CHAPTER FIVE

Actualizing Narrative Structures: Detective Plot, Fantasy, Games, and the Erotic

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John Barth

Fowles's novel is explicitly and self-consciously auto-referential. Its thematization of the role of the reader and of the ontological status of the text works both to create and to break down artifice. The reader has his orders and is not allowed to ignore them; like Charles's, his freedom is a real, though an induced one. But what if the author decides to *assume* that his reader already knows the story-making rules? He would still imbed certain instructions in the text, but these would not be in the obvious form of direct addresses. Therefore this would be a more "covert" version of diegetic self-reflectiveness. The act of reading becomes one of actualizing textual structures, and the only way to approach these narcissistic forms (as well as their implications) would be by means of those very structures. At the diegetic level there appear to be certain models favoured by metafictionists as internalized structuring devices which in themselves point to the self-referentiality of the text. It should be noted that the four models singled out earlier- detective plot, fantasy, games, and the erotic-are in no way exclusive, but represent only four- of the most visible forms presently in use in metafiction.

1. THE DETECTIVE STORY
In order to understand the internalized functioning of this model in metafiction, one must isolate first the three major characteristics of detective fiction that are relevant to this discussion: the self-consciousness of the form itself, its strong conventions, and the important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading.
To begin with, the detective story is almost by definition intensely self-aware. Often this will take the form of a writer of detective stories within the novel itself: Latimer, the academic turned novelist in Eric Ambler’s *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, is offered a banal plot for a novel by one Colonel Haki. However, through this latter fellow, he takes up instead a real life investigation which ends in the death of the hunted man, Dimitrios. Only then is Latimer free to write his next novel. However, he rejects the tale the reader has been reading, which he deems unsuitable—messy, not tidy and artistic enough. In fact his projected plot opening is not unlike the Colonel’s suggestion, previously scorned as banal. Similarly, thought in a less complex manner, the murderer’s manuscript at the end of Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None*, calls the reader’s attention to the text’s *mise en abyme*:

> It was my ambition to *invent* a murder mystery that no one could solve. But no artist, I now realize, can be satisfied with art alone. There is a natural craving for recognition which cannot be gainsaid.¹

In this same novel there is a good example of the other kind of self-consciousness that abounds in the genre—the character’s belief that certain things occur in life (that is, the novel), others in fiction. Just before he dies, the first victim merrily refuses to leave the island: “Ought to ferret out the mystery before we go. Whole thing’s like a detective story. Positively thrilling.”² In *Have His Carcase*, Dorothy Sayers’ detective-novelist heroine, Harriet Vane, agrees with the sleuth, Lord Peter Wimsey: “One wouldn’t make an intending suicide take a return-ticket in a book, but real people are different.”³

This last point brings up the second above-mentioned concern, the strong conventions of order and logic in detective fiction which Harriet Vane knows are to be obeyed because the reader expects them and needs them in order to read the work, in order to participate in the case. It is this very store of infinitely reworkable conventions that is acknowledged and exploited, “re-contextualized,” by metafictionists such as Robbe-Grillet and Borges. The third point of interest arises from this active participation of the reader in detective fiction. The act of reading is here an act of interpretation, of following clues to the answer of a given problem.⁴ The hermeneutic gaps are textually functional in an explicit manner here, but the process is emblematic of that of reading any novel. It is this realization that covertly narcissistic metafiction exploits. Often a detective story will explicitly thematize this hermeneutic paradigm. In a double *mise en abyme* (Ellery Queen

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² Ibid., p.205
[really Messieurs Lee and Dannay] always writes about himself in the third person), Ellery's novel, The Finishing Stroke, contains within itself quotation from his first novel, The Roman Hat Mystery. This citation is presented as a "Challenge to the Reader" at the start of the third book. The reader is informed that he now knows everything that the chief sleuth does and can proceed by a series of logical deductions and psychological observations to the solution of the mystery.

A reality of all reading, this can also be allegorically worked out, as in several of the Simenon novels. In The Methods of Maigret, for example, the discreet, self-effacing, intelligent Inspector Pyke is the reader's surrogate, as he follows Maigret around trying to discern his famous methods. Pyke impassively sifts his every gesture and word, much to Maigret's annoyance, for Maigret yearns to discover his colleague's thoughts about himself and the case at hand. Like the reader's, these thoughts are inaccessible.

