# Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
### www.plhr.org.pk

**RESEARCH PAPER**

# Metafiction in Postmodernist Literature: Breaking the Fourth Wall

**¹Waniya Masood\*   and  ²Arooba Choudhary**

1. Graduate Scholar, English Literature and Language Department, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Undergraduate Scholar, Institute of English Language and Literature, Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

| **\*Corresponding Author** | waniyamasood20@gmail.com |

**ABSTRACT**

The primary intent of this research is to investigate how "fourth wall" is broken in the postmodernist literature through metafiction. There has been a postmodern critique on the grand narratives through metafiction. This study incorporates a comparative method to explore how authors like Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon experiment storytelling techniques which exposed the artificial nature of the narrative. Additionally, the paper examines using critical discourse analysis how narrative and the audience are exposed to each other making the literary texts more expository and explanatory rather than convoluted. It employs Linda Hutcheon's understanding of postmodern metafiction to demonstrate how metafiction subverts reality in fiction. The research affirms the significance of meaning that arises from the interaction of the audience with the narrative through metafiction in postmodernist literature.  The study proposes a new perspective and approach to the transformative paradigm of intertextuality and fictional world.

| **KEYWORDS** | Metafiction, Postmodernist Literature, Narrative, Intertextuality |

**Introduction**

Metafiction is a very distinctive narrative technique that foregrounds the constructed nature of friction to play a central role in the evolution of Post-modernist literature this particular literary theory is often characterized by self-referential and self-reflexivity of the narrative forms in texts. This theory challenges the traditional forms of narrative building and narrative illustration by the authors and hands over the beacon of light for narrative building to the readers themselves. The fourth wall between the reader and the narrative is broken offering direct engagement with the meaning of fiction which is often contextual and relational to the background of the reader. This technique dismantles the illusion of seamless and objective narrative which is traditional view of looking at a piece of literature and encourages readers to become active participants in the process of meaning-making emphasizing the role of interpretation in shaping the text by widening the spectrum of meaning under the prism of subjectivity. In post-modernist literature the self-awareness of the reader is not an aesthetic choice but a philosophical stance that reflects broader cultural shifts in the late 28th century this philosophical shift has two layers: first is human beings' search for meaning of life from within themselves and their surroundings infused by their existential dread. It offers a choice between a struggle to look for this particular meaning of life or submit themselves to nihilist point of view and accept whole-heartedly that there exists no meaning at all. Second is the major philosophical and literary shift from objective parameters of technology in the piece of literature and life in general from having subjective contextual understanding of the events around human beings. This research intends to explore the role of metafiction in

postmodernist literature specifically focusing on its function in breaking the fourth word the steady traces down the narrative techniques that foreground the country constructed nature of fiction while analysing how post-modern authors deliberately disrupt the traditional boundaries between the fictional world and the reader. The study incorporates the works of authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Italo Calvino and George Louis Borges to examine the metafiction serves not only to challenge conventional narrative forms but also two question the very nature of reality and authorship. The research highlights the self-referential and often playful characteristics of metafictional text, demonstrating how these works invite readers to become active participants in the creation of meaning, ultimately undermining illusion of an objective or unified narrative. The research suggests that the breaking of the fourth wall in postmodern fiction is a critical strategy for reflecting the complexity of contemporary existence and identity, where the boundaries between reality, representation and interpretation are continually shifting.

**Literature Review**

For McHale and Platt, writing in their introduction to *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* (2016), it would seem that postmodernism has indeed reached its sell-by date. As they feel forced to admit, 'We are no longer locked in to the old arguments; nor were we by the onset of the new millennium. By most contemporary accounts, even then we had got well past, or perhaps over, postmodernism' (4).

*The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* offers a kind of obituary, a critical evaluation of a moment quickly receding into the middle distance. And as McHale and Platt cannot help but note, the very methodology of their book is itself a refutation of a postmodern philosophy that had scorned the very notion of historiography.

In *Utopia in the Age of Globalization* (2013), for example, Robert T. Tally equates postmodernism with the persistence of twenty-first-century global capitalism.

From his point of view, if postmodernism was alive and kicking in 1973, then it is just as relevant, if not more so, today; indeed, the spread of digital technology has only amplified the power and reach of the capitalist world system.

