"One has to learn what stories are, as a child, in order to enjoy them. Similarly one has to learn to read-actively, imaginatively-in order to enjoy the demanding fiction of today," says the author.

Contemporary self-reflexive novels demand that the reader participate in the fictional process as imaginative co-creator. At the same time, they distance the reader by their textual self-consciousness. Like Narcissus in the Greek myth, the novel of today is intensely aware of its own existence, continuously drawing attention to its own storytelling processes and linguistic structures. The author analyzes four different modes of "narcissistic" fiction, revealing an extensive awareness of the arts in North America and Europe, quoting intensively from English, French, and Italian sources. Her clear, incisive discussion of literary forms and contemporary criticism, and the conclusions she draws about the link between art and life, will interest creators and students of literature and the other arts.

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Mario J. Valdés and Owen J. Miller, eds. *Interpretation of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978; $15.00


NARCISSISTIC NARRATIVE
THE METAFICTIONAL PARADOX
LINDA HUTCHEON

Narcissistic Narrative
The Metafictional Paradox

Wilfrid Laurier University Press
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Since the original impetus for this book came from ideas generated by my doctoral dissertation, my thanks are obviously due to those whose guidance and expertise helped shape my thinking over the years: Brian T. Fitch, Gian-Paolo Biasin, Mario J. Valdés, S. B. Chandler, Robert A. Greene, Cyrus Hamlin, S. P. Rosenbaum and other teachers too numerous to mention. I should further like to express my thanks to Tzvetan Todorov and Wolfgang Iser for their advice and encouragement. Thanks are also extended to my friend, Janet Paterson, for those many hours of "auto-referential" discussion and to my husband, Michael, for his aequanimitas. For help with the manuscript, my gratitude is due to A. Alexander, S. Harper, and L. Rabkin.

Parts of this work have previously appeared in print and are published here with the permission of the editors of the respective journals. Chapter One was first printed in French as "Modes et formes du narcissisme littéraire" in Poétique 29 (février 1977). Part of Chapter Four appeared as "The 'Real World(s)' of Fiction: The French Lieutenant's Woman" in English Studies in Canada 4, 1 (Spring 1978), and part of Chapter Eight also appeared as "The Outer Limits of the Novel: Italy and France" in Contemporary Literature 18, 2 (1977) and appears with the permission of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin. An expanded version of Chapter Seven was published by Forum Italicum (1980) as "Paolo Volponi's Automa-autore."
This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Toronto
1975, 1980
All great fiction, to a large extent, is a reflection on itself rather than a reflection of reality.
Raymond Federman

Les grands récits se reconnaissent à ce signe que la fiction qu'ils proposent n'est rien d'autre que la dramatisation de leur propre fonctionnement.
Jean Ricardou
Introduction

Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox was originally conceived as a defence of a kind of fiction which began to run rampant in the 1960s. "Metafiction," as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity. "Narcissistic"—the figurative adjective chosen here to designate this textual self-awareness—is not intended as derogatory but rather as descriptive and suggestive, as the ironic allegorical reading of the Narcissus myth which follows these introductory remarks should make clear. Nor are the inevitable psychoanalytic connotations to be taken negatively, as many who have not read Freud himself on the subject might tend to do. In fact, it was Freud who conferred on narcissism the status of the "universal original condition" of man, making it the basis of more than just pathological behaviour.

These psychological associations, while likely inevitable, are here, however, irrelevant in that it is the narrative text, and not the author, that is being described as narcissistic. Other potentially pejorative terms, such as introspective, introverted, and self-conscious, are likewise meant to be critically neutral. Many other adjectives will be used to describe the modes of narcissism in the pages to follow—self-reflective, self-informing, self-reflexive, auto-referential, auto-

representational- and while these are not exactly synonymous, their minor tonal and formal distinctions should be evident in context.

These admittedly rather defensive sounding comments reflect the fact that many reviews of new metafiction, especially in the early 1970s, were negative: cries of lamentation over the death of the novel genre abounded. Since then we have perhaps erred in the other direction: we now accept metafiction- that is, we have institutionalized it- and presume it to require no further defence. I would suggest that this change has come about largely because we now have a name for such works. Labels are always comforting, but often also castrating. In the criticism of the seventies, the term “postmodernism” began to appear to refer to contemporary self-conscious texts. John Barth conferred upon this label the status of fact in his recent address to the Modern Language Association in December, 1979 and in his subsequent article in the January, 1980 issue of the Atlantic, entitled “The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction.” In this study, however, I have deliberately not used this label, no matter how tempting its institutionalized convenience proved to be. The reasons for this choice are many, and not the least important is that the term “postmodernism” seems to me to be a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction. This is not to suggest, then, that the name hangs loose about the fiction “like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish thief.” Quite the contrary- for if it is a temporal, historical designation, as some critics have implied, it is much too inclusive. Barth himself quite obviously does not mean to include the work of equally contemporary but more “traditional” novelists within this category. So the term must denote a technically definable literary entity. The “post” of “postmodernism” would therefore suggest not “after,” so much as an extension of modernism and a reaction to it.

