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Self-Reflexive Narrative in American Postmodern Fiction

Case Study: John Barth *Lost in the Funhouse*

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Anglophone Language,
Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents for their moral support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis. Making this thesis would not be possible without them. I would also dedicate this work to my unique sister who was a source of inspiration for me and a constant source of support and encouragement during the making of this thesis.

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Abstract

Self-reflexive narrative is the new literary trend which dominated the American postmodern fiction during 1960s and 1970s. John Barth is one of the greatest postmodern American fiction writers. His collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) is characterized with an intensive use of self-reflexive narrative in which the subject of almost all the stories of the collection is how fiction is created and the thought processes that the author goes through while creating the fictional work. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate self-reflexive narrative in selected stories from Barth's collection *Lost in the Funhouse*. The reason for selecting Barth's work is the experimental tendency that dominated most of his postmodern writings, as well as his remarkable efforts to refresh what he calls the exhausted literature. Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon's theories concerning self-reflexive narrative in American postmodern fiction will be used throughout the discussion. The study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter includes an overview about the postmodern American literature and explores the main characteristics of self-reflexive narrative. The second chapter examines the technique of narrative self-criticism in selected stories from the collection, and the third chapter analyses the reader-involvement technique in some selected stories from the collection.

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Introduction

American literature in the 1960s and 1970s was subject to several transformational changes. These changes are shaped by the prominent contemporary writers who are referred to as “postmodernists”. The main concern of this group of writers is to prevent the decline of literature. During that time, literature was exhausted; there were no original topics for postmodern writers to explore and the old realistic conventions were no longer suitable for the postmodern era which was characterized by disorder, chaos and a wide sense of scepticism. They sought to embrace new forms of art including: science fiction, detective fiction, metafiction...etc. These forms were popularized during the 1960s and 1970s and served postmodern writers to a great extent in creating a new model for postmodern fiction writings. Among the literary trends that were dominant in almost every postmodern work is self-reflexive narrative.

Self-reflexive narrative emphasizes the way a given fictional work is created. It shifts the readers' attention from the traditional way of reading that focuses mainly on the story of the work to a new vision that enables him/ her to have a better understanding of the creation process of the text. Hence, this technique provides a detailed account of how and why a literary work is created.

One of the most influential writers of this period is the American John Barth. The latter greatly contributes to the understanding of postmodern fiction mainly through his essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967). This essay explores the notion of exhaustion in literature and deals with the new forms and techniques that artists must develop whenever they want to write fiction. He is also known for his extensive and explicit use of self – reflexive narrative in almost all his works, mainly in his collection of short stories entitled *Lost in the funhouse* which is considered by many critics as extremely self-reflexive. Thus,

this study aims to analyse selected stories from John Barth's collection to show Barth's perception of self-reflexive narrative.

Several theories about self-reflexive narrative in American postmodern fiction will be used throughout the discussion. Patricia Waugh's understanding of self-reflexive narratives highlighted in her book *Metafiction* (1984) will be used to define and explain narrative self-reflexivity. Linda Hutcheon's analyses of the mechanisms of self-reflexive narrative in her book *Narcissistic Narratives* (1980) will be used to analyse the function of self-reflexive narrative within the history of literature.

In terms of structure, the thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter will provide an overview about the American postmodern literature and examine the self-reflexive phenomenon by defining it, investigating its origin, its main characteristics and its theorization in postmodern literature. Additionally, this chapter will attempt to investigate the reason behind the over spread of self-reflexive narrative mainly during the 1960s and 1970s.

The second and third chapters will analyse selected stories from John Barth's collection *Lost in the Funhouse* and highlight the function and prominence of self-reflexive narrative in American postmodern fiction. The second chapter will provide an overview about John Barth as an American postmodern writer. It will also analyse the technique of narrative self-criticism through which the narrator provides commentaries about the construction of the story and how the narrator lays bare the old forms of fiction writings in selected stories from the collection.

The third chapter will examine the reader-involvement as a means of drawing the attention of the readers to the status of the text as a work of fiction. This chapter will also deal with the ways the narrator uses to insist on the readers to take an active role in the creation of the story.

Chapter One: Overview of Self- Reflexive Narrative in American Postmodern

Literature

Postmodernism is an intellectual movement which greatly influenced post -WWII literary writings. Since the 1950s, writers were concerned with the status of literature and its future .Their major goal was to create new ways that match with the postmodern era and prevent the decline of literature. Self-reflexive narrative was the new trend during that period. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explore this seemingly new mode of writing by defining it, pointing out to its main characteristics and attempting to provide an explanation for its over-dominance especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

1. Towards Understanding Self-Reflexive Narrative

1.1. An Overview about Postmodernism and American Postmodern

Literature

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a shift in the American literary movements. This shift was from modernism to postmodernism. Among the contemporary conditions that led to this shift towards postmodernity were the rapid changes in technology and science. For example, the first commercial computer was invented in 1951, the first satellite to carry TV broadcasts was launched in 1962, and the introduction of the internet in America took place in 1969, in addition to the invention of cars, airplanes, and information and communication technologies. These aspects of postmodernity came with new definitions for the established values and led to several changes in philosophy, art and literature.

Unlike the previous literary movements, postmodernism was not regarded as a cohesive movement .It is rather an umbrella term which refers to the various cultural changes that the world has witnessed during 1960s and 1970s in different disciplines including literature, art, architecture, music, films, and fashion (Lindas 4). In addition, defining

postmodernism has always been a very challenging task for theorists. In this regard, Josh McDowell points out that “trying to define and truly understand postmodernism can be a lot like standing in an appliance store trying to watch three or four television shows at once. It defies definition because it is extremely complex, often contradictory and constantly changing” (qtd. in Proctor¹²).

The difficulty of defining postmodernism is often attributed to the underlying suspicion of reason that characterizes the postmodern era (Abootalebi 75). During this period, the previous assumptions of modernism were seen as no longer suitable to the contemporary situation. In other words, there was a dominant sense of scepticism and every single certainty that used to be taken for granted was challenged including the established notion of truth. Hence, the rise of postmodernism led to the ultimate end of modernism.