Yet, as McHale and Platt remind us, those taking a more socio-cultural perspective are liable to offer a rather different flavor. From Josh Toth (2010), Mary K.

Holland (2013) and Rita Felski (2015), critics who provide a more culturally inflected analysis have been much more willing to accept that the postmodern moment is over. Linda Hutcheon ends her book with a blood-stirring battle cry: "Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it – and name it for the twenty-first-century" (2002, 181).

**Material and Methods**

The research methodology inculcated within this paper is used to understand the metafiction elements in the postmodernist literature. The approach to add self-referential elements in fiction to make it understandable for the readers will be analyzed by critical discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis will elaborate on the critique of metafiction on the traditional elements of fiction. The traditional narratives that have been debunked by postmodern fiction will be studied under the critical lens of subjective experiences.

**Results and Discussion**

Through its self-reflexivity and self-referential nature metafiction offers the exposition of artificial creation of narrative and opens a new parameter for the readers doing gauge in a direct dialogue with the text. The significant role of The reader is his active participation in meaning making when it comes to metafictional texts. In such a scenario, the traditional narratives in which the reader is often positioned as a passive consumer of the text expected to accept the narrator's representation of reality without question is juxtaposed with an active participant in reading that text. He actively challenges the passiveness of tradition by creating meaning according to his own contacts and understanding of the contemporary life. Hutcheon also contributed significantly in understanding metafiction in terms of its function within the post-modern literary canon. The critics assert metafiction as not merely a playful device but also a critical reflection of the assumptions underlying traditional literary forms. The description of metafiction by the critics lies in its self-awareness in the texts of postmodern writers that interrogates the role of authorship the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction and the readers' interaction with narrative structures they explore metafiction in its capacity to subvert expectations and challenge readers' passive consumption of narrative. Some of the political and literary theories that could be Incorporated to analyze the objectives of this research are post-modern and metafiction and narrative theory. Other than its formal properties, metafiction in postmortem literature also offers a critic of traditional narrative forms by uncovering the constructed nature of friction metafiction challenges the authority of the author and the illusion of objectivity in storytelling. In post-modernist literature, narrative is no longer a transparent medium for the representation of reality, rather it is a complex and convoluted construct that reflex the ideological and cultural assumptions of time in which the reader is consuming the particular text. Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Post-modernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) is a seminal word for understanding postmodern metafiction the author argues that postmodernism is characterized by the self-awareness and playfulness which often involves disrupting traditional narrative structures she depicts that metafiction can challenge the very notion of tooth and objectivity encouraging the dialogic relationship between the text and the reader. This theory proposed by Hutcheon also creates applied form for the readers to be aware of the constructed nature of the narrative. In *Narrative Discourse* 1980 Gerard analyzes the narrative techniques that foreground the construction of fiction his concepts of narrative levels and narrative voice can be useful in understanding how postmodern works these stabilize the authority of the narrator and blur the boundaries between friction and reality. In post-modernist literature the self-awareness of the reader is not an aesthetic choice but a philosophical stance that reflects broader cultural shifts in the late 28th century this philosophical shift has two layers: first is human beings' search for meaning of life from within themselves and their surroundings infused by their existential dread. It offers a choice between a struggle to look for this particular meaning of life or submit themselves to nihilist point of view and accept whole-heartedly that there exists no meaning at all. Second is the major philosophical and literary shift from objective parameters of technology in the piece of literature and life in general from having subjective contextual understanding of the events around human beings. It also suggests the consultation from the works of Mikhail Bhaktin who in his theories of dialogism and heteroglossia are particularly significant in understanding how postmodern works often present multiple voices, perspectives and languages which destabilize the traditional unified narrative voice. The text which is related to the postmodern works of fiction usually starts with the conversation with the reader hence, the idea of breaking the fourth wall between the fiction and the reader implies in such a situation. The works of Roland Barthes *S/Z* (1970) and *The Death of the Author* (1967) assert the d legitimization of traditional notions of authorial intention and

meaning he proposes the idea that meaning cannot be fixed but constantly shifting through reader interpretation that is to say the meaning with which the fiction is pregnant is relational and derivative from the context with which the reader is perceiving it.

