this configuration, modernist author turns his narration into a monological whole by implicitly seeking to apply full authorial control over the narration, thereby erasing all subversive energies in the end. In its simple reading this leads to O'Brien's satire towards these pretentious principles (82). Consequently, Aksoy argues that the novel-within-novel structure of the narrative ultimately transforms it into a metafictional piece testing the idea of authorial control. (82). Even in the final paragraph of the novel, Aksoy is convinced that O'Brien constructs his text as a critique of the modernist literature while having episteme as target of this criticism. The mysterious tone of this voice relates the following tale at the end:

Well-known alas, is the case of the poor German who was very fond of three and who made each aspect of his life a thing of triads. He went home one evening and drank three cups of tea with three lumps of sugar in each cup, cut his jugular with a razor three times and scrawled with a dying hand on a picture of his good-bye, good-bye, good-bye (316).

Aksoy asserts that these very last lines of the novel refer back to the unnamed narrator's plan of a novel with three separate beginnings, and, in doing so, "O'Brien strikes a final, killing satiric note on the stylistic obsessions of modernist literature" (90).

The elimination of conception and pregnancy, however, or the reduction of the processes to the same mysterious abstraction as that of the paternal factor in the commonplace case of unexplained maternity, has been the dream of every practicing psycho-eugenicist the world over. I am very happy to have been fortunate enough to bring a century of ceaseless experiment and endeavour to a triumphant conclusion. The process of bringing up children is a tedious anachronism in these enlightened times. Those mortifying stratagems collectively known as birth-control would become a mere memory if parents and married couples could be assured that their legitimate diversion would straightway result in finished breadwinners or marriageable daughters. (41)

This scientific language above is likened to the views of de Selby's views of the unnamed narrator of *The Third Policeman*, whole point of which is totally dissimilar to the orientation of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. However, for Aksoy, this proves to be the illustrative of the unsuccessful attempt of Trellis, as Furriskey appears to be a virtuous character as against the intentions of his creator (83). Here Trellis is presented as the rational upper stratum or the dominant social stratum, and "the characters are like the physical lower stratum or the marginal social groups that reveal subversive energies in a carnivalesque atmosphere" (84).

Mr hard Casey, said Slug. Tell me, what were you doing in that clump there?  
 What do you think, asked Casey. What does any man be doing in a clump? What would *you* be doing?  
 Here Shorty gave a loud laugh.  
 By God I know what *I'd* be doing, he laughed (...)  
 Suddenly Casey turned round and presented a stern face to the company.  
 What was I doing? He asked. What was I doing then?  
 The only answer was a loud laugh.  
 Well I will tell you what I was doing, he said gravely. I will tell you what I was at. I was reciting a pome to a selection of my friends. That is what I was doing. It is only your dirty minds (169-170).

Another insertion of the critique of the Cartesian duality and the language of the Menippean satiric tradition as per Bakhtin's terminology is evaluated in the light of the quotation above in Aksoy's study. For her, here, "poetry and its recitation is put on a level with bodily functions or actions – whether it is a question of pissing,

shitting or masturbating is unclear, and in any case hardly matters. This transgression of the boundaries describing social etiquette and human activity regarding the hierarchization of bodily strata deflates the aura surrounding poetry and similarly reflective, mental activities. Poetry, thus, is made nothing more special than bodily excretions” (86).

Lastly, before discussing the avoidance of the cultural and political circumstances of the time in which *At Swim-Two-Birds* was written, I would like to refer briefly to another reading concentrated on a different but still single aspect of the novel. Kearney’s take on the place of history represents one of the commonest views on Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*, that the imagination reigns the most and history is no more than a ground for the narrator’s comic designs (*Transitions*, 84). Similar to Keith Booker, Kearney also finds commonalities between Beckett and O’Brien, though the former depicts the modern world is a nihilistic limbo whereas the latter interrogates a specifically Irish phantasmagoria. He investigates the traditional quest structure in literature through the Irish legendary figures in the narrative such as Finn McCool and the Pooka Mac Phellimey. Though they operate with the same tools, for Kearney, O’Brien’s transformation of the mythic heroes of the cultural past into modern world undermines the orthodox structures of realist and revivalist narrative (85), while Booker argues the same for the modernist literature, especially for Joyce. The author’s experiment with the characters from other books and literary past suggests, for Kearney, the problematization of the traditional novel and the problematic nature of creation of fiction. He poses the question of self-deconstruction for *At Swim-Two-Birds* and claims that this nature reaches its extreme limit in the annihilation of the author himself (87). Not surprisingly, Kearney also joins to the group of critics who evaluate the text in the light of postmodern

metafictional theories which detaches O'Brien's linkage to the context of his time and the literary heritage. Such a reading is also evident in Thomas F. Shea's reading of O'Brien in his article "Patrick McGinley's Impressions of Flann O'Brien: The Devil's Diary and *At Swim-Two-Birds*": "*At Swim-Two-Birds* repeatedly subverts any traditional notions of an author's control over the worlds she sets down. O'Brien powerfully calls our attention to the ways language runs away from an author, assuming an authority of its own, determining meanings unintended by the writer" (274). That is why, for this discussion, Kearney's arguments are quite interesting only when he takes the issue of O'Brien's approach to the Revivalist ideals. Though narrow in scope, his presentation provides relatively broader perspective for the reader. These ideals of the Revivalist movement can be summarized as the opposition between the country and the city and the Revivalists' favour for the rural landscape, where in timelessness the noble Irish nation lives life without the complication of commerce and urban existence (86).

The poker scene in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is crucial in testing these ideas. In this scene a group of characters discuss various subjects such as poetry, nationality, workers' right and so on, in their own voices. Among these issues, poetry is the most important theme and it is discussed in terms of both theory and practice. During the poker game, Finn MacCool recites an epic poem about Mad Sweeney, from "The Adventure of Suibhne Geilt," who joins the narrative in flesh and this brings about the serious question for the part intertextuality and 'self'-consciousness in the work:

The recitation of an epic poem proves to be totally incongruous with the modern atmosphere of the poker table. This evocation of the mythic literature of Ireland is, then, ludicrously followed by Shanahan's recitation of a social realist pseudo-poem on topical and realistic issues by Jem Casey, who is supposed to be a great poet. Both of these recitations serve parodic purposes. In MacCool's recitation, O'Brien parodies modern translations of Irish myth; while in Shanahan's recitation, which reads "In time of trouble and lousy strife, / You have

still got a darlint plan, / You still can turn to a brighter life -- / A PINT  
OF PLAIN IS YOUR ONLY MAN,” [...] (84).

Shanahan goes on to create a further comic effect in reading by claiming that “there is one thing in that pome, permanence, if you know what I mean. That pome, I mean to say, is a pome that’ll be heard wherever the Irish race is wont to gather, it’ll give as long as there’s hard root of an Irishman left by the Almighty on this planet, marks my words” (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 109). These social and nationalistic sensations are, in fact, tested and evaluated by the presence of timeless attractiveness of the past and myth. Mellamphy interprets this as a “a record of the action of a mind which perceives and captures the poor here-and-none of the Dublin of thirties [...] (10). She also takes O’Brien’s comic relation to epic literature as something opposed to Mercier’s configuration of it in his aforementioned work. Whereas Mercier argues for the possibility of relation to past only in ironical, satirical or parodic (but essentially comic) ways, Mellamphy’s reading is informed by a pessimistic outlook of the modernists such as T. S. Eliot. She thinks the novel is a moment to human failure especially in O’Brien’s alienation from the wholeness of the life celebrated in epic literature (15). For Mellamphy, “the world in which [O’Brien] lives and which he mirrors in his art is one of incompleteness, uncertainty and alienation, a world in which the quest for significance is, as Eliot showed, typically a search for shards of meaning discoverable in an obsolete past” (15). This she sees in O’Brien’s ‘humourous or quasi-humourous’ treatment of Finn (15):

Who has seen the like of Finn or seen the living semblance of him  
standing in the world, Finn that could best God at ball-throw or  
wrestling or pig-trailing or at the honeyed discourse of sweet Irish with  
jewels and gold for bards, or at the listening of distant harpes in a black  
hole at evening?  
I am an Ulsterman, a Connachtman, a Greek, said Finn,  
I am Cuchulainn, I am Patrick.  
I am Carbery-Gathead, I’m Goll.  
I am my own father and my son.

I am every hero from the crack of time (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 19).

Instead I would argue that Finn has a double mission here; first to get the seal of approval from the Catholic Truth Society and secondly to criticize the Revivalists' isolation of the mythic past for their own political and social projects. Sweeney is the central symbol of the novel. In Finn and Sweeney, Flann O'Brien exaggerates the features of Irish life as they have been in literature and folklore to caricaturize their insertion to the modern times as ideal role models, as it was for the Revivalists. However, this should not bring into mind that O'Brien was solely criticizing the principles of the Gaelic League, just as Joyce has not been his mere target in *At Swim-Two-Birds* as it is argued by many critics, some of whom have been discussed before. Waters argues that "while Joyce satirized the leaders of the Revival in order to define his own position, O'Brien satirized Joyce for much the same reason. His fiction is filled with mocking echoes of the great artificer" (123). It is this sort of reading that embraces only fragments of O'Brien's whole writing. He apparently mocked the 'Joycean' elements of fiction in his writing, but these elements were already ironically implemented by Joyce in his character Stephen Dedalus. Secondly, as a work belonging to post-Joycean era in literature, *At Swim-Two-Birds* does not necessarily parody it, but transforming the commonplace discussions of the literary arena and imagination as source of productivity into O'Brien's individual take on the literary past and the contemporary writing and reading practices. The Revivalists might have done things worse with the cultural past and Joyce might have ignored the Irish heritage as response to the Revivalists (Finn complains about his treatment in *Ulysses*: "Who but a book-poet would dishonour the God-big Finn for the sake of a gap-worded story?" (Waters, 131)), but no direct conclusion can be drawn from O'Brien's handling with these issues.