The logical deductions demanded of the reader place him more often, however, in the shoes of the detective himself, be he an active investigator or an arm-chair wizard. False trails may be laid for both of these interpreters but the evidence discovered must be shared by the sleuth with the reader; it is not fair of Watson in the Sherlock Holmes tales to withhold details from the reader, for instance. If the latter is the sleuth's surrogate, then perhaps the author is the criminal's. G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories make this allegory clear. In "The Blue Cross," the detective, Valentin, realizes that the criminal is a creative artist and he, the chasing detective, merely a critic. Flambeau, the master criminal, artistically attempts to match his crime to the season or the landscape (see "The Flying Stars"). He continues to function as the imaginative force even after giving up a life of crime, leaving the critic's work always to Father Brown. (In a fit of moral and perhaps creative frustration, Valentin, on the other hand, turns clever criminal in "The Secret Garden.")

It is perhaps not hard to see now why this genre should appeal to metafictionists as a structuring model. It also appeals on the overt level, of course, as witnessed in Nabokov's parody, in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, of the detective plot in his hero's mystery novel, The Prismatic Bezel, itself seemingly a parody of Agatha Christie's Three Blind Mice. The entire novel (Nabokov's) is itself based on the detective structure as the narrator seeks the "truth" about the novelist, Knight, and the reader seeks the "truth" about the novel he reads. Is it fictive autobiography? Pure fiction! Biography? But, as Nabokov writes in The Eye: "The stress is not on the mystery but on the pattern."5 His Despair is about a failed murder; Lolita and Pale Fire end in murder. The stylized properties of detective fiction-when either parodied overtly or

5 (New York: Phaedra, 1965), p. 10
Two of the writers of metafiction who most interestingly use this model are Robbe-Grillet and Borges. The latter, as well as having anthologized and translated detective stories, has written a volume of them himself -Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi- whose punningly named hero is unavoidably an arm-chair detective, since he is in jail. In his other short metafictional pieces, Borges usually internalizes a puzzle or enigma structure, and often the mystery variant of it, as in the case of "Death and the Compass." Lönnrot, the detective, sees himself as a "pure thinker" (à la Dupin) and divines the "secret morphology" of the crimes-crimes which he has brought about himself. His enemy, Red Scharlach, had read in the papers of Lönnrot's abstruse theory to account for a murder of a rabbi. It was based on Hasidim texts and so Scharlach had plotted the equally abstruse trap for the detective with his own plan. Like the reader, Lönnrot feels the obvious-and incidentally, true-explanation for the first murder to be "possible but not interesting" and so, like the author, sets up the rest of the narrative. The detective predicts-in time and place-the final murder of the series, unaware that it is his own. As he wanders in what is to be his death-place, Triste-le-Roy, the strange house seems to him larger than it is, due to the "penumbra, the symmetry, the mirrors, the years, my ignorance, the solitude"- an allegorical description of the effect of this self-mirroring story on the reader.

Although Wallas, the hero of Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes (Paris: Minuit, 1953), lives out the rigid conventions of the roman policier, the novel goes beyond those properties to a metafictional reworking. In "Sur quelques notions périmées," Robbe-Grillet noted that both this novel and Le Voyeur (where the reader has to decide if, as well as how, a crime has been committed) contain "une trame, une action, des plus facilement discernables, riche par surcroît d'éléments considérés en général comme dramatiques. S'ils ont au début semblé désamorcés à certains lecteurs, n'est-ce pas simplement parce que le mouvement de l'écriture y est plus important que celui des passions et des crimes?" In later theoretical statements, Robbe-Grillet equates écriture and lecture, but even here, in these early novels, the equation of writing and reading is implied.

Critics have pointed out both the roman policier elements and the use of the Oedipus myth in Les Gommes. Often they do so as if the two structures functioned separately, when in fact it is their interplay that is crucial to the act of reading and interpreting the text. From early on the reader is made aware of the fact that Daniel Dupont is still alive, a fact unknown to the detective investigating his death, Wallas. As he reads, he also learns, before the event and even before Wallas, that it is
Wallas who will be Dupont's actual murderer. It is in the mechanism of this learning process that the murder mystery conventions and the myth's structure come into play and interplay.

Through the detective plot clues, the reader follows Wallas as he tries to discover the murderee as well as the murderer. Why does Laurent not have possession of the murdered body? How could Dupont have died as he did? There are too many accounts, including conflicting newspaper stories, one of which has the victim as one Albert Dupont, who indeed dies the next night. But the reader also has another set of clues to interpret. Why has Wallas' watch stopped at 7:30 p.m., Monday? Why is Wallas confused about the day of the week—Monday or Tuesday? Why is he unsure of his goal? Does he really resemble the suspect, André WS? Is he André WS? Why is one bullet missing from his gun, a gun exactly like Dupont's?