In literature, Postmodern Literature is generally defined as a non-realistic and non-traditional literature which emerged after the end of the WWII to depict the postmodern life style and culture. It is highly characterized by the use of fragmentation, paradox, parody, black humour, playfulness, and finally the extensive use of self-reflexive narrative devices. Among the Writers associated with postmodern literature are the Americans John Barth, Donald Barthelme, John Hawkes, Robert Coover, William Gass, and Thomas Pynchon.

Interestingly, there is no exact date for the rise of postmodern literature. Some scholars link the emergence of postmodern literature to the death of the Irish novelist James Joyce and English novelist Virginia Woolf in 1941 marking the end of modernism. Others, on the other hand, link the emergence of postmodern literature to the publications of some important postmodern literary works including John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* in 1949, Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* in 1953, Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* in 1956 and William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* in 1959. But, what is agreed about is that postmodern

literature reached its heyday during the 1960s and 1970s with the publication of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* in 1961, John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969, and many other works (Sharma and Chaudhary 191).

In America, the writers who were active during the 1960s and 1970s were labelled as "Postmodernists". This group of writers came with new modes of thought and writing. They sought to challenge the established literary conventions and create new styles of fiction writing (Rezaei 16). Postmodernists argue that the realistic traditions are no longer applicable in the postmodern context. Thus, their major claim against realism, as stated by Bran Nicol, is that "it relies on the assumptions that the created fictional world is verisimilar and analogous to the real world, and story itself is natural and particular, so that writing is simply mediating an already existing story" (24). Postmodernists are against this idea of direct representation of reality and they see the realistic representation as a transparent window to reality.

Postmodernist fiction rejects the notion of universal truths and reality and believes in the non-fixed interpretations of individuals. For postmodernists there is no such a thing as a single fixed reality; it is constructed through the different interpretations and experiences of the individuals which create several realities. In this regard, Meghdadi states "postmodernists believed that there was no reality to be reflected or imitated, there is no absolute truth consequently, and they do exist neither in the world nor in a text" (11). Postmodernism is characterized by a wide sense of uncertainty and scepticism and postmodernists question and doubt everything.

Postmodern fiction emphasises its status as fiction and urges the readers to acknowledge that what they are reading is a work of fiction (Lindas 15). This fact creates a kind of challenge for readers because reading these texts is no longer a matter of just a reception of the narrative, but rather it requires an active engagement in the reading process.

That is to say, the reader is asked to respond to the text, and even more to reflect on the act of reading itself. Moreover, this transition in the role of the reader created a new demand, because contemporary texts are not looking for a simple reader but rather a specific reader who is actively involved in the creation of the meaning of texts. This type of fiction is referred to as metafiction. The following section will attempt to explore this genre of fiction and the focus will be put on one of its main aspects which is narrative self-reflexivity.

1.2.What is Metafiction?

One of the dominant literary practices in the postmodern period is writing metafiction. In general, the term was first coined by William H. Gass in his essay "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction," published in 1970. In the essay, the word "metafiction" was used to refer to the kind of text that consciously emphasizes its status as a text. Gass argues that the American fiction which emerged in the post-WW II era as a rebellion against the tradition of literary realism calling for innovation and experimentation needed a significant term to represent its power (30). He further adds that established terms like "antinovel" or "antifiction" failed to describe the radical narrative innovations of American writers such as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Federman, or Ronald Sukenick. He believes that metafiction is the best term to represent this category of writings because it is specifically fiction about fiction, i.e. fiction that deliberately reflects upon itself as fiction.

Later, Different scholars provided various definitions for the genre metafiction. Patricia Waugh for example provides a comprehensive definition of metafiction arguing that:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental

structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

Metafiction, thus, is a genre of self-conscious fiction that aims to create a fictional world that reflects on itself as a work of fiction and emphasises the fact that the reader must be aware of the text's status as an artefact. Through this definition Patricia Waugh is exploring the relationship between fiction and reality within metafictional works. The characters and the events in metafictional texts are linguistically constructed through language, they have nothing to do with the real world .i.e. they do not represent the reality.

Commenting on Waugh's definition of metafiction, Gesa Gising argues that there is a common point between all metafictional writings .According to Gising what is shared between the metafictional texts is that they are not concerned with the story itself i.e. the major concern of characters and events of the story is how as stated by Waugh herself "the writing is being writtenas a thing being made" (4). By this statement Waugh points out that what is important in metafictional works is the thought processes and the different techniques used to create the fictional novel.

Accordingly, for Waugh the aim of metafiction is to highlight the status of fiction as an artefact. Therefore, Metafictional texts lay bare the old traditions of realism as stated by Waugh "Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion"(6). To achieve this, metafictional writings generally contain implicit, or sometimes explicit, critique of the old realistic conventions of fiction writing.

In fact, Different names are used to refer to metafiction including: the self-begetting novel, the narcissistic novel, the self-referential novel, the self-reflexive novel, the self-conscious novel, the self-reflective novel, auto representation, and the introverted novel

(Hutcheon 1). These terms cannot be considered as synonyms to metafiction, but each one of them refers to a type of a novel that turns the reader's attention to the fact that it is an artefact.

Trying to trace the origins of metafiction in a particular point in history seems to be somehow difficult. This is mainly because there is a kind of disagreement and debate among literary scholars about its origin. Some argue that although the term "metafiction" is relatively new, the concept is as old as the novel itself. They argue that metafiction is not restricted to modern literature, and they relate metafictional techniques to older literary works. Mark Currie for example in 1995 states that:

If metafiction characteristically internalises the relationship between authors and readers, fiction and criticism or art and life, we find its antecedents throughout literary history. Chaucer's elaborate framings of *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's plays within plays, the extensive use of epistolary forms in seventeenth- eighteenth century poetry and fiction, or the intrusive narrators of Fielding and Richardson, are all in a sense precursors of the metafictional paradox.(5)

Novels such as Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, written in the 16th century, and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* written in the 18th century are also considered classics of the genre. The first volume of *Don Quixote* which was published in 1605 makes use of different metafictional elements. One of the elements of metafiction that was explicitly used in this novel is the intrusive narrator. The self-conscious narrator reveals the writing process of the novel mainly in the second part of the novel. In the first part the narrator tells the story of Quixada from a small village. Then, in the second part, he suddenly breaks the narrative and starts discussing issues concerning the creation of the novel (Baktir 175).