As Waters argues in his book *The Comic Irishman*, the bardic tradition is still a source of imagination, inspiration for Flann O'Brien. The strangeness and richness of the language counterpoint to the clichés of the Revivalist literature and to the popular literature of the time, as embodied in Jem Casey and Shanahan (127). The tone of the novel shifts constantly from ordinary conversation to fantasy, poetry, folk tale, according to Waters, not more than the Irish epic tale (127). Finn is the "old Storybook," dispossessed of his power, his wealth, his followers, and his audience (Waters, 127). Though I cannot agree with Waters's assertion that Finn and Sweeney are figures expressing "O'Brien's sense of internal exile, the artist dispossessed in the midst of his own people (131), it is worth notice when he argues that O'Brien's work is "a radical departure from the Gaelic experience and a source of considerable damage to modern writers" (134). It is also notable to see Sweeney and Finn among the judges in Trellis's trial, especially when one thinks of what Trellis signifies as a moralist, loyal to the censorship of the Irish Vigilance Society and the Catholic morals of the Irish society.

Flann O'Brien was writing in a time when national insecurity, censorship and repression was in its peak in postwar Ireland and naturally reflecting his frustration with this climate through his satire as his contemporaries did. Jose Lanter provides a chronology of this period of repression and censorship in detail with references to the acts passed in the parliament and records their impact on the literature of the time. Authors, including O'Brien, had to obey certain narrow moral codes in their writing, which was reinforced in the new independent state by the old, conservative Catholic views with the support of the majority of the population (Lanter, 2). Meanwhile, the artists of the Celtic Revival was advocating the idea of reviving heroic figures from the Celtic past and mythology in creating a nation that would reach the nobility and

transcendence of these figures. All these things put together, an author of the period was not able to expect enthusiasm and imagination in his writing, let alone from his readers. That is one of the chief reasons, combined with the idealism of the new repressive state; Celtic revivalists were harshly criticized for their epic vision in creating a bright nation out of ancient Ireland (Lanterns, 8).

Lantern lists Darell Figgis, Eimar O'Duffy, Austin Clarke, Flann O'Brien and Mervyn Wall as authors who worked within the realm of Menippean satire with references to the Medieval Ireland as setting. They were all extracting figures and characters from early Irish texts such as *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, "Aislinge Meic Con Glinne," *Buile Suibhne*, the Fenian Cycle, and various mythological tales (6). As response to the idealism of Celtic Revivalists, their aim was not to construct an utopian Irish society but to contrast the politics and the social conditions of the time with the mythological figures and to "create a double vision in which the satirist both is and is not criticizing the present conditions of [their] country" (6). Lanterns comes closer to Aksoy's reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in arguing that the "underlying textual dialogue—especially the reference within several of these satires to the existence of multiple manuscripts, fragments, and versions of the text—paradoxically sabotages the criticism of contemporary attitudes implicit in the characters' dialogue by questioning the authority and reliability of the epistemological foundation (text, language, meaning) on which their criticism is based" (7). Although this concern is evident in *The Third Policeman*, *At Swim-Two-Birds*'s direction is more towards the position of an individual writer in the midst of the literary past, the modernist avant-gardism and the repressive society than the sole criticism and epistemology and human understanding.

Given that Flann O'Brien is often presented as the precursor of postmodernism, when the term was known to no one, and who he "hit upon the notion of metafiction at least twenty years before its subversive conventions became the de rigueur in the realm of experimental literature" (Lanter, 173), these judgments require cautiousness in that in classifying Flann O'Brien according to Menippean and metafictional sets of knowledge limits the diverse concerns and themes of the author. Lanter's show that despite the general tendency to study O'Brien in line with the formal characteristics of Menippean satiric tradition (for his text overlaps them), full concentration on the text's formal basis as in Keith Booker's reading it as a Menippean text and with references to postmodernist writing strategies excludes multiple perspectives and breaks off the author's response to the social and religious ideology of his time and its connection to the literary past. In this vein, it is also necessary to focus on the negative consequences of discussing this novel as a metafictional novel whose concern is merely to expose the artificiality of the conventions of realist fiction.

As typical moralist, the kind the Irish Vigilance Association would approve of, Trellis only reads green books and deems the books in other colors as evil. The green-bound copies here are meant to be the publications of Irish Texts Society and his two main characters, Finn MacCool and Pooka, are derived from Irish mythology and folklore. Even the title of *At Swim-Two-Birds* comes from the story "The Madness of Sweeny" which Finn relates in the course of the novel. Just as Trellis, Finn MacCool also has a list of good stories, especially those concerned with his wisdom and greatness in Irish mythology, and bad ones, those satirical in nature as in the story of the feast of Bricriu (183). This division of stories is also evident in the ideology of the suppressive government in Ireland, especially in the acts of setting up

the Committee of Enquiry in 1926 that led to the Censorship Bill (184). One other moment in the novel among many other when Flann O'Brien covertly criticizes and subverts the Censorship Bill is in the dialogue between the student narrator and his uncle. The narrator prefers to continue with his literary activities in the privacy of his room whereas this is objected by his uncle who implies that the narrator conducts sexual activities in his room instead. The metaphor of masturbation for writing is continued later in the novel when the fellow students of the narrator are implied to be devoted to "the advancement of the French language" instead of "English and Irish letters," and the French letters here signifies, for Lanters, the issue of birth control, which is already a forbidden subject according to the Irish Censorship Law (189). Moreover, Jem Casey, a character from Trellis's novel, prefers to avoid uttering only one word by spelling it as "the bee-double-o-kay-ess" (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 168).

This strategy of including forbidden topics without mentioning them is perpetuated by drawing attention to the absence of these very topics in the narrative as in the case of Furriskey who came into existence as the result of "aestho-autogamy." After given a body, Furriskey examines parts of his own body such as "his stomach, lower chest and legs." The part between his lower chest and his legs goes unmentioned and drawn attention to through absence. Trellis's language in depicting this technique of aestho-autogamy also targets the issue of birth control in the new Irish State. The issue of alcohol is another particular example of this strategy:

[a]ll medical authorities tell us [alcohol] is a double poison—an irritant and a narcotic poison. As an irritant it excites the brain, quickens the action of the heart, produces intoxication and leads to degeneration of the tissues. As a narcotic, it chiefly affects the nervous system; blunts the sensibility of the brain, spinal cord and nerves; and when taken in sufficient quantity, produces death. [...] Alcohol may have its uses in the medical world, to which it should be relegated; but once a man becomes its victim, it is a terrible and merciless master, and he finds

himself in that dreadful state when all will-power is gone and he becomes a helpless imbecile, tortured at times by remorse and despair. (168)

This language of a moralist writer prepares the ground for biting satire and the aim is achieved when Trellis commits the sexual crimes that were a big concern for the Irish Vigilance association. Lanter's last illustration of O'Brien's subversion of the statement of The Irish Vigilance Association in 1926 is his inclusion of quotes from sporting and betting companies, forbidden books, especially those by James Joyce, Warwick Deering, D.H. Lawrence. For Lanter's, by "inserting references to Joyce and Huxley into his novel, O'Brien makes a statement against censorship; an equally subversive method he uses in quoting passages by other authors on prohibited subjects" (195).

Despite the fact that *At Swim* anticipates the postmodernist preoccupations of metafiction, or metanovel in its distortion of Aristotelian categories, and questions the existence of the novel in its attempt to prove the constructedness of truth in the dichotomy of fiction and reality, I argue that, it demonstrates that reality has many forms within a work of literature and each form might refer to the context or the real world to an extent. The main concern of the novel is the clash between complex web of themes in the historicity of the work and the complicated forms for its intertextual references. His essentially comic relation to the Irish myth and literature, criticism of Irish literary revivalism and the Modernist ideals and his tactical movements against censorship in post-war Ireland are among the most common themes that Flann O'Brien deals with. These multiple issues represented on different levels in the novel are embedded together with the narrative itself. Crossing across different ontological levels in the narrative, Flann O'Brien enables himself to deal with these issues at once on the same level. Being a book about other books, *At Swim*

acknowledges the common limitations of the novel as a genre and depicts the writer's awareness of the norms of experimental fiction writing. In short, O'Brien presents his work as it feeds upon the literary traditions behind it and the literary arena of its day. Thus, manipulation of the realist narrative conventions comes to be the consequence of Flann O'Brien's formal and thematic experiments, his extended play with embedded narratives.

The poker scene is particularly significant and bizarre. Including the autobiographical notes of the unnamed narrator, the account of his author-cum-character Trellis, and other minor sub-narratives, all the writing activities in the novel are analyzed in detail with the exception of Flann O'Brien, who never interferes with the narrative in his own name but embraces the whole as primary author, like the god of creation. The unnamed narrator composes an experimental novel in which he discusses the strategies and fate of another author of experimental writing, Trellis's, whose characters feel the urge to relate narrate another experimental novel. Thus whole chaos is, in fact, ordered and preserved in O'Brien, as the controlling principle and the reason behind the novel.