However, could one not then argue that “modernism” is here a culturally limited and limiting label as well? That is to say, what we (in our European and North American context) see as the root of “postmodernisme” can be- and has been- perceived in totally different terms, for instance, the Latin-American frame of reference. But this is an area of fiction that Barth most definitely wants to absorb into his own "modernist" tradition. Cuban expatriate novelist and critic Severo Sarduy would not agree; he has clearly shown that the origins of the techniques of what Barth calls the “postmodernism” of García Márquez, for example, lie instead in the Spanish tradition of the baroque. What Sarduy calls contemporary neo-baroque still uses the technical devices of the baroque- that is, linguistic artifice, inter- and intra- textuality, and narrative mirroring. The change in the present usage of these techniques is in intention: the baroque search for consonance is

replaced by a willed neo-baroque lack of harmony and homogeneity which is literally, and figuratively revolutionary in its transgressions of contemporary, literary and linguistic norms.

Barth admits the difficulties in defining modernism; he probably could not define it as precisely as Sarduy defines the baroque. And yet it is not hard to agree with Barth—and with Gerald Graff and Robert Alter—that there is a certain continuity of concern between contemporary self-reflective texts and those of the earlier modernist period. However, when Graff defines "postmodernism" in terms of a calling into question of the "claims of literature and art to truth and human value," does one not feel the need to point out the continuity as well between "postmodernism" and *Don Quijote*? In other words, that "post" is here too exclusive, too limiting, not to say too awkward and anticlimactic, as Barth himself has noted. This is another reason why I have chosen to restrict myself to the more purely descriptive term of contemporary "metafiction". This choice allows as well for the suggestion that the kind of "postmodernist" fiction of which Barth speaks and writes is only one of many forms that metafictional self-consciousness can and does take today.

There is yet another reason for avoiding the "postmodernist" debate in this particular kind of study. Most discussions of "postmodernism" are concerned primarily with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture. This book, however, makes no pretence to contributing to the interesting controversy that has engaged Robert Alter, James Sloan Allen, Gerald Graff and Ihab Hassan, among others. Instead, it merely accepts that something has happened and that it has its roots deep in our culture, most strongly in the Romantic and modernist periods. The focus of a debate on the causes of the change must necessarily be on the perpetrator of the change—the author. The interest here is rather on the text, on the literary manifestation of this change, and on the resulting implications for the reader. Unlike Gerald Graff, I would not argue that in metafiction the life-art connection has been either severed completely or resolutely denied. Instead, I would say that this "vital" link is reforged, on a new level—on that of the imaginative process (of storytelling), instead of on that of the product (the story told). And it is the new role of the reader that is the vehicle of this change.


For these reasons I have deliberately rejected the term "postmodernism" and chosen to limit my discussion to metafiction, that is, to restrict my analysis to the textual forms of self-consciousness, and only then to allow myself to consider their literary critical implications. The broader cultural issues that an inquiry into causes and sources reveals are assumed as givens and indeed are implied in the diachronic development of self-consciousness in the novel that forms the temporal backbone, if you like, of this book. But what appeared to be most needed in discussions of this contemporary form of narrative was rather more analytic and descriptive work on the texts themselves and on the effects they were having, or ought to have been having, on literary criticism.

This is not to say that extended critical studies of metafiction do not exist. They do, but they are few in number. The cultural impact of the *nouveau roman* in France in the 1950s and 1960s did stimulate the provocative works of Jean Ricardou and, more recently, Lucien Dällenbach's study of one of the major modes of textual narcissism, the *mise en abyme*. In North America Robert Scholes began the examination of this new taste in fiction. But it was not until 1975 with the publication of Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* that the critical implications of narrative narcissism began to be confronted. Alter begins with the premise that "in many important novelists from Renaissance Spain to contemporary France and America the realistic enterprise has been enormously complicated and qualified by the writer's awareness that fictions are never real things, that literary realism is a tantalizing contradiction in terms." As this statement suggests, Alter proposes, as a critical framework, a dialectic between fiction and reality -essentially a metaphysical, ontological, experiential, and epistemological focus. This he combines with a diachronic progression of the novel form which begins with *Don Quijote* (as a study of the moral and ontological implications of the realization that fiction is only fiction) and continues through the eighteenth century to the modern period, with what he sees as an eclipse of novelistic self-consciousness in the realism of the nineteenth century.