Although Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was written two hundred years before all the contemporary theories, it makes use of several metafictional devices. In the novel, Laurence consciously and explicitly confesses that he is creating a fictional work in front of his readers. The most prominent self-reflexive device used in this novel is involving his reader in the creation of the work, and urges him to take part in his writing process. For example in an instance in the story, he asks his reader to be patient with his style of writing by stating: "[y]ou must have a little patience...my dear friend and companion, if you should think somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out, bear with me, - and let me go on, and tell my story my own way"(Öziin 77-78).

Others, on the other hand, strongly associate metafiction with postmodernism and sometimes they even use them as synonymous .They argue that metafiction is a postmodern phenomenon which is closely connected to the ideas and thoughts that characterize that particular period (Hotti 12). For instance Patricia Waugh sees metafiction as a form peculiar to postmodernism (4).

Arguably, Metafiction started to attract attention in the 1960s mainly due to the publication of some classic texts such as John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*(1969), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Furthermore, this technique became very popular during the 1970's when it has become considered as the hallmark of the writers of that era .Thus, although metafiction is not a modern phenomenon, one can say it became the dominant literary trend during the postmodern era.

Patricia Waugh summarizes the characteristics of metafiction as including the following:

the over-obtrusive, visibly inventing narrator ; ostentatious typographic experiment ; explicit dramatization of the reader ,Chinese-box structures , incantatory and absurd

lists ; over-systematized or overtly arbitrarily arranged structural devices; total breakdown of temporal and spatial organization of narrative; dehumanization of character, parodic doubles, obtrusive proper names; self-reflexive images; critical discussions of the story within the story; continuous undermining of specific fictional conventions; use of popular genres; and explicit parody of previous texts whether literary or non-literary. In all of these what is foregrounded is the writing of the text as the most fundamentally problematic aspect of that text. (22)

In his book entitled “*Novel Arguments: Reading Innovative American Fiction*” (1995), Richard Walsh argues that not all contemporary writings, which include metafictional devices or features, can be considered as metafictional works. He further distinguishes between works that “occasionally” make use of metafiction devices and the ones in which the process of fiction writing is the subject matter. He states:

It is important to distinguish between a novel that employs occasional metafictional devices and one to which metafiction is essential, and which can therefore be designated a metafiction; between truly metafictional self-reference, in which the medium is incorporated as subject, and more general self-consciousness, in which it is simply acknowledged; and between fictions that are avowedly metafictional and those that are only rendered so by the violence of critical interpretation. (37)

According to Walsh the truly metafictional novels are the ones that self-consciously reflect on the process of writing. The subject matter of their writing is how the novel is written.

Linda Hutcheon is one of the pioneering theorists of metafiction. Her book entitled “*Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*” (1980) represents a theoretical basis for understanding metafiction. Hutcheon describes metafictional narratives which include a commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity as “narcissistic” (1). She argues that

metafictional texts are self-referring since they mirror their own process of fiction writing and the writing strategies used instead of mirroring reality.

In the first chapter of the Book, which is entitled “Modes and forms of narrative narcissism: introduction of a typology”, Hutcheon provides a distinction between two modes of metafictional texts “diegetic texts” and “linguistic texts” (22). Diegetic texts are those texts which are self-conscious about their own narrative processes. Linguistic texts are those texts which are linguistically self – conscious about their own language (23). Furthermore, Hutcheon points out that these two modes are presented in two forms: an overt form and a covert one (23). In the overt forms the self-consciousness and self-reflection is clearly presented in the texts using self-reflective devices such as footnotes and intertextuality, whereas the covert forms “internalize” this process: They are “self-reflective but not necessarily self-conscious” (23).

One of the most defining characteristics of metafiction is self-reflexivity. Hutcheon for instance, insists that postmodern “fiction is characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality” (Historiographic 2). Self-reflexivity allows the author to comment on the narrative, move forwards and backwards with the events, and to ask the readers to focus on not what is told i.e. the content of the story but rather on how it is told. Robert Coover's novel *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969) is a clear manifestation of the use of self-reflexivity in postmodern American fiction.

Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* is a highly self-reflexive novel. The narrator of the novel frequently abandons the process of storytelling in order to discuss the narrative processes used to create the fiction story. One of the main concerns of Robert Coover in this novel is to attract the reader's attention to the fictionality of the work that it is a fictional story created by the author and it has nothing to do with the real world. For

instance, at the beginning of the story he states “I wander the island, inventing it. I make a sun for it, and trees-pines and birch and dogwood and firs-and cause the water to lap the pebbles of its abandoned shores. This, and more; I deposit shadows and dampness, spin webs, and scatter ruins...I impose a hot midday silence, a profound and heavy stillness” (10).

Metafiction as a literary genre covers a wide range of self-reflexive texts. Its characteristics vary from one text to another. However, the most interesting characteristics that are of interest to our study are the devices of self-commentary (also referred to as narrative self-criticism) and reader-involvement as means of drawing attention to the status of the text as a work of fiction.

1.3.Narrative Self-Criticism in American Postmodern Literature

Linda Hutcheon describes metafiction as “fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (1). According to her, metafiction refers to the kind of texts in which the narrators provide a commentary about their own narrative .i.e. how the story is composed, the characters, and the narrative techniques used. Hutcheon further explains that metafictional texts provide their own critical commentary (6). The majority of metafictional works, thus, tend to constitute a critique about their own construction.

Self-criticism is defined as a judgement of one’s own actions, behaviour or work. Generally in self-conscious fiction narrators tend to provide a critique of their own work by criticizing their own style of writing, some aspects in their stories using some conventions then regretting using them .This could be done either explicitly or implicitly. For example, some metafiction authors make use of the old realistic conventions in their writings then they criticise them.

As far as self-criticism is concerned, Hutcheon believes that one of the tasks of postmodern metafiction is to display its own criticism (144). Metafictional works are not only about their own processes and construction; they also contain in their self-consciousness their own self-criticism. Hutcheon further links self-criticism in metafictional texts to the fact that many metafictionists have a long journey in the academic domain either as students or as teachers. She states “it is not accidental that writers like Barth, Federman, and many other metafictionists is himself an academic” (144). For Hutcheon the critical and the creative meet in their fiction as they do in all narcissist texts.