To summarize the student narrator's theory of fiction, a novel should have multiple openings and endings; it must be a self-evident sham and it must largely be a work of reference. Additionally, the existing literature must be a source from where authors extract their characters as required, "creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet" (*At Swim-Two-Birds*, 25). To the eager eyes of critics, this might seem the manifesto of a new, experimental writing but, in fact, as Mellamphy argues, "it is a mere acknowledgement of the characteristic limitations of the novel genre and a description of the informed reader's awareness of the tricks of the narrative trade and his appreciation of the relationship between the individual novel

and the tradition on which it feeds voraciously and cannibalistically” (12). This informed reader participates in the creation of the text through his ability to decipher familiar passages and intertextual lines, influences and the tradition which inspires both the author and the reader and how a given work speaks to this tradition. Given the fact that the author is also a reader, so the consumer of the tradition, he is not a transcendent figure like god. However, this does not prevent us from seeing Flann O’Brien as a realist writer with serious concerns about his time despite the fact that he hides behind different masks in his novel such as his narrators. This multiplicity is always felt and already referred to in the very first page of the book when O’Brien quotes Euripides’s *Heracles* in the epitaph: ἐξίσταται γὰρ πάντ' ἀπ' ἀλλήλων δίχα. Between the chaos of literary references, multiple forms and imagination and his control that informs the whole narrative, O’Brien also changes "for all things change, making way for each other."

## CHAPTER 4

### *IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELER*

Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, as a product of exhaustive working of fiction, structure and form, is based on serious thought concerning the act of writing and reading. In his novel, Calvino blends many kinds of literary forms from the archaic texts of the Western and Eastern narratives to the 20<sup>th</sup> century avangardist literature. Calvino's task is bidirectional in the sense that whereas he combines what he learns from modern literature, philosophy and linguistics with old materials, reverse arguments will also be equally valid. The art of the novel as a whole, the acts of reading and writing, literary and philosophical debates all provide a basis for the work and for its author on which he can express his thoughts on these issues. Within this context, Calvino seats his often lively, playful but utterly serious work. As the amusement aspect of reading is given in the text with references to mass literature on the one hand, the novel, on the other hand, acquires its high, artful value through its adept study of form, fiction and structural elements. This book is about readers' struggle to read *If on a winter's night a Traveler*. The first chapter and all the odd-numbered chapters tell the reader what he is going to read in the following chapters which are single chapters from the books the reader is trying to read. The novel is structured as the synthesis of the author and the reader/critic. It starts as "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*" and ends with the sentence "I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveller* by

Italo Calvino while asking fundamental questions about the act of writing and of reading.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the textual elements and thoughts of Italo Calvino, which are interwoven in the novel and the reason behind the text's resistance to any kind of teleological reference to 'originally metafictional' standpoint. Dissemination of the reading process, the extent to which the reader could be pushed "at the cost of the death of the author," blind spots in the reading process that blurs interpretation and the reason behind the presence of the fragmentary narratives attributed to imaginary authors, literatures and cultures are to be investigated together with their references to various schools of criticism from reader-response theory to post-structuralism by following such main figures of literary theory and philosophy as Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. This chapter further proposes an inquiry of the concept of the "death of the author" together with serious re-thinking of the role of the reader and the impact of scholarly reception of a text on its interpretation by revisiting the issues of metafiction, intertextuality and the subjectivity of meaning. Through searching for an answer to the question whether the author is really dead or is constructed according to the ideologies of the era in which s/he produces in a general context, my main concentration will mainly be on whether Calvino is really dead in the novel or just pretending to be so. If so, what is the strategy behind it?

The novel slips away the discourses surrounding it by giving possibilities to *both/and* or *neither/nor* occasions in terms of the questions it arouses by itself. Secondary literature written on this text motivated by the contemporary metafiction theory runs the risk of reducing the complexity of it and falls short after a moment. Then, what is it that prevents the text being received permanently from the same

angle and that provides for us the multiplicity in terms of ‘framing’? I would like to try to answer this question later in this chapter by revising scholarly works written on *Traveler* by Lucia Re, Marie-Anne Visoi, Teresa de Lauretis and Mariolina Salvatori whose scope ranges dramatically.

*Traveler* exhibits a manifold form when thought in relation to various kinds of novels. It is an artist’s novel seated in fictional and objective reality, which comes up for discussion of creativity, style and problems of reading and interpretation. Calvino puts in the center the idea of narrating voice, the problem of the subject position of narrating “I”, as the indicator of authority, transcendence in the Western literature and juxtaposes it to the material nature and earthliness of the Oriental narrative techniques. Furthermore, he allows his characters, each being a reader in the frame of the novel, to express his own thoughts on sophisticated aesthetical matters. *Traveler* is a novel in which no single dichotomy is preferred among others and in which each survives in a multi-layered texture, while at the same time Calvino’s opinions are worked up in each line. What emerges from the text is the correlation of things which have never been said together before. This correlation is the structural unity of *Traveler* whose nature is polyphonical due to the concurrence of different ontologisms. Calvino does not offer ethical solutions to the problem of reading and writing, but this does not mean that he refrains from stating his own thoughts. The novel’s nature as open to interpretation leads to such an illusion as the production of text by reader and the disappearance of the author figure in the light of the contemporary philosophy.

Postmodern literature lines up with displaying life with its contradictions, discrepancies without taking sides and is descriptive. In this view, artist dwells on contradictory components of life and makes new worlds out of them. The task here is

not to establish harmony as it was in the classicist literature in postmodern view; instead it is to create a new world with a new cosmology whose components are chosen from the particles of daily reality. The main element of these novels is not harmony, but the *aporia* in Derridean terms which stems from chaos of dichotomies and deadlock as result. Bakhtin's view of textual polyphony is the impetus of the PostStructuralist theories. Pluralism in postmodernism is the backbone of a world in which all contradictions come side by side without hierarchy. In most of its secondary literature, carnivalesque contradictions in *Traveler* are deemed as product of the pluralist nature of postmodern literature. Each reader, character, in the novel exhibit his individual views on the main problems of the novel no matter they contradict each other. Furthermore, it is claimed in these readings that Calvino does not adopt a dominant narrative voice that would disturb the principle of pluralism and polyphony, and defamiliarizes his own voice, hides in between the lines and equates to other voices. Especially literary modernism in the early 20th century departs from the traditional novel with the lead of radical theories and renounces its reader in the 19th century literature. It seeks readers capable of keeping pace with new literary inventions and of internalizing the cultural affluence in the modernist works. Literature in the second half of the century, however, has populist tendencies which reclaim its reader. This is a movement which is believed to have socio-economic, political and philosophical reasons to do so.

Artistic dimension in a work of art is determined in line with author's experimental and creative performance on the ground of structure and fiction. For some literary scholars, Calvino's experimental creation in *Traveler* manifests itself on the ground of metafiction. Metafiction, defined as the main tendency in postmodern fiction, reserves in itself the modernist take on the art of novel. Multi-

layered, pluralist structure of the postmodern literature, combined with Bakhtinian dialogism occurs through the interaction of the levels of fiction and reality in metafiction. Especially for Visoi and de Lauretis, *Traveler* consists of such metafictional strategies as laying bare the fictional problems in the text, addressing directly to the reader with the aim of drawing the reader into the web of fiction and intertextual references to other texts. Metafictional nature of the work is reflected upon through the binary oppositions and yet togetherness of life and fiction and intertextual relations.

Lucia Re's portraiture of Calvino reveals one who is aware of the necessity to choose a complex style in order to come to terms with the global literature of this day through multiple epistemological expressions. She argues, the complex form and style of Calvino's writing is peculiar, for he does not advocate or imitate mainstream writing techniques of his time, but masters them by escaping from and creating new worlds out of them. His conception of literature manifests itself in his this escape from and use of the levels of knowledge that his time foregrounds. As Lucia Re states, Calvino is not quick to grasp the deconstructionist theories of textuality with immediacy, instead he maintains his distance from them (126). In his article "Whom do we write for? Hypothetical Bookshelf," Calvino himself expresses his opinions about the Structuralist and deconstructionist theories of literature that were spreading in Europe in 1960s:

In all periods and societies, with the establishment of certain canons aesthetics, a certain way of interpreting the world, a certain scale of moral and social values, literature can perpetuate itself by a series of confirmations, limited readjustments, and further studies. What interests me, however, is another possibility inherent in literature: that of questioning the established scale of values and code of meanings [...] A literary situation begins to get interesting when one writes novels for people who are not readers of novels alone, and when one writes literature while thinking of a shelf of books that are not all literary. (82)

Despite his acknowledgement the new demands of reader and his effort to “question the established scale of values and meanings,” Re argue, Calvino witnessed “reduction of all literature to a set of linguistic functions, oppositions and permutations” (128). Although he was inspired by the Structuralist analysis of codes and systems of signs, placing literature on the same level with advertising, fashion and spy thrillers was not something he would approve of (128). Democratization of textuality, as Calvino understood from this movement, might have helped him fragment himself into different figures at the moment of writing and have stylistic criticism as addressee in mind, however, this should not mean Calvino consented to the absorption of literature by the discourse of postmodern textuality. While he puts the emphasis on the construction of text by the author and reconstruction by the act of reading, this emphasis is often misinterpreted by the metafiction theory and transformed into an undifferentiated production among other contemporary texts. For him the value of literature lies in the difficult labor of writing and reading. Reading, here, also signifies author’s position to his time and literary tradition as reader and as someone who benefits from literary heritage, which moves us to the revision of the concept of intertextuality. In opposition to what wholistic, postmodern metafiction theory does today, Calvino maintains that “it is only when the writer writes before the philosopher who interprets him that literary stringency can server as a model for philosophic stringency, even if the writer and the philosopher happen to dwell together in the same person” (“Philosophy and Literature,” 41).