While this study begins from this same initial assumption- that Cervantes' parodic text is indeed not only the first "realistic" novel but also the first self-reflective one-it diverges from Alter's in the consideration of nineteenth-century realism The critical framework here is not to be one of the dualism of consciousness and world, as it is for him. Instead, the frame of reference will be one of a dialectical literary

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8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. X.
progression from one kind of novelistic mimesis to another. If the novel is by definition a representational genre, the Aristotelian concept of mimesis is worth reinvestigating. For Aristotle, diegesis was a part of mimesis. Cervantes too saw this, and neatly demonstrated that in the novel form the narrative act itself is, for the reader, part of the action. For this reason the term "diegetic" might be preferable to the simpler and more familiar- term "narrative," as an adjective to signal this study's rejection of the split between process (the storytelling) and product (the story told). Given the diachronic implications of this framework, the realism of the nineteenth century, which is based almost entirely on what will be called a mimesis of product, will be seen more as a reductive limitation of novelistic mimesis than as the paradigm or the defining characteristic of the genre as Auerbach, Watt, and many others have insisted. The novel genre does seem to change dialectically, as Alter asserts, but in literary as well as ontological terms. Modern metafiction is largely what shall be referred to here as a mimesis of process; but it grows out of that interest in consciousness as well as the objects of consciousness that constitutes the "psychological realism" of Woolf, Gide, Svevo, and Proust at the beginning of the century. Rather than positing a break in novelistic self-consciousness in the last century and then a modern revival of it, this literary dialectic would suggest a continuum but a gradually evolving one that has logically culminated in metafiction. However, once again, the "postmodernist" historical debate will not be evoked.

Alter's dialectic effectively separates "art" and "life," suggesting that Modern writers ask the reader to examine these distinctions and see how they interact. Within the critical context of what will here be called process mimesis, such a separation would prove impossible. Reading and writing belong to the processes of "life" as much as they do to those of "art." It is this realization that constitutes one side of the paradox of metafiction for the reader. On the one hand, he is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the "art," of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience. In fact, these responses are shown to be part of his life experience. In this light metafiction is less a departure from the mimetic novelistic tradition than a reworking of it. It is simplistic to say, as reviewers did for years, that this kind of narrative is sterile, that it has nothing to do with "life." The implied reduction of "life" to a mere product level that ignores process is what this book aims to counteract.

While Alter's work sets the ontological and literary historical stage for a study of modern metafiction, it does not venture into an analysis of its various forms and modes. This present study, however, seeks to investigate both the implications of these literary phenomena for novel theory, and the possibility of categorizing the many types of modern
textual self-consciousness in the interest of clarity and precision in discussion. Thus, the typology suggested in the next chapter is not to be seen as a rigid, externally, imposed organization but rather it is the result of an inductive approach to individual texts and a subsequent generalization from them. As such this critical structure neither is superfluous nor can it be said to have generated its subject, any more than any other methodology can be said to have done so.

No attempt has been made to propose a comprehensive theory of metafiction. In the first place, any such theory would be reductive, much more reductive than any other theory of the novel in general. This is because the point of metafiction is that it constitutes its own first critical commentary, and in so doing, it will be argued, sets up the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered. Therefore some of the chapters which follow are "theoretical" only in the sense that they investigate various existing novelistic theories in the light of the challenge afforded by narcissistic texts.

This limitation of the "theoretical" part of the argument also explains, at least in part, the fact that the critical terminology employed here is by necessity eclectic. If self-conscious narrative by definition includes within itself its own first contextual reading, no single theory will be able to deal with it without considerable distortion. However, two particular methodologies have been drawn on more than the others: Saussurian structuralism and Iserian hermeneutics. This choice is dictated largely by the fact that metafiction has two major focuses: the first is on its linguistic and narrative structures, and the second is on the role of the reader. In the first case, the basic structuralist terminology of the "code," of the "sign"'s "signifier" and "signified," and of the "referent" of language proves useful, indeed necessary. The work in reader aesthetics by hermeneutic critics such as Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden provides a vocabulary in which to discuss the functions of the reader who "concretizes" the text and whose role is also "thematized" and often "actualized" within the text itself.

Narcissistic narrative, then, is process made visible. In this sense, metafiction is "production" but not in the current French ideological use of the word. The generic terms of reference in metafiction are still novelistic; auto-representation is still representation. These narratives are only about "production," perhaps. Therefore this book is not part of the modern critique of representation; it does not partake of the Derridian post-structuralist discourse.