Narrative self-criticism can be achieved through the use of an intrusive narrator. In Metafictional novels providing commentaries about the story and its creation is done with the help of the intrusive narrator. The intrusive narrator frequently appears in the story in order to attract the reader’s attention toward the creation of the story by providing intrusive commentaries.

Intrusive narrator is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as an omniscient narrator who, in addition to reporting the events of a novel's story, offers further comments on characters and events, and who sometimes reflects more generally upon the significance of the story. David Lodge argues that in the old narrative traditions an author who is narrating the story makes his best not to be noticed in the work, however what is being noticed during the postmodern era in postmodern fiction, specifically in metafictional texts, is that the authors are being explicitly presents in their works discussing issues related to the narration with the reader (24).

Commenting on the creation of the story and the practice of writing fiction is one of the key tasks of the intrusive narrator. This type of comments in metafictional texts are called intrusive comments through which the intrusive narrator frequently disrupts the process of

storytelling in order to reflect on the process of writing fiction. Consequently, this intervention breaks the reader's illusion that what they are reading is a real story with real people and real events. Through this intervention and comments the contemporary writers are emphasising their views concerning the old conventions of writing novels (Saumaa26-28).

As an example of the use of an intrusive narrator is Raymond Federman's novel *Double or Nothing* (1971). Federman is known for his experimental style, and this novel was regarded as highly experimental. In this novel Federman gives each page a shape or structure, and a diagram or picture. The novel includes two stories. The first story is about a narrator who is making an effort in order to create this novel, and the second story tackles the story of a narrator who is intending to tell the events of a young man's arrival in America. This novel is typically a postmodern novel, one of the landmarks of metafiction, where the narrator reflects on how the book is structured.

Self-criticism aims to lay bare the conventions of writing and tell the reader that there are many possibilities for writing the story differently. Thus, since the aim of the intrusive narrator is to interrupt the reading process, he tends to directly address the reader and involve him in the story's creation to emphasise its fictionality. The following section will attempt to explore this important aspect of metafictional text so as to understand its over-use by postmodern writers.

1.4. Reader-Involvement as a Self-Reflexive Narrative Device

Reader involvement is another self-reflexive strategy through which the author involves his readers in the creation of his work. This technique is known as 'breaking the fourth wall' .i.e 'the readers' (Schroeder 15). In metafictional works, the authors frequently break this wall and directly address the readers. Generally, narrators do not give the reader a

specific name in order not to reduce the list of their readers, they either use the word "reader" or the pronoun "you" and more often the pronoun "you" "because it is more engaging.

A classical example for of this technique is Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The story of the novel is about a young orphan named Jane Eyre .Jane really suffered throughout her life from her cruel and wealthy aunt, her cousin to the school's headmaster who is a cruel, hypocritical, and abusive man. Jane became a teacher and she fell in love with Mr. Rochester whom she marries. In a direct address to the reader, Jane says "Reader, I married him"(142). This is the most remembered line from Charlotte Bronte's beloved novel. However, what attracted the literary critics was not the emotion the technique evokes for both the character and reader, but rather the use of direct address technique in the novel.

Hutcheon argues that in metafiction writings the focus is not only on the process of production, but also on the process of reception i.e. there is a kind of parallel between the acts of writing and of reading(130). Thus, in metafiction, the role of the reader shifts from a passive receiver into an active reader who plays an important role in determining the meaning of the text. Hutcheon points out that: "while he reads the reader lives in a world in which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically the text also demands that he participate that he engages 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" (134). As stated in the quotation, metafictional texts are narcissistic in a way that they reflect their own fiction making processes and they emphasizes the acknowledgment of the fictionality of the work .However what is also emphasised is the role of the reader in which only through the joint efforts of both the author and the reader that it will be possible to discover the meaning in the fictive discourse (Hotti 67).

James Pearse also thinks that metafictionists generally explore their fiction writing processes in order to attract the Reader's attention, make them think and make connections, and consider their own presence and the world around them. He points out "Metafictionists often explicitly reveal the component parts of their narrative technique and separate 'the material to be presented from the forms that serve its presentation in order to provoke the reader into establishing for himself the connections between perception and thought'" (75). One can amply say that laying bare the techniques of writing is a necessary method to attract the reader and make him involved in the making of the story. Indeed, it is here where the true essence of postmodern metafiction lays.

2. Why Writing Metafiction?

Writing metafiction has become a need during the post-WWII period. John Barth's essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" published in August 1967 in the *Atlantic Monthly* is considered as the most influential document of postmodern literature or as it is called by many critics as the "manifesto" of postmodernism. At the beginning of the essay, John Barth clarified what he means by "exhaustion" by stating: "By 'exhaustion' I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities"(64). In this statement John Barth is explaining that he is using the word "exhaustion" to refer to the old traditional forms of writing that have been used successively throughout literary history to the point that they have exhausted their possibilities to create something new.

Among the issues that Barth talked about in his essay was the problem of fiction writing in the postmodern era and the position of contemporary writers who are trying to create new and viable art. Barth describes the old literary forms as "used-up". He believes that a particular stage in history was passing and as a result contemporary writers need to take

new directions in order to prevent the decline of literature. Similarly, R. M. Berry and Jeffrey Leo argue that “The Literature of Exhaustion” is a “transitional” shift from modern literature to postmodern literary representations “which marked an earlier sea change, the transition from modernism to the next thing, and which can be regarded as a manifesto for the kind of literature that critics and scholars would soon be calling ‘postmodernism’” (104).

In “The Literature of Exhaustion” Barth points out that there are no new ideas left in the world that contemporary writers could tackle. For him no one has the possibility of originality anymore; the material and formal conventions of writing have limits, and we have finally come to them (29-30). Consequently, he declares that this exhaustion needs to be turned on itself in order to create something new and preserve the exhausted literature. Susana Onega comments “For Barth, the truly creative writer is one capable of giving birth to a new literary form out of the ironic absorption and rejection of the “exhausted” form preceding it”(143).