Against this agenda, Calvino creates *Traveler*. In doing so, he has to find or create his own ideal readers, but, at the same time he has to be aware of “a bookshelf on which pride of place is held by the disciplines capable of breaking down the fact of literature in its primary elements and motivations, the disciplines of analysis and

dissection (linguistics, information theory, analytical philosophy, sociology, anthropology, a new use of psychoanalysis, a new use of Marxism” (“Who do we write for? Or the hypothetical reader,” 84). “To this library of multiple specializations,” Calvino says, “we tend not so much to add a literary shelf as to question its right to be there at all: literature today survives above all by denying itself. Therefore, to the question posed at the beginning, the answer becomes: We will write novels for a reader who finally understood that he no longer has to read novels” (84). He feels the responsibility to make sense for this reader according to the circumstances and cultural changes of his time. On the other hand, he has to reflect open his ideal reader and reading without falling into the trap of the mainstream philosophical investigations. His is not a mere dethroning of the author and crowning of the reader. As he discovers things unmentioned, or mentioned in different senses, in the literary history, he transforms them to intelligible things for the modern reader, which in return would contribute to the collective literary consciousness. Among similar forms and themes he searches for unfamiliar juxtapositions by shaping his work in a way that could inspire his reader to feel alien in a familiar discourse. As an author who is strictly bound to intertextual references, Calvino can also be deemed as one sort of a reader who is inspired to create and contribute to the collective practices of reading and writing. Covertly, he puts an extra emphasis on the educational mission of literature which is not directly transferred in the text, but woven in a way the reader shares collective reading while indulging from the text individually. This interaction both shapes Calvino the reader and Calvino the author, and reveals the kind of reader Calvino has in mind in writing literature, which he maintains in his article “Whom do we write for? Or the Hypothetical Reader” as well: “Literature is not a school. Literature must presuppose

a public that is more cultured, and more cultured than the writer himself. Whether or not such a public exists is unimportant. The writer addresses a reader who knows more about it than he does; he invents a “himself” who knows more than he does, to speak to someone who know more still” (85).

In her article on Calvino’s *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Teresa de Lauretis discusses the narrative discourse in Calvino with references to the novel in question, but at the same time, she passes judgment on all Calvino’s works with reference to the methodological framework provided by structural analysis to literary criticism and concludes that this framework suggests new modes of expression for Calvino (415). The celebration of the Structuralist and Poststructuralist theories is felt in de Lauretis’ terminology in identifying Calvino’s writing in accordance with metanarrative and metalinguistic functions. These functions, for her, “expose or even explode the code so that a new one may be created” (421). Whereas Calvino’s imagination is likened to the freedom of parole in Structuralist terms, literary tradition is defined as the langue, in other words, as a closed, coherent system against which Calvino is working. As already discussed in length in the second chapter within the framework of metafiction theories, such an attitude towards his text always denies Calvino’s writing as literature and reduces it to the scripture and confirmation of these theories. When read with ready-made assumptions, such an outlook claims to reveal the text’s freedom, whereas it is this reading that denies the literary value of a work of art by defining it as ‘écriture.’ Besides, this operation is claimed to be carried out by the text itself, thus naturalizing the theoretical operations:

Whereas it has always been true that literature makes maximum use of the poetic function, only recently has the metalingual function become an important element of narrative discourse, and one of the distinctive stylistic traits of what is called self-reflexive fiction and antinarrative.

The awareness on the part of the writer of performing an act of writing, the questioning of one's motivations, purpose, responsibilities in writing, and of the very meaning of writing is reflected by a hyperconscious, willful manipulation of the codes. (421)

In the secondary literature of Calvino's *Traveler*, the most striking and problematic one as the mouthpiece of the postmodern textuality and metafiction theory is Marie-Anne Visoi's article "Parody in the Postmodern Novel: Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore." *Traveler* is presented as a complex parodic text whose boundaries reach to parody of literary conventions, authorship, conventional author-readership, popular literature and even of itself through self-parody. It is true that Calvino contributes to the awareness of reading conventions, narrative voice and author as a reference point. However, in handling these issues as a way of self-parody and parody of popular literature, Visoi excludes the authorial presence, or even targets it, so that the 'value' of parody is affirmed. "[...] most critics agree that the reader's activity is intensified by the use of metafictional techniques which destabilize the text," Visoi says and goes on to claim that "by stepping outside the conventional narrative frames, the narrative voice abuses the reader's confidence in traditional narrative authority and manipulates him/her to adopt a new perspective on reading" (159).

Aesthetics of reading is central to this novel, for it aims at exhausting various reading practices and reception of a literary text by common readers or literary scholars. It does challenge the reader's expectations, but this does not necessarily mean the text employs a self-parody. Contrary to the common assumptions of metafictional texts, *Traveler* does not investigate the inadequacy of literary language; instead it explores its power. Though it seems as a new departure in fiction, in fact, *Traveler* creates an illusion of fiction as much as a traditional novel does. Calvino uses second-person narration in the novel, thus giving the postmodern definition of

metafiction a chance to admit that “characters are in the process of being developed by the Reader,” or even “what the reader must be prepared to admit right away is the absence of an authorial voice” (160).

Calvino sets out to create a cosmos other than the reality outside the text. It is a cosmos of literary texts where ‘the real’ is also a fiction by itself with overt acknowledgement. The author lies beneath the text and as claims such as disappearance of author from texts are put forward, in fact, it’s Calvino’s presence that sets the playfulness of the text in motion. To prove the opposite view, namely the death of the author, Visoi interprets parts of the novel in accordance with this very presumption. The manuscripts that cannot be found is claimed to subvert textual authority. The figure of Ermes Marana, insertion of so-called Cimmerian, Polish or Cimbrian texts are all there, for Visoi, “to shatter the illusion of authorship” (162). I argue, Calvino divides himself as many authors as possible in order to meet the demands of multiple ways of reading, interpreting. He attempts not at solving a problem but reflecting upon universal aesthetic habits of reading. This starts with an acknowledgment of the gap between the author and the reader, but in Calvino, this should not mean the subversion of the authorial control on the text. He is interested in the demands of his readers as much as they are interested in his narratives.

Another problem occurs in Visoi’s reading of Ludmilla and Lotaria’s reading practices:

Ludmilla’s fear of crossing the boundary between her own world, that of the readers, and the world of the authors, those who produce books, is explained by her wish to keep the pleasure of reading intact. In contrast, Lotaria’s reading appears as a negative example, showing what can happen its meaning adapt to their interpretative practices [...] The notion of the author as the privileged transmitter of meaning becomes thus eroded and instead we have a plural figure of the author. (161)

She concludes from her arguments above that the “notion of author as privileged transmitter of meaning becomes thus eroded and instead we have a plural figure of author” (161). While we can agree on the plurality of the figure of the author according to Calvino’s textual intentions, erosion of the author can be explained with the above mentioned presumption. As discussed in the second chapter, one of the main problems of the contemporary metafiction theory is the juxtaposition of the concepts of fiction and reality in order to reflect upon the philosophical questions of the second half of the 20th century. Visoi suggests, “[...] there is no use pretending in order to create fiction, for narrative conventions more or less fail at translating reality” (163). Calvino works within the realm of literature, even the reality in this realm is fiction and the boundaries or clashes between the layers of this so-called fiction and reality, as metafiction theory repeatedly emphasizes, stays within the universe of literary texts. The techniques used by Calvino might coincide with the current philosophical investigations, but the nature of content belongs to literature. Visoi further asserts a double intentionality of Calvino in the interplay between traditional narrative techniques and ‘new’ structure of the text. As the novel is reduced to the dichotomy of fiction and reality, metafiction theory, as in Visoi’s reading, puts the text in an ambiguous relation to the literary past. In line with the discussion of parody in the second chapter, these theories draw a clear line between the usual artistic codes of traditional narratives as models parodied and the new writing. The text’s linkage to the ‘real’ world breaks its relation to the literary antecedents and employs a mechanical mission for it. Visoi suggests:

The naive irony of the narrative voice in its overt reference to the novel itself highlights self-parody in Calvino’s novel. The narrator’s game is ultimately revealed in this aspect of parody. We have seen how our attention is drawn to the continuous interplay between traditional narrative techniques of the novel’s “incipits” and the maze-like structure of the whole novel. Similarly, the self-consciousness of the first-person

narrators as well as that of the hero who is not able to cope with the textual interruption, clearly points to the actual interruptions of the text itself. (170)

Parody can be said to be present in the constant interruption of reading according to the author's project of exhausting various reading practices. Intertextual references to the works such as *The Arabian Nights* draw the attention to the framing and readers response to narrative references, but not in a way that subverts textual unity. Marana overtly refers to the structure of *Traveler* by identifying it with *The Arabian Nights*, thus questioning the competence of the reader instead of risking the author's control of the text. Even if a parody is at work here through intertextual references, self-parody can only be explained again by these references. Calvino employs ancient narrative techniques in the text and does not hide it. The claim is for universal reading practices, so this move cannot only be explained with the Western definition of metanarratives. Our relation with the text is revealed, though it is not at the expense of the text's relation to the literary past, which is underestimated on the surface of building a dichotomy between the real life and fictional world in the text. Intertextual structure of the text and the irony pervaded in the novel enable the characters to cross the border of the author's ontological level as it is in the traditional novels. Sexuality, elements of detective narrative, beginnings of different novels in the text all pay homage to the traditional novel, and traditional reader, and displays characteristics of mass literature with identical literary forms and styles. On the flip side of that, experimental and artful dimension of the novel appears as it tries to produce new textual strategies. This is where high literature is posited. Calvino's work, which forms the Western material with Oriental narrative strategies, has two dimensions in terms of figurative language and story. The depth of the text is entrusted to the rich

experimental and aesthetical dimension which is based on intertextual levels; this depth is revealed through the act of reading that resolves different narrative levels.