As the sections to follow which examine theoretical issues will probably suggest, however, metafiction does have very serious implications for the theory of the novel as a mimetic genre. Some redefinition of novelistic mimesis would seem to be in order if critical theory is to deal adequately with the new forms of the genre that have developed. This
redefinition would necessarily entail a reconsideration of the nature of novelistic language; in all fiction, language is representational, but of a fictional "other" world, a complete and coherent "heterocosm" created by the fictive referents of the signs. In metafiction, however, this fact is made explicit and, while he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation. This two-way pull is the paradox of the reader. The text's own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader.

The typology developed in Chapter One is based on the observation that some of these texts are diegetically self-conscious while others demonstrate primarily an awareness of their linguistic constitution. In the first case, the text presents itself as narrative; in the second, as language. Rut there seem to be two possible varieties of each of these modes, and these will simply be referred to as the overt and the covert forms. Overtly narcissistic texts reveal their self-awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic identity within the texts themselves. In the covert form, this process is internalized, actualized; such a text is self-reflective but not necessarily self-conscious.

These four types of metafiction are discussed in terms of many specific texts which represent a selection of those from which the typology was originally derived. The choice of many texts discussed as examples rather than only a few analyzed in fuller terms was made in order to show the broad range of this metafictional phenomenon and thereby to account for the view that the implications it holds for novel theory cannot be ignored. For reasons of authorial linguistic competence, only texts written in English, French, and Italian are dealt with in the original languages; translations are used for Spanish-American and German texts. The wider range of reference allowed by translations was deemed necessary to subvert the convenient parochial generalization that metafiction is a uniquely American phenomenon or that the *nouveau roman* or even the *nouveau nouveau roman* is the last word in novelistic auto-representation. If the novel is indeed not dead in our Western culture, but rather is very much alive, it is thriving in Europe, in North America, and in South America too.

Perhaps, in actual fact, it is narrative as a whole, and not just literary narrative that has progressed to a process-oriented mode. Jean-Luc Godard is one film-maker whose work might be cited in support of this notion of a developing narrative self-reflexiveness. Peter Wollen claims that in Godard's earliest work "the narrative and dramatic structure is taken for granted, but the characters in the films question each other about the codes they use, about the sources of misunderstanding and
incomprehension. Then, as his career continued, he began more and more to question, not the inter-personal communication of the characters, but the communication represented by the film itself. Finally he began to conceive of making a film, not as communicating at all, but as producing a text in which the problems of film-making were themselves raised."

Perhaps it is even reductive to limit this formal narcissism to narrative genres alone, for the visual arts and music both have also shown signs of self-reflectiveness. It might even be tempting to posit a general cultural phenomenon: not "postmodernism," neatly labelled, no longer to be questioned or examined, but rather merely an increasing interest in how art is created, not just in what is created. The process may be becoming as intriguing as the product. But there is no doubt that the novel today has become the focus of critical interest in modes of auto-representation, and as such confirms Northrop Frye's 10 hypothesis that in literary history a recurrent opposition can be detected between the Aristotelian and Longinian impulses, between the view of literature as product and the view of literature as process. Frye even suggests that prose fiction today has much in common with that of the late eighteenth century, when Sterne in particular helped bring to "a peculiarly exquisite perfection" the sense of literature as process. In fact, in the discussion to follow here, Tristram Shandy will indeed sit alongside Don Quijote as the major forerunner of modern metafiction.

At the start of these remarks, an allegorical reading of the Narcissus myth in terms of narrative was proposed. The interpretation to follow is not intended as a digression. Instead it hopes to fulfill two functions: the first is to make the point-as Freud did in a psychoanalytic context-that narcissism can be argued to be, not an aberration, but the "original condition" of the novel as a genre. This is done by representing, by means of the myth, the diachronic development of self consciousness in fiction in the briefest form possible. In the second place, this reading of the myth is in part definitely an ironic one. While it is clear that from Ovid's perspective, Narcissus is indeed self-obsessed to the point of self-destruction, even Ovid himself notes that Narcissus lives on -in two forms, one (his own) in the underworld, and one (as a flower) that, while different in form, does bear his name. Both Ovid and the naiads and dryads who lament Narcissus' change are seen ironically here as representative of those critics who lament the death of the novel -refusing to accept that the form of fiction might just have changed.

The first one to test the truth of [Tiresias'] utterances is Liriope, the nymph whom Cephalus, the river-god, once clasped in his winding stream and ravished, as he held her in his waves. This beautiful nymph conceived and bore a child... and named him Narcissus. When asked whether this child would live to a mature old age, the far-seeing prophet answers: "If he does not know himself." For a long time, the words of the seer seem but empty ones. But they were to prove justified by the fact and by the manner of his death, and by his strange infatuation. For indeed the son of Cephisus had turned sixteen and could pass for either child or man. Many young men and women both desired him; but beneath that gentle form was a pride so hard that no boy, no girl could touch him.  