It is only through the interaction of these clues with the Oedipus myth structure that the crime's inevitability appears to the reader. Gradually details mount up: the statue of the Chariot of State on the way to the rue de Corinthe, the drunk with his riddle (what animal is a parricide in the morning, incestuous at noon, blind at night?), the eraser with its middle letters of "DI" in a word of seven or maybe six letters (like the police phone number of 124-124-- OEDIPUS, OEDIPE), the picture of the ruins of Thebes, the bronze statue of a blind man, the rue Bergère where Wallas notices his swollen feet, sore from walking. These details serve to give context to the most important of the myth's uses: Wallas recalls having been in this town earlier with his mother. At first he cannot remember the circumstances—a visit? an inquiry about a legacy? It is only at the point at which he recalls that they were really seeking his unknown father that the detective clues fall into place and the reader knows, even before the repetition of the exact description of the killer's preparations in the study, that Wallas will murder Dupont (who may indeed have a son, the reader is told). Alone, neither the mystery plot nor the myth would have guided the act of reading sufficiently to allow the reader's prior knowledge of the crime (and the detective's ironic lack of it). As Jean Ricardou states: "L'activité d'Oedipe est une opération aléthique: elle dévoile ce qui a eu lieu; l'activité de Wallas une opération productrice: elle engendre ce qui n'était pas."

Whereas Oedipus moves from error to knowledge, Wallas moves allegorically from fiction (Dupont's feigned death) to reality (his real death). Since the investigation precedes and brings on the crime, it is the reader who must indeed endeavour to interpret the meaning of the internalized structures.

In addition, the Prologue-Epilogue-five chapter (act) structure contributes to the already strong self-reflectiveness of the text as a text. One finds, for example, in section two of the prologue, that as Garinat

follows Bona's precise directions and instructions for the killing, several significant images (all the more noteworthy in a book of few metaphors) appear: the plan is said to be like perfectly adjusted machinery which bears no surprises; in fact, all Garinati needs to do is follow the text, reciting phrase after phrase, like an actor reading his script, in order to fulfil the word and have Lazarus rise from the tomb. Of course, the reader only needs to do the same to discover a Dupont rising from his tomb. Just as Wallas gives up trying to explain his interpretation of the case to Laurent in carefully chosen words and instead falls back on clichés and ready-made formulae, so Robbe-Grillet uses the clichéd structural conventions of detective fiction in such a way that the act of reading becomes one of active participation, of "production." And this is one of the aims of covertly narcissistic texts.

2. FANTASY

It is interesting to note that metafictionists who use the detective structures also often use those of fantasy literature. Borges professes to intense interest in both Chesterton and Poe (who wrote those horror fantasies but who also "invented" the detective story); Nabokov was influenced, he claims, by Wells as much as by Conan Doyle. The next chapter will examine the linguistic relation between the referents of fictional language as they accumulate for the reader, building up the novelistic world. This is true of any narrative, but is especially clear in the conscious realization of the process itself in narcissistic texts. In fantasy literature, the fictiveness of these referents is axiomatic: the time and space of such narratives need not correspond to those of the reader's experience.

In the kind of metafiction which structures its temporal and spatial relations with the reader on the model of fantasy literature, the act of reading is presented as going one step beyond the one suggested by the detective model above. It involves not just the interpretation of clues and the construction of an ordered plot. It also involves (perhaps at a more fundamental level) the very act of imagining the world, of giving shape to the referents of the words that go to make up the whole of the world that is the "concretized" text being read. Again, this is true of all fiction, but while accepted as axiomatic in fantasy, it is made self-evidently so in metafiction using this model of covert diegetic narcissism.

All literature could be said to be "escape" literature: readers as well as authors want to create worlds as real as, but other than, the world that is, to use the narrator's terms in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In fact, all reading (whether of novels, history or science) is a kind of "escape".

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in that it involves a temporary transfer of consciousness from the reader's empirical surroundings to things imagined rather than perceived. Perhaps it is the imposed order and coherence, as well as the fictiveness, of the worlds created by the imagination that separate them from other linguistic constructs. The act of reading partakes of man's lived life; what he reads competes, during that act, with the empirical world he inhabits. If this is seen as desirable, then one speaks of the freedom, the liberation of the mind through art; if it is riot, then one talks of literature as "escape" in derogatory terms. Theoreticians of the nouveau roman were quick to claim the freedom-inducing properties of the new fiction; because of its linguistic and fictive natures, the novelistic universe can and does compete with the empirical. And its paradigm is the world of fantasy.

