

METAFICTION AND POSTMODERNISM: DISCUSSION OF THE RELATIONSHIP

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Although the techniques of metafiction have a history that dates back to some of the oldest samples of fiction from the UK, Europe, and America, the use of metafiction, shaky narration, self-reflection, intertextuality are characteristics of postmodern literature. The writings of writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, Philip K. Dick, Kathy Acker, and John Barth contributed significantly to the powerful emergence of this experimental literary movement in the United States throughout the 1960s. Since postmodernist writing originally appeared in the setting of political movements in the 1960s, it has been suggested that the fact that postmodernists frequently question authority as a symptom of this. [Linda Hutcheon, 1988:202] Postmodern literature is immensely self-reflexive about the political themes it speaks to, which is one way to see this inspiration. Don Quixote (1605–1615) by Miguel de Cervantes, Tristram Shandy (1760–1767) by Laurence Sterne, Sartor Resartus (1833–34) by Thomas Carlyle, and On the Road (1957) by Jack Kerouac are some of the works that predate postmodern literature. There are no set dates for the rise and collapse of postmodernism's appeal, as is the case with all artistic eras. 1941 is sometimes cited as the approximate year when postmodernism began, as it was the year that both English novelist Virginia Woolf and Irish novelist James Joyce both away. The Third Policeman, written by Irish novelist Flann O'Brien, was finished in 1939. It was turned down for publishing and was thought to be lost until it was released after the author's death in 1967. Two years before O'Brien passed away, in 1964, a reworked version titled The Dalkey Archive was released ahead of the original. Despite its ponderous exterior, literary scholar Keith Hopper considers The Third Policeman to be among the pioneer works of the postmodern novel genre. [Hopper, Keith, 2009]

“Fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”

That is how Patricia Waugh describes the critical term metafiction, which gained fame in the 1970s and was originally coined by William Gass, in his article
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“Philosophy and the Form of Fiction”. From this definition it can be assumed that it is the notion of literature that discusses its own fictitiousness and thus presents the breakdown of diegetic (existing or occurring within the world of a narrative) and extradiegetic or real worlds. However, the definition of metafiction whether it be non-essentially or basically defined, should be done so separately from the idea of postmodernism because the two concepts do not have the same historical referents. Numerous instances of metafiction exist that don't align with postmodernism. What is concerning about the loss of distinctions between postmodernism and metafiction is the construction of "a postmodern definition of metafiction." A notion cannot be utilized to characterize postmodernism if a postmodern definition of that concept can be found. In her groundbreaking work on the subject, *Metafiction*, Patricia Waugh defines metafiction. However, some of her arguments confuse the terms postmodernism and metafiction. She contends that literature can be divided into three main periods. The first, known as the classical era, offers fictions that are based on a strong conviction that are widely seen. The second, which Waugh explicitly identified as modernist, was composed earlier this century in response to the initial decline in faith in a real world. Finally, she references modern metafictional writing as a reaction to and an addition to a deeper understanding that history and reality are ephemeral: they are no more a universe of unchanging truths but rather a collection of fabrications, artifices, and transient structures. [Waugh, Patricia. 1984.6] Waugh intends to use the phrase to analyze literature that goes beyond discussing other fiction or its own artifice, fiction that portrays the dissolution of the borders between reality and fiction. She also asserts that this is, to some extent, a feature of all fiction, but she makes a compelling case that the current era—whether it be postmodernism or the late twentieth century—is distinct because of the demise of the “materialist (the belief that only physical matter exists, and that there is no spiritual world), positivist (a philosophy which accepts only things that can be seen or proved), and empiricist (the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses) world-view.” As a result, metafiction is essential to fiction in general and is especially common and significant in the modern day. This tension leads Mark Currie, when faced with such readings of the term that are inspired by postmodernism, to look for fresh definitions of metafiction. In essence, what Waugh is defining as metafiction in her latter definition is postmodern metafiction, distinct from the metafiction of the nineteenth century.

However, it is the postmodern era when the highest number of metafictional novels were produced on a regular basis as opposed to any prior period, and, the next three decades marked the pinnacle of metafictional experimentation and methods.

Literature:

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