The novel too can be seen to be the child of rape, the parodic offspring of Cervantes, self-centred and self-beloved from its very birth. This self-consciousness is perhaps more evident in modern metafiction but it is not at all limited to it. Alongside the eighteenth century realistic tradition of Richardson and Defoe, one finds once again Sterne's narrative play in *Tristram Shandy*. Diderot's self-reflexive fiction precedes Balzac's realism. This self-mirroring which, by its very nature, challenges the traditional narrow concept of nineteenth century novelistic mimesis is seen most obviously in the *mise en abyme*, a technique so dear to Gide (who loved those small convex mirrors in the paintings of Memling and Quentin Metsys, mirrors which reflected the scene being painted).

At another level of self-reflectiveness, however, as in "The Betrothal of the Arnolfini," for instance, one notices not only a mirror, as above, but also a "Johannes de eyck fuit hic" as part of the composition of the painting itself, signalling the artist's presence as witness and virtuoso. Often the novel itself also consciously manifests a concern for the aesthetic presence of the writing novelist, drawing the reader's attention to the storytelling process, destroying what Ian Watt once called the defining characteristic of the novel-formal realism. As early as *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le fataliste*, then, not to mention *Don Quijote* again, the reader has been asked to participate in the artistic process by bearing witness to the novel's self-analyzing development. The narrator-novelist has, from the start, unrealistically entered his own novel, drawing his reader into his fictional universe.

Several explanations have been put forth to account for the novel's early self-consciousness. If, on the one hand, one accepts Barthes' thesis that it is only with the rise of the bourgeois consciousness that literature begins to be self-regarding, then the novel's self reflectiveness is not surprising, since, as critics as diverse as Watt, Auerbach, Levin, and Lukacs have attested, the novel is a bourgeois

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1 The translation here of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 3, 11. 341-55) is that of the author, and is based on Kudolufus Ehwald's edition of the Latin text (Berlin: Weidmann, 1903), following the example of the Loeb Classical Library. Line references will be noted in parenthases in the text, since only selections have been used, and not the entire story.

capitalistic narrative genre. On the other hand, remaining more within the strictly literary realm, one might choose to see the origins of this phenomenon in the parodic intent of the novel, in the unmasking of dead conventions by a mirroring of them- minus the "proper" motivation.\textsuperscript{13}

Whatever the reason, the novel from its beginnings has always nurtured a self-love, a tendency toward self-obsession. Unlike its oral forbears, it is both the storytelling and the story told. Tiresias' warning about Narcissus' self-awareness is perhaps well directed \textit{from the start}: he will live long, "si se non noverit," if he does not know himself.

One day as [Narcissus] is chasing the frightened deer into his nets, he is seen by resounding Echo, a strange-speaking nymph who could neither be silent when others spoke, nor speak herself unless first addressed. . . . Now she saw Narcissus as he was wandering through the fields, and, burning with desire, she stealthily followed him. . . . But he flees her and, fleeing, says: "Withdraw your hands, do not embrace me. I'll die before I give you power over me." She only replies: "I give you power over me." Scorned, she hides in the forest, covers her shamed face with leaves, and from then on, lives in caves, alone. But still her love remains and grows on the sorrow of having been spurned; and the cares that keep her sleepless waste away her wretched body; she becomes thin and wrinkled, and all the life force leaves her body, evaporated into the air. Nothing more than her voice and tier bones remain; her voice lives on; they say that her bones turned to stone [11.356-58; 370-71; 390-99].

In the myth, Narcissus' fate is interestingly prefigured-with significant variations-by that of "resonabilis Echo" who cannot remain silent, cannot be ignored, and yet cannot be a creative, autonomous force on her own. Her destiny is not unlike that of novelistic language.\textsuperscript{14} It too cannot be silenced, for it exists independently of its artistic function. Yet it cannot operate completely autonomously, for it is also referential as well as being a vehicle for connotations outside of its willed control. However, yet another dimension must be considered, for, being novelistic, its referents are to a fictive verbal universe and not necessarily to the real world. Maurice Blanchot\textsuperscript{15} once deplored the traditional realistic novel's scorn for its language, its inability to realize that it is through literary language that the novel captures something.

\textsuperscript{13} See the work of Chklovski on \textit{Tristram Shandy}, or more briefly, in Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), \textit{Théorie de la littérature: textes des formalistes russes} (Paris: Seuil, 1965), Tomachevski's \textit{Thématique}, pp. 263-307, and Eikhenbaum's "La Théorie de la 'méthode formelle,'" pp. 31-75.