The Bakhtinian dialogue on the metafictional level of the novel occurs between the layers of fiction and concrete reality. For the abovementioned scholars, Calvino, first sets these layers in motion, and then nestles the levels of real life and fictional reality. Storytellers within the text, as if bards, addresses to the reader in the outer world. In fact, this technique used by the Romantics in order to reach a unified reality is assimilated in postmodern texts to draw the reader into text. In Visoi's and de Lauretis' arguments, it is never the author who has the last word in the 20th century avangardist texts. Author weaves his text with a pluralist approach furnishes it with various domains of meaning but never says the last word. The last word belongs to the reader who produces the text on his/her own ontological level by following the traces of author within the text. For this reason, the call of the author on the reader on metafictional levels in the last quarter of the century to this day is the necessity of the postmodern aesthetics. In novel, seen as a play on aesthetical ground, this means author's call on reader as his partner. For the sake of a complete portraiture of this attitude towards modern literary texts, especially novels, it is of great importance to investigate the roots of these arguments in literary and philosophical discourses, within the framework of Structuralist, Poststructuralist thoughts and the reader-response criticism.

Barthes, in the discussion of the role of an author, points out the conceptualization of authorship as the cultural and historical product of particularly Western literary tradition and the idea of this product stems from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the modern times in which the value of individual has been –and is being- highly emphasized. In his article “The Death of the Author” he portrays the

destruction of authoritative voice which has occupied the status of 'origin' in writing for long. According to his transcendental imagery of the act of writing, subjectivity should disappear and identity should be negated to the zero point in order to pave way to the "death of the author." The tyranny imposed on writing emerges from the attribution of the position of centre to the flesh-and-blood person of author by literary criticism which has had the habit of explaining a work in accordance with the person who produced it. Barthes recognizes the 'I' in writing just as a 'subject' instead of a 'person' due to partly structuralism and mostly post-structuralism that rejects the presence of any institution or construction outside 'text.' Linguistics has "recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool" (145) by showing "whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together'. . . ." (116). The author is "born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (145).

Even if an author exists, not in the sense to which Barthes is objecting, s/he comes to being not with his/her proper name but with the simultaneous emergence of him/her along with the text, in the "authoring" process. Having negated the role of conventional author by dethroning him/her, the emphasis is put on the reader who is so essentialized that s/he reads and makes texts by him/herself in the absence of author. The "removal of the Author" in this way "utterly transforms the modern

text”: so, the text is to be made and read in such a way that at all levels the author is absent” (145). Within the traditional scheme of things, Barthes points out; authorship has long been conceptualized on the basis of two principal metaphors, the temporal and the paternal. The Author is “always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically in a single line divided into a *before* and *after*” (145). Moreover, the author is thought to “*nourish* the book” and to be “in the same relation of antecedence to the work as a father to his child,” which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it.

In other cultures, Barthes claims, the “responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose ‘performance’ – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired but never his genius” (142). He argues that it is “logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author” who continues to predominate in “histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, . . . in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs” (143).

According to Barthes, the text is “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” and the scriptor’s “only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others” (146). The scriptor does not express himself. Rather, the “inner ‘thing’ he thinks to convey is always already present, its words can only be explained through other words, and so on indefinitely” (146). At this point Barthes comes closer to the post-Structuralist idea of language but he does so in order to appropriate his own thoughts around the author. The ‘scriptor’ “no longer bears within him passions, humors, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense

dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt” (147). The text, paradoxically, gives birth to the writer in this way. Barthes concludes that the primary determiner of meaning in the text is the reader who does not easily digest the writer’s intention. Rather, the reader is the active producer of meaning which s/he catches in the play of signification.

In “Structure, Sign and Play in Human Sciences” Derrida sheds the light on the criticism of ‘structure’ as the principle of intelligibility, as the centre of interpretation by pointing out to the arbitrariness, to the endless play of signification in the language and reflecting the attention back to the level of writing where dissemination occurs in various levels. Contrary to the resistance of structuralism to the insightful nature of ‘things,’ Derridean deconstructionism negates every kind of opposition in an easy way to the ‘absence’ where the writing is posited as loss. Resisting to scientific metalanguages that promises immediate contact with the “truth” in metaphysics of presence, Derrida employs his philosophical attack on the philosophical discourse that has come to privilege speech/voice to the writing which has been perceived as harmful, out of control, subject to drift and play and devoid of the transparency of the speech.

His alternative to the superimposed, standardized terminology and binaries is the deconstructionist method having roots in Nietzschean philosophy that promises nothing other than recurrent freeplay of signs in structure since “the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure” (278). The endless deferral of meaning in the circle of freeplay breaks the illusion of the ‘good writing’ which depends on the Socratic dialogues that juxtaposes the writing to the act of speaking in a binary way and marginalizing the kind of writing that does not fit its definition. The simple pun of the binary of writing

and speech in the term *différance* draws the attention to the ambiguity lying under the desire of Western metaphysics to connect everything to a higher (un)reachable reality, to a centering logos/origin that cannot be destroyed, to a transcendental signifier to which all the signifiers refer back. However, Derrida never attempts to avoid the metaphysical language, because he acknowledges that “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics” (280)

In the article, Derrida’s problem is mostly with the Structuralist/modernist discourse rather than the roots of the metaphysics that can be dated back to the Ancient Greece. He does not celebrate the “death of the author” in an revolutionary way as does Barthes for example. Though he does not directly refer to Barthes, critique of Levi-Strauss, the father of structuralism along with de Saussure, asks fundamental questions about Barthes’s stance before the transcendentalism when it comes to the de-centering of the fixed *truth*:

In opposition to *epistemic* discourse, structural discourse on myths-*mythological* discourse-must itself be *mythomorphic*. It must have the form of that of which it speaks.... structuralism justly claims to be the critique of empiricism. But at the same time there is not a single book or study by Levi-Strauss which does not offer itself as an empirical essay which can always be completed or invalidated by new information. (287-8)

Barthes replacement of author with the reader is contrary to the idea of deconstruction which works in circle and in the system itself through using its concepts, its writing instead of dismissing it. According to Derrida, the Structuralist act is a mere replacement of the centre with another one by pushing the margins to the centre, thus repeating and breaking the arguments of previous thinkers. In the post-Structuralist method, on the other hand, the old binary way of looking at things is replaced with a whole freeplay of meaning. That is to say, while structuralism switches the binary into another, post-structuralism destroys the binary leaving no

clear back to the origin. Barthes' *juissance* for renewal has the potential to be harshly criticized by the post-Structuralist since it tends to transform the "death of the author" to the "birth of the reader" to restore the loss, nostalgia, but it is constantly interrupted by the author's repetitive motifs.

Among many scholars who have studied under the wide umbrella of the reader-response criticism ranging from Jauss, Fish, Iser, Riffaterre to Wolff, Iser is the one who has approached to this field of study relatively with more awareness of the limited nature of response theory led by the problematic assumptions of the *ideal reader* of these scholars. In his essay, "Readers and the Concept of the Implied Reader," Iser compartmentalizes the terms coined by Fish, Riffaterre and Wolff in order to draw attention to his own theory of reader, namely the "implied reader" which is free from the limitations of the 'superreader', the 'informed reader' and 'the intended reader.' For Iser, Micheal Riffaterre's depiction of a reader as an embodiment of collective consciousness which is named as *superreader* or Stanley Fish's *informed reader* as the 'all wise' figure capable of self-defining or Erwin Wolff's *intended reader* that shapes the author and the text are nothing but the limitation of the responsibility of reader (160). Instead, Iser prefers the guideline of textual elements such as narrator(s) and characters in the interpretation of texts which let the reader to grasp the essence of the writing (160-2). This means the reduction of text to the potency of an individual reader, thus carving the path to the coronation of reader to fill the gap left by the death of the author. The *implied reader* that should replace and transcends the limitations of the superreader, the informed reader, and the intended reader "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (*Aesthetic Response*, 163).

For Iser, the implied reader is essentially a part of the structure of a text. The concept of implied reader “designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text” (163). While the role of the text is to offer the vantage points, it is the reader’s role as the *structured act* to evaluate these vantage points. In the meeting place provided by the text, meaning is realized or actualized in the “ideational activity” of the reader (163). It is the readers structured acts that “sets the work in motion” through effecting the interaction between the sentences that have been presented to him/her (“The Reading Process,” 275). This feature attributed to the reader by Iser indicates that the act of reading is not a passive reception of the text but a sort of re-writing in the process of reading.