Furthermore, in the essay, John Barth presented the Argentinian Luis Borges as great fabulists that he admires and suggests using Borges’s works as a model for the new postmodern fiction. According to Barth, Borges is a genius writer and his genius lies in the fact that “he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work” (31). Barth uses Borges as an example of those writers who experiment with fiction to avoid employing “exhausted” forms in their works and urges postmodern writers to follow his path in order to create new modes of fiction writing.

Barth’s solution to the felt exhaustion of literature is to experiment with new modes of narrative. Self-reflexive narrative was what Barth’s introduced as the new literary trend that can make literature move from its exhausted stage to a new developmental stage. John Barth describes this new style of writing as that which “imitates the form of the novel by an author

who imitates the role of author” (75). For Barth since there is no new ideas to talk about, the process of writing fiction itself can be the subject of writing and this is what Barth meant with self-reflexive narrative. With this technique reflecting the real world is no longer what writing novels is all about, but rather the reflection of the aesthetic strategies used to create the fictional work.

The Franco-American novelist Raymond Federman was also among the American writers who, in the 1960s and 1970s, opted for the new style of fiction writing. His works are often labelled as ‘self-conscious fiction’. In his essay, "Surfiction-Four Propositions in Form of an Introduction," published in 1975, Federman emphasises that:

The only fiction that still means something today is that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it: the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination and not in man's distorted vision of reality--that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality. (25)

According to Federman self-conscious fiction allows the contemporary writers to use their imagination to create something new and not to restrict themselves to representing reality.

In Raymond Federman's fictional works, the experimentation is more radical and somehow aggressive. This was demonstrated in his experimental novel *Double or Nothing* (1971). The book is unusual in the sense that each page from the book contains a particular structure or a shape and the words inside the pages move from one place to the other in a kind of puzzles. Additionally some pages they only contains pictures or graphics with few words inside them. The structure and the form of the novel make it a highly experimental novel. This is an example of the new trends that Barth encourages.

Obviously, when John Barth published his short story collection entitled *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968, scholars agreed that with this publication Barth confirmed his own theory about self-reflexive narrative. Reading the stories, the reader gets to explore Barth's wit of using this technique as he creates different strategies for narrative self-reflexivity. The following chapters will attempt to analyse the use of self-commentary and reader involvement techniques in some stories of *Lost in the Funhouse*.

Chapter two: Narrative Self-Criticism in *Lost in the Funhouse*

John Barth is one of the main figures in the postmodern American fiction who wrote self-reflexive fiction. His collection of short stories *Lost in The Funhouse* is the most representative of the genre. This chapter will attempt to give an overview about John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* and will endeavour to analyse the technique of narrative self-criticism in some selected stories from the collection.

I. An Overview about *Lost in The Funhouse*

The collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice* is written by John Barth in 1968. John Simmons Barth is an American novelist and short-story writer, who is well known for his innovative ideas concerning the postmodern American fiction. He is classified among the early postmodern writers; a "premier theorist and practitioner of postmodernism" (Lindsay 1). In his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" he talked about the exhaustion that literature was facing during that time and he called for new ways to overcome this exhaustion and to create new possibilities for fiction writing.

Lost in the Funhouse contains fourteen pieces which in his "Author's Notes" Barth calls "neither a collection nor a selection, but a series" (7). The collection is regarded by many literary critics as John Barth's creative response to literary exhaustion (Abu Jweid and Ali Termizi 1072). Barth is known for his advocacy for literary innovation and experimentation, he prefers to experiment with new modes of narrative and that is why an experimental tendency explicitly appears in *Lost in The Funhouse*.

The full title of the collection is *Lost in the Funhouse; Fiction for print, tape and live voice*. Hence, the point that Barth is making here is that there are some stories within the collection which can take another form rather than the print form; some stories can be

recorded in a tape, others can be heard live. Furthermore, in the Author's Note he clearly distinguishes between the stories that should take the print form and the other ones that can be recorded or read.

Barth is frequently described as a "difficult" and "playful" writer who is obsessed with his writing tricks rather than reflecting reality. Thus, the view about Barth as a difficult writer who deviates from the general norms of storytelling that readers are accustomed to would tremendously expand after the publication of *Lost in the Funhouse*, because this collection of short stories is more than telling stories, rather shedding light on how stories are created. Therefore, when *Lost in the Funhouse* was published, it was regarded as typically a postmodern work due to its experimental nature and self-reflexive narrative. Precisely, the short story "Lost in the Funhouse" which takes the same name as the entire collection is considered not just one of Barth's most famous pieces, but also one of the most critically acclaimed short stories in the postmodern American fiction (John Barth).

Lost in the Funhouse is a metafictional work. In which Barth uses different metafictional techniques. Among those techniques narrative self-criticism is dominant narrative technique. Through this technique the narrator provides commentaries about the narrative. Hence, in the following sections, we will attempt to analyse the narrator's instances of commenting on the stories in some selected stories from the collection.

2. The Elements of Narrative Self-Criticism in "Lost in the Funhouse"

The short story "Lost in the Funhouse" is about a family trip to Ocean City, Maryland. Ambrose the protagonist of the story is a thirteen years old boy, he is traveling with his family, his mother and father, his older brother Peter, their Uncle Karl and a fourteen-year-old neighbour named Magda. Both Ambrose and Peter are attracted to Magda but unlike Peter, Ambrose is somehow shy to show her his feelings.

Moreover, the family were going to Ocean City on the Fourth of July, the most important holiday in America which is the Independence Day. They usually visit the place three times in a year on Memorial, Independence, and Labors Days. The family is traveling by their car while in the past Americans used to travel by train .The parents and Uncle Karl are sitting in the front seats and the kids in the back. During the ride, the kids are playing games; one particular game which becomes a tradition in their family is “looking for the towers” (83). Which are the electrical towers that mark the halfway point of their trip. The winner this time is Magda and her prize is a banana, which she decides to share with Ambrose and Peter.