\textsuperscript{14} The connection between language and narrative (similar to that between Echo and Narcissus) can also he seen as quasi-synecdochical. See Roland Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des recits," \textit{Communications} n o . 8 (1966), 4. One could elaborate: narrative agents are like proper nouns in sentences (subjects and objects); their actions are parallel in function to verbs in sentences; the qualities attained are adjectival. See Tzvetan Todorov, "Structural Analysis of Narrative," \textit{Novel} 3 (Fall 1969), 74-76.

\textsuperscript{15} In "Mallarmé et l'art du roman," in \textit{Faux pas} ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1943), p. 203.
beyond the inauthentic and the everyday. It does not see, he lamented, that its language must be singular in the sense that it depends uniquely on the work in which it appears, as one of its means and one of its ends. Valéry also listed as the causes of his distaste of the novel, its disorder, its arbitrariness, and its scorn for language, the very matter that is its essence.

Therefore, at a certain time, when formal realism was seen as the accepted goal of fiction, the novel, like Narcissus, seemed to refuse to give independent power to (or even pay any attention to) its medium, language. Character, action, morality, representation of reality—words were its conscious concerns. Language was merely a means, never an end. As a result, the value of deliberate and careful linguistic choice in the writing and evaluating of the novel seemed to diminish until, like Echo's bones which turned to stone, all that appeared to remain were skeletal structures and petrified conventional terms to be adopted uncritically by the conforming novelist.

As Narcissus had mocked [Echo], so had he mocked other nymphs of the waves or mountains, and before that, the company of men; after that, one of these latter despised youths, raising his hands to heaven, said: "May he himself love in this way, and not possess the thing he loves!" The goddess, Nemesis, agreed to his rightful entreaties. There was a limpid pool with shining silvery water, which neither shepherds, nor goats feeding on the mountainside, nor any other cattle had touched, which neither bird nor beast nor fallen tree branch had ever disturbed. . . . The boy, worn out by the exertion of the hunt and the heat, lay down here, charmed by both the appearance of the place and by the spring; and while he seeks to quench his thirst, another thirst sprang up. And while he drinks, struck by the image of the form he sees, he falls in love with an illusion that has no body, and thinks that to be substance which is only shadow. He is astonished by himself and is fixed, motionless, with the same expression, like a statue carved from Parian marble. . . . Inadvertently he desires himself; he approves and is himself what he approves; and while he seeks, is sought; and equally he in flames and burns with love. . . . What he sees, he does not know, but he burns for that which he does see, and the same delusion that deceives his eyes excites them. Credulous boy, why do you vainly try to seize fleeting images? What you seek is nowhere: what you love, if you but turn away, you will lose. That which you perceive is the shadow of a reflected form: it has no substance of its own. It both comes with you and stays with you; it will depart with you—if you can depart [ 11. 402-10; 413-19; 425-26; 430-36].

Unaware of both the value in, and the impossibility of ignoring, the verbal component of its form (which, like Echo's voice, might be said to have retired in shame), the novel continued to prosper, seemingly self-important and unself-critical, until it became Romantically intrigued with its own reflection. Now even more self-conscious, the novel increasingly took this image as a thing in itself worthy of literary treatment: the novelist and his novel itself became legitimate subject matter. The process of narration began to invade the fiction's content. Out of the Bildungsroman or Entwicklungsroman, then, came the Künstlerroman with its preoccupation with the growth of the artist. As in
the psychological novel in general, unity of action was replaced by unity of personality — here, the artistic personality. Interpretation became interiorized, immanent to the work itself, as the narrator or point of view character reflected on the meaning of his creative experience. This phenomenon of the nineteenth century may well, as Foucault has suggested, be a result of a change in the conception of the relationship between words and things, idea and object. (In Les Mots et les choses [Paris: Gallimard, 1966], Foucault shows how, after the eighteenth century, objects gradually became self-centred as if searching for the principle of their intelligibility in their own development and abandoning more and more the conventional space of representation.) But this wider debate is outside the limits of this study.

Nevertheless, such a change, whatever its cause, would allow, in literary terms, for the transformation of form into content: the subject matter would change again from the novelist to his writing. Novels then begin to reflect and to reflect upon their own genesis and growth. The mirroring involved begins to undermine traditional realism in favour of a more introverted literary level of mimesis: Point Counter Point, The Alexandria Quartet, Portrait d'un inconnu. The realistic story trappings are finally reduced to an allegory of the functioning of the narration. As Jean Verrier explains: "On est passé de l'oeuvre dans l'oeuvre à l'oeuvre sur l'oeuvre, puis à l'oeuvre par l'oeuvre." It is here that a first principle of structuralist criticism—literary works are about language—would seem most obviously relevant. Perhaps the origins of this concern for writing and reading within the structure of the novel itself, lie in the early journal and epistolary novels. The writer calls his reader's attention to the activity of writing as an event within the novel, as an event of equally great significance to that of the events of the story which he is supposed to be telling. As Tzvetan Todorov explains:

Toute oeuvre, tout roman raconte, à travers la trame événementielle, l'histoire de sa propre création, sa propre histoire. Des oeuvres comme celles de Laclos ou de Proust ne font que rendre explicite une vérité sous-jacente à toute création littéraire. Ainsi apparaît la vanité des recherches du sens dernier de tel roman, tel drame; le sens d'une oeuvre consiste à se dire, à nous parler de sa propre existence. Ainsi le roman tend à nous amener à lui-même; et nous pouvons dire qu'il commence en fait là où il se termine; car l'existence même du roman est le dernier chaînon de son intrigue, et là où finit l'histoire racontée, l'histoire de la vie, là exactement commence l'histoire racontante, l'histoire littéraire. 17

Although perhaps an extreme formalistic view which could be countered by accusations of reductiveness in making a new "sens dernier"—a merely literary, formal one—this stance shows clearly the line of succession from the early self-consciousness of Cervantes and

Sterne, to the **Künstlerroman**, to the novel about novels. The "narcissistic" change is one of degree, not kind. Narcissus had *always* been self-aware; he merely became more physically conscious of his own existence and charm, as seen in the still water-mirror- "the shadow of a reflected form."

No concern for food or rest can draw him from the spot; but stretched out on the shaded grass, he gazes at the deceitful form with unsated eyes and by his own eyes he perishes; and, having raised himself up a little, and stretching his arms to the woods around him, he says: "Oh woods, is there anyone who has loved more cruelly? . . . And, to make me grieve the more, no great sea separates us, no long road, no mountains, no ramparts with closed gates; we are hindered by a little water! He himself desires to be embraced. . . . [addressing the image] I have often noted your tears too, as I cry; and you return my signals with a nod; and, as I suspect from the motion of your beautiful mouth, you utter words which do not reach my ears. I am he; I have sensed it, my image deceives me no more; I am consumed with love for myself . . . Death is not disagreeable to me, as sorrows are left behind in death; I wish that he who is loved might live longer. Now, united, we two shall die in one breath." . . . But as golden wax is accustomed to melting away before a slight fire or morning frost before the warm sun, so, weakened by love, he wastes away, and is gradually devoured by the secret fire. And no longer is his complexion that ruddy hue mixed with white; no longer is there the vigour and energy and all that lately was so pleasing to behold; nor does the body, which Echo had once loved, remain

Unable to stop at an acceptance of this mirroring vision of itself, the novel proceeded, at least in some critics' eyes, to pine away until the form barely remained. These critics share Ovid's viewpoint on Narcissus' fate. They argue that, like Narcissus, the novel began to lose those attractive features-of action, of personality- which had made it so beloved (in the last century) to become absorbed in a deeper self-reflective state which- and herein lay the fear- threatened to deny the novel's existence as a realistic narrative of something outside itself. Literature at this stage, writes Foucault:

>n'a plus alors qu'à se recourber dans un perpétuel retour sur soi, comme si son discours ne pouvait avoir pour contenu que de dire sa propre forme: elle s'adresse à soi comme subjectivité écrivante, ou elle cherche à ressaisir, dans le mouvement qui la fait naître, l'essence de toute littérature; et ainsi tous ses fils convergent vers la pointe la plus fine-singulière, instantanée, et pourtant absolument universelle-, vers le simple acte d'écrire. Au moment où le langage, comme parole répandue, devient objet de connaissance, voilà qu'il réapparaît sous une modalité strictement opposée: silencieuse, précautionneuse déposition du mot sur la blancheur d'un papier, où il ne peut avoir ni sonorité ni interlocuteur, où il n'a rien à dire que soi, rien d'autre à faire que scintiller dans l'éclat de son être."

One might consider this change either, as most "Ovidian" critics have, a negative one (as the decline of the novel as a realistic genre), or

it might also be seen as a positive one (as a renewed sense of language, formal craft, and aesthetic design). But either way it is hard to ignore this new development in the genre. More and more the reader is made aware of the fact that the existence of verbal and structural materials conditions the formation of images, that the human imagination is exercised in working with these materials—perhaps still at the service of some human meaning and value outside themselves, however. The thin paper is the reflecting pool; the text is its own mirror.

However when [Echo] saw [Narcissus' wasted form], she grieved, although angry and remembering still, and as often as the wretch ed boy said, "Alas," with echoing words, she repeated, "Alas," and when he beat his arms with his hands, she returned the same beating sound. This was his last utterance as he gazed into the familiar water: "Alas, vainly beloved boy!" and the place echoed back just as many words; and when he said farewell, Echo also said "Farewell." He lay down his weary head on the green grass; death sealed his eyes that were admiring their master's beauty. After he was received into the infernal abode, then too did he keep on gazing upon himself in the Stygian water. The naiads, his sisters, beat their breasts and consecrated to their brother their shorn locks; the dryads, too, lamented; Echo responded to their laments [11. 494-507].