Iser’s idea that the reader brings into the arena of the text his/her background is composed of familiarity with literature in general, literary themes and the ability to decode allusions to familiar social and historical contexts. Nevertheless, he essentialized the conflict between what has been brought and what has been found which results in the effect of defamiliarization. Hence, there emerges a distrust of the expectations and leads to a permanent questioning of self-awareness of the reader which grows more and more in the course of reading in an alert way. The recreation of the text is interrupted continually by what the writer introduces to the text in an unexpected way. Thus, before the reader absorbs what is given fully according to his/her baggage of interpretation, the newly constituted readerly structure is shattered. Here, despite all the focus on the reader’s primary subjectivity, the writer’s presence intervenes so deep into the text that both of them have to constitute identification between each other, one in the act of writing, the other in that of reading. It means that reader’s access to the writer’s thoughts is determined by the writer him/herself as the source of reader’s perception. As mentioned above, a reader

should adapt him/her to the mobility of the text in order to formulate it, should be ready for change and identity construction while reading. It is Iser's view that it is the cognitive effort of the reader in the phenomenological process of joining the text that defines the high value of the reader.

In the actualization process of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, even Iser's reader can constitute his/her own entrapment. The nameless protagonist who is presented through second-person narration and the woman reader are in the web of entrapment that emerges from their desire to read an 'original,' "entertaining" book and come to the closure of it. As a text woven into another, the structure of the novel posits interplay between the narratives and the chapters not just for the Reader and the Second Reader, Ludmilla, but for the readers who also yearns for reading the book. Calvino shatters the boundary between the Real reader, which is fictional, and the assumable 'real' reader by making use of second person narration: "Your attention, as reader, is now completely concentrated on the woman, already for several pages you have been circling around her, I have –no, the author has- been circling around the feminine presence...it is your expectation, reader, that drives the author towards her... (*Traveler*, 20). At this point, there is no clear indication of to whom the author is calling since he has been depicting woman for the last three passages before stating that. Does it give Iser's reader the chance to enter into the thoughts of the author? "In reading," Calvino warns, "you must remain both oblivious and highly alert" (18) and if not, he foreshadows that will happen to the Reader later in the novel as follows:

The thing that most exasperates you is to find yourself at the mercy of fortuitous, the aleatory, the random, in things and in human actions – careless, approximation, imprecision, whether your won or others'. In such instances your instant passion is the impatience to erase the disturbing effects of that arbitrariness or distraction, to re-establish the normal course of events. (27)

In this case, Iser's reader needs to ask appropriate questions to break each frame around him/her in order to get down into the core of the work. Even if the character stands for a negative figure for Iserian reader like whom one should not be, one cannot avoid "becoming" due to the frame that is constantly being built around the audience. While the Reader's and the Second Reader's experience constitutes the *story* of the novel, the process we undergo as readers is the other story that occurs in the course of reading. The repetitive elements such as the beginning of every single first-chapter novels are determined by the preceding chapter in which we focus on the Reader. That is to say, we do not need to be told what he will read and he will not be reading what he thinks to do so. Nevertheless, what the reader thinks is connected to what the reader-characters are doing in the novel: yearning for a closure which results in a disappointment at the very end of the novel that is cut sharply.

In her article "Writer's Authority, Reader's Autonomy" which she penned together with Italo Calvino, Mariolina Salvatori follows a different path from previously mentioned scholars, in that by introducing Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, she claims that the ultimate goal of the text is to prevent the finality of the text and the reader's opinions on it (182). Self-understanding of the reader is as important as understanding the text in her arguments, for it calls into question the preunderstandings of the reader and thus liberates the text from restricted finality. In this view, the aim should be to detect the "moments of blindness" and their acknowledgment and then to turn them into something unexpected, anew (184). She proposes a reading of Calvino's text to investigate the general question of author's authority and reader's autonomy. More specifically, she emphasizes the author's authority inscribed in the text in such a way that we have to ask if it is possible to

avoid the entrapment of the text when that authority of the author is inscribed everywhere in the text:

Does this mean that I have asked the appropriate questions or that I have been framed? Does in fact "to ask the appropriate question" mean to be framed? Is the "reader's autonomy" an invalid concept since, it can be argued, the reader who asks the question that the text is an answer to is after all the reader who is the most sensitive to the text's authority? (186)

The use of narrative frames in the novel as the preventor of closure of the Reader's readings in the novel is presented by Salvatori as "the *raison d'être* of *If on a winter's night a traveler*" (188). These frames also serve as the source of frustration that is beneficial to keep the text from being absent or scarce. Having Gadamer's interpretative approach in mind, we, as the readers outside, are not exempt from these frustrations though the character-readers' frustrations seem to be our enjoyment, since "[...] we are also continuously made to yearn for it by being subjected to seeing all of our predictions and projections completely fulfilled, and also by finding them reified in the text" (189). In chapter eleven, we witness the full authority of the author as we discover that the whole fragmented, framed structure of the novel resolves into a list of different reading practices, though none is superimposed over other, but are merely depicted instead. The unsuccessful search of the Reader and the Other Reader for a complete text with a beginning and an end is juxtaposed to various reading practices some of which might welcome the lack of closure as learned from the novel while others might feel dissatisfaction for being in the same category with the reader-characters.

Ideal reading for Salvatori and Calvino is the one in which we, the readers, do not resist identification with the unsuccessful reader-characters since the reverse attitude disables us to come to the realization of our own short-comings and prejudices in reading (196). Each judgment we pass on the readers in the novel work

for us as well because of the use of second-person narration as the dominant narrative technique. Considering the diversity of the audience of *Traveler*, any direct address to the characters with the second person pronoun “you” overlaps with at least one type of reading. Even if we could escape from one categorization, it is almost impossible to fall into entrapment. This achieved through the gallery of reading types inherent in the novel as presented by the eight readers in the library. The scene provides us with a rich and “kaleidoscopic view of the phenomenology of reading,” in Salvatori’s terms. In terms of the discussion of reader’s autonomy and author’s authority, Salvatori suggests her idea of “programmed response,” which is utterly crucial for our discussion in this study:

[...] the autonomy we can enjoy in the reading of the narratives is relative to the awareness of the reading process that we may have achieved in our reflexivity on the function and constraints of the frame; and that the enjoyment of such autonomy is a "programmed response" determined by the frame's didacticism. Though reluctantly, we may have to admit that once more we have been framed. Then what is the difference in the structuring of a reader's response between what we can now call the "outer frame" (i.e., the chapters) and the "inner frame" (i.e., the narratives)? Why does a reader, though ultimately aware of the elaborate structuring of his response, experience in the narratives a sense of greater autonomy and gratification? (202-3)

To argue that Calvino sets traps for each and every reader in the first place would lack the unity of his project. As Salvatori also claims it depends on our attitude as readers whether to fall or not. In other words, we are no different from the Reader and the Other Reader unless we do not question our reading habits in the course of reading. Knowing that every reader approaches a text with ready-made ideas, the most problematic preunderstanding in *Traveler* will be that of a critic if s/he is familiar with the author’s other works and the trends in writing and literary studies. As Calvino underscores these readings in his work, Salvatori does not leave it unmentioned in the article as well. Critic’s expectations will be even more

predefined, organized to such an extent that it creates another text from the original and thoughts of the person criticizing remains untouched, which according to Gadamer and Salvatori, even to Calvino, is problematic. Salvatori suggests as the only alternative to these problems to “play the writer from a position closer to (though admittedly never identical with) Calvino's [...]" (195). As bound to the conventions of literary studies in the framework of metafiction theories today, Visoi and de Lauretis miss what Calvino points to. They reduce the text's complexity in responding to the commonplace discussions of contemporary writing.

This situation is reflected upon by Calvino through criticism of critical interpretative communities: “study seminars, working parties, research teams, as if intellectual labor were too dismaying to be faced alone” (96). Calvino depicts the atmosphere as a kind of cold war situation in literature besides the collectivity: “Nobody knows that the Organization of Apocryphal Power, which I founded, has a meaning only as long as my control kept it from falling under the sway of unreliable gurus” This reminds the reader of John Fowles' reflection on post-modern philosophers such as Derrida and Barthes in one of his interviews: “Well my goodness, put me in a class and ask me to teach deconstruction and I would be very hard-put to do it, I can assure you. I've read one book on deconstruction, another on structuralism, and so on. Occasionally, I've had a shot at the French gurus like Barthes and Derrida, but I find them very difficult to understand” (*Conversation with Fowles*, 113). Professor Uzzi-Tuzzi becomes Calvino's mouthpiece in outlining general trends in literary criticism: “They want problems to debate, general ideas to connect with other generaş ideas. My colleagues adjust, follow the mainstream, give their courses like ‘Sociology of Welsh,’ ‘Psycho-linguistics of Provençal.’ [...] With the Cimmerian it cannot be done.” (52)

Lotaria wants to know the author's position with regard to "Trends of Contemporary Thought and Problems that demand a Solution." Lotaria wants to make the Reader's task easier she furnishes him with a list of names of Great Masters among whom he should situate him [Calvino] (44). Later on, the Reader is invited to a seminar by Lotaria at the university, "where books are analyzed according to all Codes, Conscious, Unconscious, and in which all Taboos are eliminated, the ones imposed by the dominant Sex, Class, and Culture" (68). Parody is deepened when Innerio come to stage with his task of "making things with books" (149). He states that "the critics say what I do is important. Now they're putting all my works in a book. A book with photographs of all my works. When this book is printed, I'll use it for another book, lots of works. Then they'll put them in another book, and so on" (149). Elsewhere Calvino addresses to the Reader and the Other Reader, Ludmilla, and tells them until the critical reader finish with the text after underlining "the reflections of production methods, others the processes of reification, others the sublimation of repression, others the sexual semantic codes, others the metalanguages of the body, others the transgression of roles, in politics and in private life" (75).