After arriving to the Ocean City some decided to swim, others prefer to seat and play near the beach. Then the kids decide to go through the funhouse and try its mirror maze. Peter and Magda go off by themselves, and Ambrose is left alone in the funhouse. Ambrose takes a wrong turn and get lost in the terrifying corridors of the funhouse. While there, Ambrose starts to imagine different endings to his situation dying in the funhouse or meeting someone then they become attached to each other when they go out. By the end, Ambrose finds his way out from the funhouse and goes back home with his family and Magda.

Among the techniques through which the narrator could provide critical commentaries on the narrative is narratorial intrusion. A frequent narrative self-criticism strategy is to use narratorial intrusion to comment on the creation processes of the story. The narrator of the story constantly interrupts the story in order to tell the reader about its construction, the methods, the techniques used while writing and how the author plans for his story. The narrator also tries to tell the readers about the choices that he makes, and the other possibilities that he has. In addition, the narrator often criticizes some aspects about his writings.

2.1.1. Narratorial Intrusions in “Lost in the Funhouse”

Arguably, the story “Lost in the Funhouse” provides the most explicit exposition of the technique of narrative self-criticism. From the beginning of the story, the narrator is explicitly open about the methods that he uses in writing his story, which are according to him, are used by writers of fiction in general. The first method that Barth talks about is the “Description of physical appearance and mannerisms” in which he states that “Description of physical appearance and mannerisms is one of several standard methods of characterization used by writers of fiction” (78). Following this method, the narrator provides a detailed description of the physical appearance of the main characters in the story.

The narrator describes Magda as a pretty girl, an exquisite young lady, possessing “very good manners” and a “figure that was very well developed for her age”, a left-handed girl (77) whereas Uncle and Peter resemble each other in their faces, they “Both had dark hair and eyes, short husky statures, deep voices” (80). For the father of Ambrose, the narrator at first reveals that it is difficult to describe him because no such special feature of Ambrose’s father stand out only that he “wore glasses and was principal of a T—Country grade school” then in the last pages he reveals that the father is tall and thin and have a fair hair (95). For the mother, there is no specific description of her appearance only that she is a pretty woman. For Ambrose the protagonist of the story, he describes him as an adolescent ‘at that awkward age ‘with a high pitched voice (77).

The second method that the narrator explores is “keeping the sense operating”. According to Barth, by using this method “the reader’s imagination may be unconsciously oriented towards the scene” (78). As an example for this method Barth provides different expression such as “the brown hair of Ambrose”, “mother gleaming in the sun”, “the smell of

Uncle Karl's cigar" and the "fragrance of the ocean" (79). By using such expressions, the narrator aims at attracting the reader's attention and makes them imagine the story.

Furthermore, the narrator provides explanation about some specific forms and symbols that he uses in his writing. For instance, in page (77) he writes a sentence with italics then he explains that italics "is used as an equivalent to oral emphasis of word and phrases as well as for titles of complete works". He also adds that italics "is used in fiction stories for outside, intrusive, or artificial voices such as radio announcement or newspaper articles". In addition, Barth also explains why he uses some initials and blanks by stating "Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality." Thus, the narrator provides the readers with all the methods that he uses and their function in self-reflexive fiction.

Concerning the ending of the story, Barth provides different endings for the story. By doing so, he gives the readers an access to his mind in order to consider the different possibilities that he considers while trying to find a conclusion for this story and the choices that he makes (Panigrahi 71). Therefore, the first possible ending that he provides could be that Ambrose meets a person in the funhouse and they both help each other until they find their way out. However, in the second version of the ending of the story, Ambrose dies "of starvation" in the funhouse "telling stories to himself in the dark" (95). Whereas; in the last possible ending of the story provided by Barth, Ambrose imagines himself to be "successful, married, at ease in the world, the trials of his adolescence far behind him" (96).

Additionally, the narrator of "lost in the Funhouse" provides some critical commentaries concerning the arrangement of the narrative at several intervals. The narrator starts the story by describing the main characters, the drive to Ocean city, explaining the methods that he uses then in page (82), he stops questioning whether the details that he

provides are relevant to the theme of the story or not . Furthermore, the narrator argues that the title of the story is “Lost in the Funhouse,” so the details given about the family drive to Ocean City do not seem necessary or relevant at all. Then he provides another arrangement for the story as he states:

The beginning should recount the events between Ambrose’s first sight of the funhouse early in the afternoon and his entering in it with Magda and Peter in the evening. The middle would narrate all relevant events from the time he goes in to the time he loses his way; middles have the double and contradictory function of delaying the climax while at the same time preparing the reader for it and fetching him to it. Then the ending would tell what Ambrose does while he’s lost, how he finally finds his way out, and what everybody makes of the experience. (91)

The narrator is not satisfied with the way he arranged the story, he sees that the events that he talked about do not seem relevant to the story as a result he provides another arrangement for the story . Moreover, the narrator comments that “long time has passed and nothing really happened, which is related to the theme of the story” (92). However, even after his statement he does not move directly to the funhouse, he continues giving details about the family arrival to ocean city, what they do, what they talk, and how they behave. Then, once again in page (93) he stops and criticises his narrative, he says “there is no point in going further with these events as it is not getting anybody anywhere, they haven’t even come to the funhouse yet”.

According to Henry Shepard, the narrator’s voice in “Lost in the Funhouse” is very similar to John Barth's voice in his essay “The Literature of Exhaustion”. The similarity between them holds the fact that what the narrator is doing by revealing what he is doing in “Lost in the Funhouse” expresses Barth’s thoughts and ideas that he calls for in his essay in

order to create a metafictional work as a new style to get out of the exhaustion that literature was facing during that time (10).

Furthermore, Shepard argues that the narrator in “Lost in the Funhouse” has two sides; the first side is expressed through the story-centered voice in which the narrator wants to tell the story of Ambrose and his trip to Ocean City. As an example, we have the first lines of the story “For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of fear and confusion. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday . . .”(77). What can be noticed from these sentences is that they are all related to each other and they all sound that they are being told by the same person. Moreover, the second side of the narrator is the metafictional side; which is reflected through the metafictional voice. As an example from the story “A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, which in turn is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases “They should be used sparingly” (77). These lines are not related to the story of Ambrose; there is no relation between the story of Ambrose and the use of italics in literature. Thus, the metafictional side of the narrator is not telling the story of Ambrose but how his story is created (11).