If the novel has, to some "Ovidian" or "naiadic" critics, died Narcissus' death it seems, nevertheless, like him, quite able to live on in another less traditionally realistic world, ceaselessly regarding at least its formal beauties. Echo- or verbal process- can come out of hiding. While accepting the inevitably constant presence (even if hidden in the caves of nineteenth-century realism) of linguistic concern in the novel, one must still take note of the increasing obsession with the creative functioning of language in the novels of Roussel, Joyce, Beckett, Sanguineti, the writers of the "new new novel," and so many others. Jean Ricardou sees the works of the Tel Quel group as going yet further in this radicalization and so superseding the novel genre. If the nouveau roman is self-mirroring auto-representation, then Tel Quel's works are anti-representation-"textes" which, like Echo, are similar in fate to, but not the same as, the Narcissistic narrative itself.

The very activity of the novelist seems to alter in direction when he becomes aware that he has been the unconscious producer of a synchronic model or sign-system; then perhaps he decides to do so consciously and self-consciously. Similarly, the activity of the reader is not one of being a consumer of stories, but rather one of learning and constructing a new sign-system, a new set of verbal relations. The novel becomes a new and strange kind of code written almost in hieroglyphs and analogous in process to primitive myth or fairy tales.  

Criticism, then, must concern itself with these privileged objects and their organization. Because of the primacy of the linguistic model, structuralist analysis concentrates most on the predominance of lin-

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guistic structures in shaping meaningful experiences. But since many modern novels seem intent on identifying themselves with their own theorizing, perhaps descriptive research into these self-informing theories, such as what follows in this study, is the only possible form of novel criticism left. The extreme of this view is Jameson's idea of "metacommentary" which would be a self-conscious commentary on the very conditions of existence of any given critical problem: it would be the need for interpretation, not the nature of it, that would be discussed. Each individual analysis, he feels, should include an analysis of its own existence, should show its own credentials, and justify itself.

With metafiction, then, the distinction between literary and critical texts begins to fade. Like Echo, verbal process comes out of hiding to accompany what some see as the novel's dying farewells, perhaps outliving it to echo the smug laments of the dryadic denizens of the critical deep. Literature itself has altered; this cannot be denied if one looks at the modern novel. But the change is logical and a less abrupt change than most "Ovidian" critics would have one believe. Even in Ovid's account, Narcissus is received into another world, not cast there. Self-conscious fiction is part of another trend or tradition within the novel, for this genre is as much a self-conscious bourgeois aesthetic form as it is a bourgeois social entity. The narcissism of Romanticism altered the degree but not the kind of self-absorption in the novel.

Barthes once saw this process as beginning with Flaubert (and perhaps James, Manzoni?) and his "conscience artisanale de la fabrication littéraire." Mallarmé (and Gide, Huxley, Joyce, Svevo, and Mann?) brought to literature that mingling of literature and critical thought about it. Next came Proust's "espoir de parvenir à éluder la tautologie littéraire en remettant sans cesse, pour ainsi dire, la littérature au lendemain, en déclarant longuement qu'on va écrire, et en faisant de cette déclaration la littérature même." Stage four began, for Barthes, with the surrealists' (and the Italian hermeticists?) multiplication of meaning of language, the refusal of the "signifié univoque," and ended in the "blancheur de l'écriture" that he perceived in the work of Robbe-Grillet. The radicalization has progressed even further since Barthes wrote this. Literature- and the novel in particular- seemed to many in the sixties and seventies, if not today, to have been playing with its own destruction. But has it not, rather, proved to be, as Barthes claimed, more like "cette héroïne racinienne qui meurt de se connaître mais vit de se chercher"?

And now they prepared a funeral pile and brandishing torches and a bier; but his body was nowhere to be found; instead of the body, they find a flower (11. 508-509).

Even if the novel today has, as the "Ovidians" claim, died as a traditional realistic narrative genre, there is still the fact that no proof can really be found. There is no corpse; the form has just slipped into another world, in a very similar shape and attitude. Something new, or rather something old and resurrected, has appeared in its old traditional place. Like the flower which shares Narcissus' name, the "non-fictional novel" is a natural outgrowth of the old realistic tradition, a spontaneous rediscovery of those devices of formal realism which Ian Watt once isolated in his study of the eighteenth-century novel.

Between the Echoing wail of the dryadic mourners of the novel's death and the stubborn concreteness of Truman Capote's reportage, the reader is left alone- to read metafiction, and to contemplate with some perspective Tiresias' warning, "si se non noverit."