Of course, every work of art is a product of the time and should be considered in relation to the age it is received. Its author is aware of the materials that the work is made of and includes it in the work. However, as highlighted earlier, main problem here is to attempt at defining the time by making use of literature as merely a mirror of the changes in thought and reality. On the other hand, as Calvino puts it in his article "Levels of Reality in Literature," "in a work of literature, various levels of reality may meet while remaining distinct and separate, or else they may melt and mingle and knit together [...]"(101) and these levels of reality are not necessarily

referred to the realities outside of the text. A work of art can propose its own level of reality, which is fiction, and the other levels might be defined according to this so-called reality. So, direct relationship with this particular world in the light of daily experience fails to grasp the complexity of work of art. Calvino defends the opposite approach with reference to Coleridge's concept, 'suspension of disbelief': "This suspension of disbelief is the condition on which the success of every literary invention depends, even if it is admittedly within the realm of the fabulous and incredible" (105). To appreciate *Traveler*, then, one should not confuse levels of reality within it and levels of truth in outside world.

Additionally, the writing process, which is revealed many times in the novel, implies that Calvino is watching his reader, not only the Reader, but also us, from the top and records the times of break down without hesitation. He says, "...the more I seek to return to the zero moment from which I set out, the further I move away from it: though all my actions are bent on erasing the consequences of previous actions and though I manage to achieve appreciable results in this erasure..." (15-16), and comments on the tradition of the futile desire to mention about everything in a single work: "Long novels written today are perhaps a contradiction: the dimension of time has been shattered...We can rediscover the continuity of time only in the novels of that period when time no longer seemed stopped and did not yet seem to have exploded, a period that lasted no more than a hundred years" (8). There are traps within the text for scholarly reading. He is very much aware that the time tends to erase subjectivity from daily life as well as literary artifacts. However, as in the example of levels of reality in fiction and outside world, there is another misunderstanding on the side of metafictional literary criticism: While Calvino divides his subjective stance in the novel into many levels in order to come to terms

with diverse reading types, this attitude is interpreted as the erasure of subjectivity in the text with the impact of Barthesian and Derridan concepts. Instead of disproving his own authority, I believe, Calvino creates, or discovers, different writing subjects in himself in the course of writing, and all these make up the author who on the jacket of the book.

Salvatori claims that task of a literary work is fulfilled when the reader undergoes a radical change and shifts his/her questions, get stripped off former prejudices. I would like to take this argument one step further and suggest that this cycle can be completed when the author also projects and identifies himself with writing subject of different natures. In his article "Levels of Reality in Literature," Calvino suggests as the author is shaping the characters, he is also shaped in return by them (113). He further claims the more "we go forward distinguishing the various levels that go to make up the "I" of the author, the more we realize that many of these levels do not belong to the author as an individual but to collective culture, to the historical period or the deep sedimentary layers of the species" (113). This is how Calvino unites his Structuralist tools with the traditional intertextual context.

If you, reader, couldn't help picking me out among the people getting off the train...this is simply because I am called "I" and this is the only thing you know about me...Just as the author, since he has no intention to tell about himself, decided to call the character "I" as if to conceal him, not having to name him or describe him, because any other name or attribute would define him more than this stark pronoun; still, by the fact of writing "I" the author feels driven to put into this "I" a bit of himself, of what he feels or imagines he feels. (16)

At many levels Calvino draws the attention to himself without giving any apparent clue for it except for one instance. He refers to himself as an author who changes greatly from one book to the next. And he adds that these changes are the instruments for the reader to recognize easily as it is illustrated in the changing narratives that are in the text to underline the author's statement. The situation causes

a distress in the Reader: "Let's hope," you say, "that we've got a perfect copy this time, properly bound, so we won't be interrupted right at the climax, as happens..." (As happens when, how? What do you mean?) "I mean, let's hope we get to the end satisfactorily" (31). He uses Silas Flannery as the mouthpiece, it is so apparent that it is Calvino himself who wishes he "were only a hand, a severed hand that grasps a pen and writes" (117). Ermes Marana, additionally, says, "What does the name of an author on the jacket matter? Let us move forward in the thought to three thousand years from now. Who knows which books from our period will be saved, who know which authors' names will be remembered... or perhaps all the surviving books will be attributed to a single, mysterious author, like Homer" (101). What Calvino does is to melt the plasticity of the literary past, collective culture and the literary trends of his day in his ironical pot.

Through the middle of the text, discussion is diverted to the artificiality of classification by showing the similarities of the novel, which is assumed as a Western product, to the Eastern habits of writing in the example of *Thousand and One Nights* that extremely bears resemblance to the novel: "And so Marana proposes to the Sultan a stratagem prompted by the literary tradition of the Orient: he will break off this translation at the moment of greatest suspense and will start translating another novel, inserting it into the first through some rudimentary experiment..." (125). Calvino identifies himself with Scheherazade of *The Arabian Nights*, in that as he starts narrating his novel it is interrupted by another novella, which is also to be interrupted by another and so on. Moreover, as in *The Arabian Nights*, the narratives in *Traveler* and Calvino are also on the same ontological level. In other words, Calvino is on the same level with his reader-cum-characters, and the

readers in daily reality. He refers to these tales openly in his many articles, for instance, in “Levels of Reality in Literature,” he suggests that in *The Arabian Nights*,

[...] we can distinguish two very different types of narrative: the magical types of Indian and Persian origin, with its genies, flying horses, and metamorphoses, and the Arab-Islamic storytelling type of Baghdad cycle, with the caliph Harun-al-Rashid and Jafar the vizier. But the tales of both types are put on the same plane, both structurally and stylistically, and as we slide from one type to the other, as the eye slides over the surface of a tapestry (117).

Frame stories has a rooted tradition in the Western literatures as well, as in the example of Boccaccio’s Decameron. However, there is always a clear stylistic and structural division between the tales and the ontological level of the narrators. For a reader accustomed to this sort of framing in literature, the first reaction would be as Calvino depicts in the Reader’s first frustration when he encounters an interrupted narrative: “You would like to throw it out of the house, out of the block, beyond the neighborhood, beyond the city limits, beyond the state confines, beyond the relational administration, beyond the national community, beyond the Common Market, beyond Western culture, beyond the continental shelf...” (26). Later in the novel, Calvino explains his readers the reason why these frustrations are aimed at in his writing project, in which he would like to meet his ideal reader through a collection of stories that have always been told and are to be retold by himself:

I see something like a forest that extends in all directions and so thick that it doesn’t allow light to pass: a material, in other words, much richer than what I have chosen to put in the foreground this time, so it is not impossible that the person who follows my story may feel himself a bit cheated, seeing that the stream is dispersed into so many trickles...let’s say that it’s a trick of the narrative art that I am trying to employ, a rule of discretion that consists in maintaining my position slightly below the narrative possibilities at my disposal.  
(109)

The artistic anxiety pervaded in throughout the novel appears as the author’s attempt at reaching the traditional, or ideal, reader which can be anticipated with

Scheherazade's audience. This anxiety and tendency is the destiny of an author with the awareness that the art of novel is about stylization. Narrating/writing and reading are generally intertwined within the intertextual and experimental structure of the novel. There are as many writers in the novel as there are readers. Parts of the novel can be thought as individual novels with integrity within itself. The text is narrated by an invisible storyteller, voice. Character, whose mission in the novel is to read, aid the author in narration in this novel where writing and reading are blended in various levels.

Intertextuality is the absorption and transformation of other texts by an individual text, as Kristeva argues. However, the contemporary author's motivation is different in handling others' texts; instead of reflecting the new, unfamiliar reality, he takes refuge in the world of literature; he creates a second hand world. This, what has been despised by older generation of novelists as plagiarism, comes into being as an aesthetical element in new writing. All tales are everyone else's tales. This is a world where everything repeats each other. The dialogue between the new text and the formers is the most irrevocable element of textual polyphony, because books are constructed on or around other books.

Addressing the reader outside of the novel is an extension of the archaic story-telling techniques; it is a characteristic of fiction in the novel. Calvino tries to communicate with his reader in *Traveler* by combining postmodern techniques with archaic story-telling conventions. Another dimension of this metafiction game played through the co-existence of different levels of reality is perpetuated with the introduction of the author to the text as a character. Thus, he has the chance to contribute to the novel with his views on literary theories and the problems of fiction writing. *Traveler* is an artist's novel in which Calvino's thoughts regarding artistic

creation, especially the novel, are given voice. The careful reader following these traces can find the profile of the author in the text underneath the autobiographical references. Essentially, the problems of artistic creation are at the center throughout the novel. The author does not directly take sides, but hides his opinions in between the lines. Sometimes, he himself hides behind his characters as in the example of Silas Flannery, who is just one side of Calvino's reflections of himself within the text. Flannery yearns for being "only a hand, a severed hand that grasps a pen and writes" (159). This is also the type of author that Calvino's ideal reader, Ludmilla enjoys reading, as "the one who interested [her] was the other, the Silas Flannery who exists in the works Silas Flannery, independently of you, here [...]" (191).

Calvino melts the materials he inherited from the literary past and his thoughts on these materials in his aesthetical pot; filters with irony and creates new novelistic worlds that are incompatible with the outer world, reality. He strives to make both the reader and the critic pay for their hubris by separating their activities from each other and exhausting them separately. Issues of closing, linearity and intertextuality are kept in tension even to the last sentence of the novel. It does not mean that the author cannot adapt him/herself to the dominant discourses of the time in which they are produced. His renovation lies in his argument that "this book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read" (129). Also, his task of writing what is "unwritten" and "unwritable" (181) unites the ground of literary history, what is written, and the new stories that come out of it, the unwritten.