Meta fiction is a narrative technique that is characterized by its self-awareness and reflexivity playing a pivotal role in post-modernist literature it deliberately disturbed the conventional boundaries between fiction and reality offering readers avenues to artifice the narrative. In her theory of Metafiction, Hutcheon narrates how meta fiction is not simply a narrative that references its own fiction but a mode of storytelling that actively offers readers an engagement with the perception of reality and fiction this engagement is often facilitated through the technique of breaking the fourth wall where characters and even the text itself directly address or implicit the reader in a dissolution of boundary between the narrative world and the real world of the reader. A very significant example of breaking the fourth war in post-modern metafiction is found in the works of Italo Calvino who used metafiction to blur the lines between fiction and reality. In Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), the novel begins with the second person narrative offering a direct engagement to the reader the protagonist also a reader is trapped in a series of incomplete stories constantly reminded that he is reading a book the context of the plot lies within this consciousness of reading a book and engagement with several stories at a time while being a part of a story himself. Through this recursive structured the reader is made aware of their own involvement in the act of narrative construction.

In Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the author submits the reader's expectations by using fragmented narratives and references to the process of Reading itself Thomas plays with the idea that the reader must acknowledge meaning from the text that continuously references its own certainty and inability to draw attention to the constructed nature of both the narrative and the act of interpretation.

Borges short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote* (1939) depict s how narrative addresses the problem of authorship and the originality of meaning by creating a fictional author who seeks to create Don Quixote word for word the author invites that either to confront the paradoxes of authorship and text. These works encourage readers to reflect on their limitations of their own interpretive practices and the multiplicity of meanings that emerge when the text's constructed nature is laid bare.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, while the critics of metafiction and postmodern literature offer a critical lens through which to understand the significance of metafiction becomes easier for the reader as the command for leading the story and its meanings along with its narrative is handed over to the reader rather than authors spoon feeding everything to the audience, the fourth wall getting broken opens a pandora box for the metafictional text to be disrupted between the text, the reader and the world of narrative emerging from their conventional relationship. The critics have been assertive regarding the self-referential and reflective nature of postmodern metafiction which illustrates how these texts challenge traditional storytelling, critique the dominant ideologies and invites readers to become active participants in the construction of meaning. The idea of subjectivity often removes the paddle from beneath the author and offers the handle to the reader in order to birth a new process of evolution using metafiction towards the construction of contextual meaning.

**Recommendations**

The research affirms the significance of meaning that arises from the interaction of the audience with the narrative through metafiction in postmodernist literature. The study proposes a new perspective and approach to the transformative paradigm of intertextuality and fictional world. Understanding this key strategy for questioning the very nature of narrative and representation enable readers to engage with the complexities of contemporary life and philosophize the very question of the essence of existence that intrigues human beings, especially after the modern and postmodern period and compels them to derive meaning from within and the surroundings or submit themselves to nihilism.

**References**

Barthes, R. (1970). *S/Z*. Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (1967). *The death of the author*. In *Image, music, text* (pp. 142–148). Hill and Wang.

Borges, J. L. (1944). *Ficciones*. Editorial Sur.

Borges, J. L. (1939). *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. In *Ficciones* (pp. 35–41). Editorial Sur.

Bunnell, Noah. (2015). "Oscillating from a Distance: A Study of Metamodernism in Theory and Practice", *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies*, vol.I, 1-8.

Calvino, I. (1972). *Invisible cities*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Calvino, I. (1979). *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Harvard University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.

Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Cornell University Press.

Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.

Kadagishvili, Dali. (2013). "Metamodernism as We Perceive It". *European Scientific Journal*, 2, 558-565.

Kristeva, J. (1969). *Semeiotike: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (L. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

Lathan, Monica. (2015). *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism: Rewriting Mrs Dalloway*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1979). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Pynchon, T. (1966). *The crying of Lot 49*. J.B. Lippincott & Co.

Tally, R. T. (2013). *Utopia in the Age of Globalization*. Springer.

The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature. (2016). In B. McHale & L. Platt (Eds.), *Cambridge University Press*. Cambridge University Press.