The reader's act of forming the universe of fantasy (or of metafiction using fantasy as a model) is like that of forming all novelistic worlds in that it provides the freedom- or the "escape"- of an ordered vision, perhaps a kind of "vital" consolation for living in a world whose order one usually perceives and experiences only as chaos. That the order here is of a fictive universe does not matter; the need and desire for such order is real, as is the need for freedom, for the liberation of the imagination from the bondage of empirical fact.

Not only have works of metafiction and fantasy become simultaneously plentiful recently (the Tolkien fad being only one manifestation of the latter), but they have both often been denied the critical treatment allowed to "serious" literature. However, neither represents a current outside the central mode of literature or fiction (that is, realism), as some have claimed. Fantasy is indeed the "other side of realism" and represents historically a parallel anti equally valid literary tradition. The most extreme autonomous universes of fantasy are still referential; if they were not the reader could not imagine their existence. This has always been the case. In diachronic terms, the same external and internal forces and concerns that spawned traditional realistic fiction could be said to have created Science Fiction. Did the interest and curiosity in exploration promote only true travel tales (and

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11 See Witold Ostrowski, "The Fantastic and the Realistic in Literature," Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich 9, no. 1 (1966), 63: "A work of completely fantastic fiction would have to present creatures that are completely different from us and modes of existence and action with their space and time settings completely alien to us. To tell a story about them the writer would have to use a new, non-human language and then the story would be unintelligible, unimaginable, and awfully uninteresting."
so *Robinson Crusoe*) or can one include Gulliver's imaginary voyages? The positivistic, scientific materialism of the last century brought both *L'Assomoir* and *Frankenstein*.

From the point of view of the reader it is no easier to create and believe in the well-documented world of Zola than it is for him to imagine hobbits or elves: the imaginative leap into the novel's world of time and space must be made in both cases. Any literary landscapes, inhabitants or events can be made credible. "A dream world may be full of inexplicable gaps and logical inconsistencies;" explained Auden, "an imaginary world may not, for it is a world of law, not of wish. Its laws may be different from those which govern our own, but they must be as intelligible and inviolable."12 Like Tolkien's Middle Earth, Borges' self-reflective world in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" has its own history, geography, culture, its own inhabitants, myths, and language.

The invented autonomous cosmos of fantasy becomes a model in metafiction for the temporal and spatial structuration of both the universe of the work and its very narration-par and this is so from the perspectives of both writer and reader. Moving from the views of Pnin and Humbert Humbert, émigrés who see America as an invented land, through the fictive countries of Padukgrad of *Bend Sinister* and Zembla of *Pale Fire*, Nabokov in *Ada* proceeds to rework both time (Veen's time) and space (Terra versus Antiterra), making Van's world as real as the novel's and both as real as the reader's.

The complex interplay of dream and reality, fiction and fact, structures Borges' already-mentioned "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." A metafictional allegory of all reading and writing processes, it presents the story of the creation of another cosmos which decidedly seduces and takes over the existing real one. Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (Torino: Einaudi, 1972) is a more extended version of this same mode. In it Marco Polo provides the Kublai Khan with descriptions of the cities of his empire that the discoverer has already visited (and some he will visit in the future). Soon the ruler notices that these cities, each with a seductive female name, resemble each other, as if the traveller were merely shifting common elements around. He is annoyed then because he feels mocked by Marco Polo's lies: these cities have never existed except in words, or if they did, they no longer do. The stories that follow this outburst (such as "Olivia") reveal, on the contrary, that falsehood is never in words but in things. Later the explorer points out that the ear, not the voice, determines the nature of the tale: like the reader of Calvino's stories, the listener of Marco Polo's constructs the cities in his imagination, feeling free to wander about or leave at will. Kublai Khan remarks that Marco has never spoken of his own city, Venice. With a smile, the storyteller asks what else he has ever spoken of. Each description of each city has said something about Venice. Yet

12 "The Quest Hero" in Isaacs and Zimbardo (eds.), *Tolkien and the Critics*, p. 50.
he avoids speaking of it directly for fear of losing it. Fictive referents are more real to the imagination than are real ones. Stories are only stories—and therein lie their enormous power and value.