While analysing the two sides of the narrator, it can be understood that both of them have the same purpose which is to tell Ambrose’s story in the funhouse, but each one of them emphasises a different aspect in the story. The first side focuses on telling the story, while the second side explores the processes that are used in writing it. By using a narrator with two different voices, one is a story centred voice devoted to represent the narrator’s strong passion for writing literature, and the other one is the fictional voice representing the curiosity of the narrator embrace new styles and overcome the old conventions. John Barth is putting under the spotlight the idea of creating new ways of writing which suits the postmodern period they are living in. In “Lost in the Funhouse” there is no clear distinction

between the author and the narrator of the story. Thus, in the following section we will examine the authorial intrusion in this story.

2.2.The Authorial Intrusion in “Lost in the Funhouse”

The intrusion of the author is also another method used by most postmodern writers in their fictional works to comment about the fictionality of their works and John Barth is no exception. Commenting on the postmodernist fiction, Brian McHale states ‘No longer content with invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds, the artist makes his freedom visible by thrusting himself into the foreground of his work. There is a catch, of course: the represented in the act of creation or destruction is himself inevitably a fiction’. (30). Thus, when the author is present in his work talking about his creation, then there is no clear “distinction between the real world and the literary one”. The intrusion of the author breeches the traditional order of an author, a narrator and the characters because in some cases the author of the work is also the narrator and sometimes he is even a character in the work (Garrissos 23-24).

According to Henry Shepard, in “Lost in the Funhouse”, Barth challenges the main role of an author. Generally, in literary works, authors try their best to hide their presence within their stories; however, it is almost impossible for metafictional writers to maintain this role. Accordingly, in metafiction writings, the creation processes of the story are explicitly explored by the authors. In addition, what metafictional authors usually do is to ask the readers to play an active role and participate in the creation of meaning rather than simply reading a story. Consequently, in “Lost in the Funhouse” both the readers and Barth are not fulfilling their normal roles.

Unlike the magician, the intrusive author in “Lost in the Funhouse” reveals all the tricks concerning the making of the story. Inger Christensen calls this kind of intrusive author

as the “fictional author” referring to this fictional author as being both the narrator and the author of the story. She states “the historical author will of course always exist outside and apart from the work itself, so that metafiction only operates with an additional factor: the fictional author [who] places himself inside the fictional world and figures as a structural element in the novel”(110). This is the case of the author in “Lost in the Funhouse” where there is no clear cut between the roles of the author and the narrator in the story.

Additionally, the explicit presence of the author in metafictional works sometimes threatens to hinder the flow of narratives. In this sense, in most metafictional stories there is no such thing as a logical or chronological order of the events, mainly because in such works, the author is jumping from one point to another. The author sometimes talks about the events, then, he uses flashbacks to talk about other events or aesthetics of the story. By doing so, the readers are sometimes confused and find it very difficult to figure out the meaning of the story.

In ‘Lost in the Funhouse’, Barth challenges all the perceived assumptions that the readers expect from the role of author to which they have been accustomed to. In the story, Barth frequently interrupts the narrator of the story in order to remind the readers that what they are reading is a work of fiction, it is not real, and it does not represent the real world. By doing so, Barth is expressing his refusal towards using the old exhausted methods of realism which emphasize the fact that a work of literature is a reflection of reality which does not suit the postmodern condition. By providing commentaries about the narrative, the narrator deviates from the plot structure of the story. The following section will analyse the plot structure of “Lost in the Funhouse”.

3. The Plot Structure in “Lost in the Funhouse”

“Lost in the Funhouse” does not have a typical “conventional plot structure”. The narrator of the story frequently deviates from the plot in order to discuss something related to the language used, the techniques and the process of writing itself. Furthermore, the narrator gives the readers the way in which the stories should be arranged, what should be placed as the beginning, the middle and what the end includes, but he does not follow this structure in the story as he states “details of the plot’s so-called climax, introduction and conclusion are scrambled throughout the text, and are not found within the expected locations” (90). What this quotation may refer to is the “instability” of the text because most of the time the narrator is telling something and then he is doing something else (Buckingham 11).

From what is stated before, it comes clear that what makes “Lost in the Funhouse” typically a metafictional text, is those metafictional features that Barth uses in the story including the unclear distinction between the author, the narrator, the protagonist and the unconventional plot structure in which, the narrator occasionally deviates from the narrative in order to give some comments concerning the narrative and the literary devices that are used. Additionally, the metafictional text is known by its rejection to the old conventions in other words, “Lost in the Funhouse” doesn’t embrace any old realistic conventions (Buckingham 12).

John Barth also uses the narrative self-criticism technique in order to comment about the usefulness of the old realistic conventions of writing and tells the reader that there are new possibilities for writing the story differently. Thus, the following section attempts to examine Barth’s comments concerning the old realistic modes of writing fiction.

4. The Realistic Conventions from the Barthian Perspective in “Life-Story” and “Title”

John Barth’s short story entitled “Life-Story” represents the structure of “story-within-a-story”. The story is about a writer who is writing a story about another writer writing a story. All the characters in this story are nameless and each writer in the story is referred to by a letter of the alphabet instead of a proper name. The narrator’s aim is to write an entertaining story according to the conventional realistic manner which includes a “grand situation”, a “vehicle situation”, full of characters, heroes, heroines, climax and coherent events as he states “I want passion and bravura action in my plot, heroes I can admire, heroines I can love, memorable speeches, colourful accessory characters, and poetical language” (123).

The narrator of “Life-Story” does not want to be a “self-conscious” writer; he wants to distance himself as much as possible from his work. Moreover, he does not want his voice to be present in the story in order not to interrupt the illusion of the real story. He states:

Another story about a writer writing a story! Other regresses in infinitum! Who doesn’t prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own processes? That doesn’t continually proclaim “Don’t forget I’m an artifice!”? That takes for granted its mimetic nature instead of asserting it in order (not so slyly after all) to deny it, or vice-versa? (121)

With this statement, the narrator refuses to write a self-conscious work which points out to itself as an artefact. He further asks “Why must writers choose to write such stuff when life is so full of people and places and situations to write about? (122).