This study, which is intended to reveal the polyphonic, manifold nature of Calvino's work by analyzing the form, style and fictionalization of the novel, is nothing but the product of our act of scholarly reading with the necessary

background in philology. In this reading, contradictory levels in metafictional description of the structure of the text, where the aesthetical value of it is revealed, are studied to resolve the association of reading and writing, intertextuality and the concurrence of the realm of fiction and reality. Calvino's text does not seem to directly produce solutions to the problems it contains, does not direct his readers; it is descriptive and does not set norms. Its pluralist structure enables multidimensional readings on the level of motives.

## CONCLUSION

Survey of theories of metafiction and their potential for literary studies reveal few grounds for enthusiasm. The potential for a literary aesthetics in the contemporary literary criticism remains underdeveloped and restricted to self-reflexive modernist and post-modern literature. The interpretative models discussed so far allow only very limited application of the notion of discourse or discourse analysis to literary texts, since these models consists of a very reductionist discursive practice. With regard to literary texts themselves, my criticism of theories of metafiction has partially made it possible to pinpoint the dangers of regarding literature merely as cultural reproduction in an evolutionary manner.

A literary history that is informed by the current theories of metafiction regards literary texts as part of the process of cultural reproduction. The problem with these theories arises, first of all, from the consequences of the reductionism in their concept of “metafiction.” This derives from their determinist definition of the formation of literary genres through the ages as a chronological narrative, which problematizes the validity of “metafiction” as a general term. Second, in line with the first problem, current criticism’s refusal to make the norms underlying its own intellectual critiques explicit leads to a peculiar positivism that does not allow questioning of the validity of the claims of its investigations. These investigations tend to define the concept of metafiction through strict narrative specimens of the modernist and postmodernist literatures. As such, they fall apart vis-a-vis of different literatures and even within that of individual works. The conclusion that seems to follow from the investigation of assumptions underlying the idea of metafiction

theory today is that any application of metafiction for the study of literature requires a considerable revision of the main guidelines of the theories.

First of all, these theories break with major aspects of the Cartesian legacy such as its dualism between mind and body. For this reason, much of the critical writing on metafiction displays a philosophical language that reduce the connection of metafiction between modernist and postmodernist movements in the process of forming a cultural critique by means of revisiting Enlightenment thought and pointing out that the present is in quarrel with the past. Metafictional writing defined as the continuation of the cultural context dating back to the Enlightenment, in Waugh's conception for instance, had to approach the literary past with deconstructive strategies. This conception and the hostility towards traditional narrative conventions could be explained by the conviction of metafiction theories in the Enlightenment anti-subjectivity and its belief in the existence of a unique reality. This surely meets the concerns of the time Waugh and Hutcheon were writing, when self-questioning was at the centre of attention. Thus, recent writing with metafictional strategies was seen to be a response to the sense that reality and fiction were provisional. As in Waugh's take on metafiction, the so-called function and the power of language in constructing a sense of reality and the 'illusions of daily reality' has been repeatedly emphasized, for both fiction and reality were thought to be mediated through language.

The growth of metafiction theory in the literary world has led to an intolerance toward alternative ways of doing literary studies and significant negative consequences. First of all, transformation of narrative strategies, themes, forms and genres are silenced through the prominence of contemporary metafiction theories of literature that purport to explain almost all aspects of modern culture and philosophy.

This is strictly connected to the presumption that deconstructive strategies provides the writer and the reader with a better understanding of the nature of narrative, act of writing and of reading. This conception of metafiction builds upon Bakhtinian formalism and evolves into the poststructuralist outlook as exemplified in the reading of *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Booker and Aksoy with this concentration on the Menippean satire tradition and its subversive energies in critiquing the *philosophus gloriosus*. Equating daily reality with the realism in the novelistic discourse has been a major part of this endeavor.

Secondly, another problem arises in the examination of ‘the’ traditional novel as a homogenous literary tradition equal comprehensible to readers and writers. In actual fact, a variety of concerns about narrative forms and content are obviously present in what is defined as the traditional novel. This diversity is overlooked and sacrificed to the definition of an orderly “evolution” of narrative in an attempt to prove the natural development towards postmodernism. This view also advocates that historically narratives had stable social and literary conventions. However, as demonstrated in the chapters on the novels, the nature of the novel defies any continuous history of the novel. Calvino and O’Brien’s novels too called into question the claim of self-reflexivity and self-consciousness as a thing in itself through intertextual references and allusions to the literary grand narratives preceding them, contradicting Waugh and Hutcheon.

The third problem with the standardized description of metafiction is that forms that do not quite fit in the sequence, which is the chronological association of humanism to formalism and formalism to poststructuralism, falls out of the reading list. In this frame, Humanism becomes the spokesman of literary realism; formalism, of the practitioners of modernism; and postmodernism, of poststructuralism. The

study of metafiction as the master narrative of modern literature maintains a totalizing narrative history and again ignores the forms that fail to fit the pattern. On the other hand, metafictional strategies are extracted from various narratives and the techniques they employ. In other words, a range of earlier writings are said to employ metafictional devices, but these earlier texts are helping to define what metafiction is. Characteristics gathered together from various literary texts with their individuality are stripped from their contexts and these characteristics are reduced to the definition of metafiction. This contradicts Waugh's claim that metafiction is an inherent characteristic of narrative fiction; a tendency within the novel, especially when she adopts a historicist approach in arguing that metafictional writing is a response to the contemporary cultural context and the literary past in the Bakhtinian sense. At this point, the question concerning what makes modern metafiction distinct from realism, against which metafiction is reacting becomes significant.

The fourth problem, related to the one above, is that contemporary criticism severs contemporary metafiction from previous self-reflexive texts and actually marginalizes the for the sake of identifying it with current social and cultural visions. Despite the acknowledgement of older self-reflexive texts, "metafiction" as a radical definition encompasses such other postmodern fictions as surfiction, antifiction, fabulation, neo-baroque fiction, post-modern fiction, introverted novel, irrealism, or as the self-begetting novel. Theories define metafiction as a borderline between the theory and the practice of fiction writing. Being posited beyond 'fiction', metafiction describes the nature and the purpose of fiction as fiction by itself. Yet this argument should demand a sort of self-consciousness on behalf of the theoreticians, for metafictional texts are not alone in blurring the line between fiction and reality. Farther, it is more the readings of the literary critics that describe this phenomenon as

effective in posing questions about the relationship between the fiction and reality than the texts themselves. The extent of the metafictionalness of a text is determined by the tenor of the time in which writings are evaluated. The literary strategies attributed to contemporary metafiction have always existed within literary history. The postmodern take on the 'self-conscious' narratives as metafiction is just one of many such approaches. What matters for the contemporary understanding of metafiction is the mode of reading in the light of recent philosophical and social discussions. As in the past, the codifications of the critics today have an effect on the ways a text can be experienced.

The fifth problem, last but not least, is the paradox between the theory and the practice of postmodernist metafictional reading. On the one hand, we witness what actually amounts to a homogenous representation of postmodern writing, and on the other, we see the consistent emphasis on the ways in which postmodern thought and writing highlight individual differences on different levels. Moreover, in line with this paradox, this theoretical writing, which sounds almost didactic, tries to create an awareness of ideological, social and also literary constructions according to these critics. Metafictional novels, as 'the embodiment' of postmodern writing, allegedly control the reception of text by its audience.

As argued earlier, just like a national literature can simultaneously exhibit by distinct poetics such as realism, expressionism, modernism or postmodernism, the reigning paradigm can differ from one literature to another. In this frame, the investigation of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* and O'Brien's *At Swim-two-birds* has been an attempt of illustrating of this phenomenon. The assumption that literature changes developmentally caused postmodernist metafiction to be tagged as the prominent narrative mode. My current study of metafiction tries to

prove that no single unchanging rule is possible and that a linear theoretical account of historical events does not hold up. Instead, the investigation of the circumstances under which literary works transform and interacts with literary history is of crucial importance. This interaction is not evolution, but a transformation, a transformation that embraces distinct poetics at once without overrating one over others.

Both Flann O'Brien and Italo Calvino also questioned some of the fundamental assumptions behind the rationalism in realistic fiction. They called into question the standards and values of criticism of this time, developing new methods of writing that respected context and the individuality of the text. Many of the problems they raised are still vital today. As discussed throughout this thesis, to many, these authors were postmodernist. Like the postmodernists, they were skeptical of the possibility of a unified literary form, especially in the novel, of universal standards of criticism, and of complete systems. Nevertheless, despite the contemporary relevance of their writing, we must be careful to avoid anachronism. We must strive to understand the historical individuality of each author. Calvino and O'Brien are our contemporaries in some respect, and they are not so in others. They were indeed still the children of the harshly criticized traditional literature and in crucial respects they were very far from postmodernism.

While these authors recognized difference, and indeed celebrated it, they also believed that we should strive to reintegrate it within the wider wholeness of the work and world of literature. Despite the disparities between the writing practices of these authors and postmodernism, the predominating trend in recent interpretations of their works has been postmodernist. There is an important truth in these interpretations because, in some crucial respects, both O'Brien and Calvino reacted against commonplace literary norms. It must be said, however, that theories of

metafiction have pushed its case too far, so that it has become one-sided and anachronistic. For, again, these writers carried on the legacy of the traditional novel and they never lost their belief in the need for and value of the literary past.

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