This same diegetic concern is revealed more covertly in Calvino’s earlier works, *Cosmicomiche* (Torino: Einaudi, 1965) and *Ti con zero* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967). In these stories, the author becomes intrigued with the imaginative possibilities for narrative which lie latent in scientific theories of creation (of the universe, the earth, the body) and in mathematical and logical concepts of time and space.” In most of the tales the narrator, one Qfwfq, tells of the time when he was only consciousness, straining to achieve bodily form. The referents of the scientific theory are real enough, but in the context of Qfwfq’s narration they become fictive, the fuel for imaginative flight.

Taking the human reader into account, Qfwfq tries to explain his pre-human state as consciousness straining to perceive the new forms of nature by assembling sensations which allow a visual or aural image to form. Then, of course, comes the problem of naming objects and states. Fantasy, Calvino reveals, shares with science the burden of inadequate linguistic resources which threaten to block actual perception; Qfwfq’s situation differs in that he can express his states afterwards without the danger of language guiding or tyrannizing what he actually perceives. In metafictional terms, the interest is in the structural similarity between the efforts of the humanoid consciousness toward perception, meaning, and naming and the imaginative processes of the reader of fiction who must not once the text has established itself allow real referents to blind him to what is really a fictive world. The naming process is done anew in each work.

Qfwfq is content to allow his reader liberties with his story: the process of narration, though guided by him, is open. In *Ti con zero*, in a story about the origin of the birds, the narrator tells the reader, if he does not like the far-fetched (and textually self-conscious) means by which Qfwfq has arrived at the land of the birds, that he can make up another. The important thing is to have him arrive there somehow. Umberto Eco’s “opera aperta,” the freedom within a certain order, here takes on diegetic form.

Indeed, in many tales, Qfwfq is presented as the order-maker, the one who tries to discover meaning through system in the chaos of life data-human and pre-human. The act of reading these texts is analogous to this process, as Calvino suggests in "Priscilla," in the second

14 Science fiction, according to Kingsley Amis, is “that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin.” *New Maps of Hell* (New York: Harcourt, Brac, 1960), p.18.
section of *Ti con zero* which ends with a narrating voice desiring (this is intercellular love) to capture his beloved at last in words, and at least on the page unite "io" and "Priscilla."

Calvino's metafictional fantasies range over time and space both, as do those of Alejo Carpentier, although these are even more directly concerned with narrative time. One of his books, *Guerra del tiempo*, takes its title from Lope de Vega's image of the soldiers in the "war of time." One story in this volume begins in the time of the *Iliad*, Book One, with Agamemnon's ships taking on soldiers to go to Troy, and it continues in section two as the (now) Spanish ships prepare to leave for the new world. In section three, the soldier seen in the first two is now in sixteenth-century France, bidding farewell to his jealous virginal sweetheart; in four, the now Teutonic soldier goes off to a brothel in frustration before leaving; in five, before finally leaving for Troy, he goes home, only to find his sweetheart in his bed. Rumour has it too that Helen is happy with Paris anyway.

The temporal and spatial circling is both a fantasy structure and a metafictional device which points to the literary and fictive ontological status of the text. Carpentier's next tale in the volume is a fragment of a text, beginning at Chapter Four. Already the reader is made aware of the textual identity of the story. It turns out to be essentially a multicultural coming together of all the flood myth heroes, their gods, and their creation myths. In some cultures man is born of woman (Noah), in others of pebbles (Deucalion), in others, of palm seeds (Amaliwak). This latter, ignoring his counterparts' advice, scatters seeds to repopulate the earth, but a vague story of a woman's abduction divides the crowd into factions and war results. The temporal play here is intratextual, as this tale links up with its seemingly independent predecessor. The act of reading becomes one of ordering as well as imagining, sense-making as well as world-building.

Narrative has the power to reverse time: its words progress in a linear fashion in space anti time but the referents of those words can be temporally reversed. In another story, "Journey Back to the Source," Carpentier forces, through the structures of fantasy, this very realization upon the reader. An old man pokes amid the rubble of a building being torn down. When the workers leave, the house puts itself back together, like a movie in reverse. Don Martial lies on his death bed. The candles begin to lengthen and he is now in bed with a woman. At dawn the clock strikes six p.m. The woman is a necessity for the Don, since his wife has died. Coming home one day, he finds his wife and her relatives. Martial (not Don Martial now) is an ardent lover of his wife, but after an argument, they put on their wedding clothes and go off to be married in order to regain their freedom. Presents are returned. Kings are taken back to have inscriptions removed, and a new life begins for Martial. One night after too much drink, the clock seems to
strike five, then four, then three, but the hero pays no heed. He has a party when he reaches his minority; his signature now is no longer valid. After entering school, he learns less and less, while enduring his puberty and adolescent sexual obsessions. Furniture grows taller; he sits on the floor and plays with toys. Once he is given sweets and locked in a room with Melchior, the groom, so that he will not see the coffin. He then visits his sick father. Once an admirer of Melchior, he soon forgets him and plays only with the dogs. Achieving ultimate liberty he talks his own language. Then he feels only hunger, thirst, heat, pain, cold; his field of perception is reduced. After closing his eyes he enters a warm damp body, slipping towards life. At this point, birds return to eggs, fish congeal to roe, the marble appears on a ship returning to Italy, leather gloves grow hair, the bricks return to clay and the house disappears. The angry demolition crew returns and marches in protest to the park where the men sit as the sun goes from east to west, from life to death.

In this short narrative, Carpentier can allegorically present the power of language and of narrative in an emblematic fashion. It is not only in fantasy that time is so controlled: Scott, Balzac, Stendhal—all jumped over fictional years in mere lines of narrative, or in the space between chapters. Characters appear in other places without the reader's having observed their travels. The "fantastic" temporal and spatial self-involvement of metafictional works of the covert diegetic mode is ultimately emblematic of the imaginative leaps in time and space required in the reading of any fictional work. Such narcissism brings to the reader's attention the fact that fantasy is not a deviation from either reality or the conventions of realism. Any text—realistic or fantastic—uses certain conventions in order to create its own reality.

It was suggested earlier that narrative is a basic human faculty, transferred to art from life. Storytelling is imaginative, ordered construction in language. Fantasy, as a human psychological impulse, is the source of the inventive energy that created man's earliest myths as well as his most self-conscious modern art: nature is humanized, assimilated to human forms. Bergson felt that the "fonction fabulatrice" was a human necessity, giving the mind instinctual images free from the perception of the empirical world or reason. Jean Bellemín-Noël has noted that: "ce ne sont peut-être pas les longs romans réalistes, ceux qui se soucient de copier peu ou prou le réel de notre monde quotidien, qui nous disent le plus long sur ce qui constitue au fond

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notre réalité la plus profonde, notre vrai rapport au monde: ce sont les contes de la nuit, du délire et de la fantaisie." In "The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming," Freud saw the importance of fantasies driven by unsatisfied wishes—this case, wishes for an ordered meaningful universe, the totality one can probably only find, or rather create, as a reader or a writer of fiction.

All novelistic fiction-making and world-ordering find paradigms in the reading of fantasy, and it is this realization that the cover diegetic mode of metafiction exploits. This productive labour is no longer the explicit subject of overt teachings to the reader; the text now forces him to read with his imaginative and ordering faculties alert and at work.

3. GAME

While the detective and fantasy structures are the most frequently used in this mode of narcissism, the game model appears often enough to warrant attention. At Cerisy in 1971, Robbe-Grillet gave the theoretical and ideological justification for the conceptual model of the “jeu” in the nouveau roman. With the disappearance of the old myths of “profondeur” (and the bourgeois order of values) came the loss of the sense of the “sérieux” behind art. Behind the “jeu” there is nothing; it is all surface, like a game of cards in which each card has no meaning in itself. However, the player organizes his cards into a “hand” and within the context of the game’s code or rules, gives them their significance. This is not a hindrance to the player’s freedom, but rather it is the very “champ de cette liberté,” allowing him to project his personal ordered creation and meaning upon the chaos of the world. If the cards he plays with are words, then his task is even more creative: “votre organisation du jeu dans votre main, la bataille sur la table seront en même temps la création des règles, la création du jeu et l’exercice de votre liberté, donc aussi bien la destruction des règles, pour laisser de nouveau le champ libre à l’homme libre qui viendra encore après.”

In using a game model, metafiction calls attention to a free creative activity (as in fantasy) within self-evolving rules, an activity that is the same in all fiction reading. The reader must either learn the code (that is, create it) or be unable to bring the fictive world into play. As Claudio Guillén has observed, the early Robbe-Grillet, in trying to divorce seeing from knowing, engages his reader in a sort of “metaphysical” game, a fluid contest with changing rules and high stakes. The links here with the detective structure are clear. Since Poe first codified “The Gold Bug,” the deciphering of codes by the sleuth and the reader has

18 "Notes sur le fantastique (texts de Théophile Gautier), » Littérature 8 (décembre 1972), 23.
been a major motivational force in the action of interpretation-or in the
game plan. The murder of *The Finishing Stroke* is committed with the aid
of the Phoenician alphabet as a code to lure the ingenious Ellery Queen.
Parodic metafictional structures also demand that the reader learn rules,
codes—literary this time—in order to understand the text. Nabokov has
called parody a game, but a serious, if delicate one.21

One of the favourite metafictional game structures seems to be that
inherently narrative one-chess-with its characters of all classes, its
intrigues, and action. This is used either covertly as a structure, as in
Sollers' *Drame*, or in a more overt manner, while still remaining
structural, as in Nabokov's *The Defense*. Here, Luzhin, the chess master,
reads Jules Verne and Conan Doyle, attracted to "that exact and
relentlessly unfolding pattern" which he finds in their plots. Like the
chess player, the reader too develops a strategy. The chess-board of dark
and pale squares of the ground below the window out of which Luzhin
throws himself to commit suicide, is also the black and white of the
printed page—all that is left of the hero. An ardent chess player and
problem-deviser himself, Nabokov denies that his novels are plotted like
games,22 while admitting that his (narcissistic) narratives do have
inexorable rules of logic (as do all literary universes) that govern their
proceeding.

In Calvino's *Le città invisibili*, Kublai Khan tries to understand by
analogy the cities of his empire (in order to possess them) through the
means of chess playing. He presumes a coherent, harmonious, codified
system which he learns, does not exist in the cities at all, although it
does in Marco Polo's and Calvino's literary narratives.

Robert Coover uses a multidimensional game image to structure his
An accountant, paradoxically fascinated by the laws of chance and
probability, Henry begins his real life after work as he sits down to his
creation— a dice game of baseball, complete with league records, politics
(since officers are elected every four years for each club), rewards,
penalties, personnel (old players die; rookies break in). A gradual process
begins: the fantasy game comes to impinge more and more on his
working life. Reality begins to copy art: Pete in the bar reminds him of
Jake, one of his creations. Although this game serves as an allegorical
comment on American life and values, it is of interest here because it is
an extended internalized structural metaphor of the novel, as well as an
overtly metafictional allegory of the creative process.

Henry's invention of his players (dialogue, looks, mannerisms) and
their contexts (favourite songs, love affairs, batting averages) is a *mise en*

21 Strong Opinions, pp. 75-76.
22 The critics continue to disbelieve him and attempt to prove otherwise. See, for instance,
Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston: Little, Bt-own, 1967), pp.138-39, 175-
77, 326-27, 166-67.
*abyrne* of the authorial act of creation that brought Henry into being as well. The *process* of creation is explained by the narrator:

Henry was always careful about names, for they were what gave the league its sense of fulfilment and failure, its emotion. . . . You roll, Player A get a hit of he doesn’t, gets his man out or he doesn’t. Sounds simple. But call Player A “Sycamore Flynn” or Melbourne Trench" and something starts to happen. He shrinks or grows, stretches out or puts on muscle. . . . Strange. But name a man and you make him what he is. Of course, he can develop. . . . But the basic stuff is already there. In the name. Or rather: in the naming.23

This game (about a game, baseball) or this fiction (within a fiction, the novel) begins to structure and dominate the "fiction" as well as the "narration" of the text. Henry lives more and more for his league, losing his job, alienating his few friends. Finally, in an echo of Doomsday, Damonsday CLVII ends the game and the Association and the novel of the same name. The game has become itself self-reflective, for on Damonsday new players act out the ritual death of the great Damon Rutherford, once Henry's favourite (until an unlucky throw of the dice killed him in his prime). Henry too has disappeared. In the last chapter there is no narrative framework, just the game itself; no dice, just the action. Chapter eight is the last, ending with the Damonsday game also awaiting, of course, the last, the *ninth* inning. Both structurally (covert) and allegorically (overt) the game image works to guide the act of reading- of interpreting, ordering, imagining.

This guiding is made even more self-reflective in Sanguineti's *Il giuoco dell'oca*, which the reader is instructed to order by shooting dice himself. The usual linear plot of fiction is replaced (as in Marc Saporta') *Composition N°1*, though by a different mechanism- unbound pages) by an accumulative collage effect of verbal images taken from printed sources, unitable (by the reader) only by *motif* and theme, and the narrating "I" who alternately lies in a coffin and sits writing at a desk, "la faccia al pubblico," blurring (by his myopic vision and the poor light of his candle) the visual images that are here verbalized. The dedication to the novel includes Breton's "ce n'est que superpositions d'images de catalogue." Also a parody of the convention of the "trionfo della morte," of Dante's voyage in the Malebolge, and of the picaresque tradition,24 this novel reveals its ideologically operative aim (as did Robbe-Grillet's theorizing) through its equating of the act of reading with that of writing. On the back cover of the 1967 Feltrinelli editionare these instructions to the reader:

E chi avrà fatto tutte queste fermate e avanzate e ritorni e pene e pagamenti, innante e indietro quante fiate correndo come un matto con i suoi dadi e gli occhiali, e il naso

23 (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 46-47,
puntato e il mente proteso, si che giunga primo o postremo alla conclusione del giuoco, ne avrà tratto il giovamento che pare trarne l’autore, al lume di quella candela, con la testa tutta piegata sopra il tavolo, lì sopra i suoi fogli, lì sopra i suoi libri con le figure, sopra il suo teschio giallo.

The final section (111) ends with the narrator's decision to write the name of the ship we have all been sailing—the title of the novel is then given—followed by another word which he wants placed a little below, in the middle:

“FINE.”

In Sanguineti’s novel, a game system of self-signifying units organized by the reader replaces traditional novelistic structure, but the narrative of the writing- and reading- of the novel remains intact.

4. THE EROTIC

Although less frequently used to specifically metafictional ends, the erotic or sexual metaphor is also found occasionally as an actualized structure in narcissistic texts. Reading becomes, like the fiction-making that is the author's, an act of possession, of control, as in The French Lieutenant's Woman. In Lolita, Humbert Humbert learns at last that he can only possess Lolita, only make her live, imaginatively, in a diegetic erotic version shared with the reader.

That very special kind of relationship between reader and writer could be considered erotic by nature: Barth's genie, in Chimera, expounds on the mutual involvement and active participation of both parties, each necessary for the text- and each other- to live. Sex is a metaphor for this union of processes in Coover's phallic-laden myth parodies in Pricksongs and Descants, or "death-cunt-and-prick songs," as one character calls them. As Robert Scholes has remarked, sex itself is here "the door that connects fictional form and mythic idea."26

William Gass's novel, Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife, provides a more extended structural use of the erotic model in metafiction. In this textually intriguing work— with its unnumbered pages, different page forms and tints, different print sizes and colours— Gass mirrors the loneliness of the writer in that of sexual intercourse for the heroine who livens up the act by inventing fictional worlds (imagining herself as Madame Bovary). Just as she is her body, so "the poet is his language. He sees his world, and words form in his eyes just like the streams and trees there. He feels everything verbally- as does the reader. She sees herself as only "a string of noises": "These words are all I am." "Not even the Dane is any more than that," she adds.

Gass also draws the reader directly into the text by trick footnotes, one of which ends with a verbal rape: "Now that I've got you alone down here, you bastard, don't think I'm letting you get away easily." The narcissism of the text, like that of sex, is here explicit. For instance, after a great proliferation of asterisks, the reader is told: "the stars interfere with reading, pester the eye. (Why don't you go to a movie?)." One page is smudged: "The muddy circle you see just before you and below you represents the ring left on a leaf of the manuscript by my coffee cup. Represents, I say, because, as you must surely realize, this book is many removes from anything I've set pen, hand, or cup to." Aware of the illusion involved in reading, yet insisting that "the acts of the imagination are our most free and natural," Gass plays with that "artificial" yet "vital" paradox present in all narcissistic fiction. Another representation of a coffee cup ring encircles the message: "You have fallen into art- return to life." Although the text deliberately works at being discontinuous, Gass ironically undercuts this as a mere illusion for novelistic art. The final page presents a coffee ring around the navel of a photographed woman- a direct and unifying link to the second sentence of the novel: "there'll be rings on my belly where men have set down drinks"- as there are rings on the manuscript of the narrator.

That the erotic forms the metafictional underpinnings of this novel is what guides the reader through the labyrinthine print of the text. But all novels are erotic in another way- they seek to lure, tantalize, seduce the reader into a world other than his own. Only by forcing the act of reading to become one of imaginative possession, analogous in degree of involvement and active participation to the sexual act, can literature bring itself to life. This is the point that metafiction of this mode brings to the reader's attention.

Far from sharing the fate of a drowned or dead Narcissus, covertly self-reflective narrative often presents the story of its own coming to life, its own creative processes, through the actualized structures of these various models. Detective plots, fantasy, games, the erotic-all these function as self-reflective paradigms, making the act of reading into one of active "production," of imagining, interpreting, decoding, ordering, in short of constructing the literary universe through the fictive referents of the words. Reader and writer both share the process of fiction-making in language. And it is this process that must now be investigated.