Interestingly, the narrator struggles to write a meaningful beginning for story. He drafts different beginnings but he is not convinced by any of them. Soon after, the plot of the story deviates from writing a realistic story into another direction that deals with the “theory of short stories” mainly how to write a story about heroes and heroines in a time where the “literary vehicle available” is to write a self-conscious story (Chang 30). During that time, self-reflexive narrative is the most suitable technique to write a story that matches the literary period we are living in. He points out “self-conscious, vertiginously arch, fashionably solipsistic, and unoriginal— in fact a convention of twentieth-century literature” (121).

Ironically, although the narrator does not want to be a self-conscious writer, his comment from the beginning shows the opposite. From the very beginning of the story, the narrator is self-consciously commenting about his writing. For example, he is commenting about his inability to find the appropriate beginning for the story, a ground situation which includes “a coherent, trenchant plot and conflict” (125). The narrator also contradicts himself when he states that he prefers “straight-forward tales of adventure” rather than “experimental, self-despising, or overtly metaphysical characters of Samuel Beckett’s or Jorge Borges’s” (128). Although the narrator does not prefer to write a story using similar style as Samuel Beckett and Luis Borges’s, he ends up writing a story which shares the same characteristics as their writings. Accordingly, the more the narrator writes, the more he produces an experimental self-conscious story (Life-Story Summary John Barth).

Through the story of “Life-Story”, Barth is referring to some aspects of the postmodern writer’s thoughts and ideas (Panigrahi 73). Contemporary writers reject the old realistic conventions arguing that they are preventing the modern artists from using their imaginations and creativity to create something new. In addition, these conventions can no longer serve the postmodern context. As the case in “Life-Story”, where the writer is unable even to write a beginning for his story. This situation represents the case of many

contemporary writers who are born during the postmodern period and who are unable to write realistic stories that reflect the real world. The solution found by these writers is to write a self-conscious fiction which deals with its own process of writing fiction as “Life-Story” which ends up becoming a fiction about fiction.

Likewise, John Barth’s next story from the collection entitled “Title” is also another example where Barth lays bare the old realistic conventions as no longer useful for contemporary writers. The story of “Title” is about a writer who is trying to write a story but he gets stalled in the process. The narrator of the story is frustrated from the situation he is in, and that there is nothing he can talk about because everything has been said before by other writers. The narrator states “What now. Everything’s been said already, over and over; I’m as sick of this as you are; there’s nothing to say. Say nothing” (109). According to the narrator, all the language expressions and the old literary forms have been used over and over by writers to the point that they become exhausted. It seems almost impossible for writers to write something new since they have to follow the path of their precursors and write similar works using the old literary forms.

Furthermore, the narrator of “Title” feels that he is blocked and unable to write anything about the story, he states:

We’re more than half-way through, as I remarked at the outset: youthful vigour, innocent exposition, positive rising action—all that is behind us In this dehuman, exhausted, ultimate adjective hour, . . . every humane value has become untenable, and not only love, decency, and beauty but even compassion and intelligibility are no more than one or two subjective complements to complete the sentence . (110)

According to the narrator, the old realistic conventions which emphasize reflecting the real world should be put behind. Stories which include real characters and events and deal

with human relationships such as love stories are not interesting anymore rather they are exhausted. Throughout the story, the narrator keeps complaining about his inability to write a meaningful story using the old realistic forms and he ends up by not writing any story.

As in “Life-Story”, the main concern in “Title” is how to write a “conventional story”. The narrator abandons the story before he develops it (Chang 30). He points out “The worst is to come. Everything leads to nothing: ...The final question is, Can nothing be made meaningful?”(109). The narrator is unable to develop the story, thus his self-conscious commenting about the story becomes the centre of the story. In “Title”, the word ‘blank’ is frequently used by the narrator .This word is mainly used to refer to the blank that the narrator is feeling when he is trying to develop a meaningful story. Consequently, the narrator is asking for new ways, new ideas to produce a meaningful story. He argues: “And that my dear is what writers have got to find ways to write about” (115).

Thus, what Barth is trying to convey through writing this two short stories “title “and “life-story” is that the time for writing realistic stories is gone . It is a new era which includes new writers who have new thoughts and they want to convey them through their writings. According to Barth, the problem of writing a story itself can be the subject of writing a story which is the case of many stories in John Barth Lost in the Funhouse. He states “it turns the artist’s mode or form into a metaphor for his concerns” (78). For Barth, what can defeat this exhaustion is to make it the topic of writing itself and to talk about how contemporary writers are struggling to write fiction stories using the old traditional conventions. In other words, the self-consciousness of the contemporary writer about the issue can be the new way for writing something new and different; they can write about the process of writing, the methods that they use, the obstacles that they go through while writing fictional stories and so on.

Barth's ideas are confirmed throughout most of the stories in his collection including these two stories "Title" and "Life-Story". Most of them are about the process of writing fiction and laying bare the old realistic convention.

Narrative self-criticism is the dominant techniques that Barth used in his collection of short stories. From one hand, Barth uses this technique to comment about the creation of the stories. From the other hand, he uses the technique to lay bare the old realistic forms of fiction writings.

Chapter Three: Reader-Involvement in *Lost in the Funhouse*

Reader Involvement is an important aspect in John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*. Barth challenges the role of the reader from a simple receiver of a text into an active co-creator of the text. The reader in *Lost in the Funhouse* is asked to read, analyse, comment and help the author to create a meaning for the text. Thus, due to the significant role of the reader in Barth's collection of short stories this chapter will attempt to study the author's insistence to involve the readers in selected stories from the collection.

1. The Role of the Reader in *Lost in the Funhouse*

In *Lost in the Funhouse* Barth denies the belief that the author is the only creator and controller of his text. From the first moment in the collection, the author shares the responsibility of creating a meaning for the text with the reader. Most stories of the collection do not follow the linear structure in which the reader can passively read the novel. In some stories the reader is the creator of the story, since he is asked by the author to follow his instruction and link words and sentences in order to create the story. Thus, if the reader wants to read the book, he has to actively be engaged in the story in order to be able to come out with a meaning from the texts.

Discussing the role of the reader in *Lost in the Funhouse* many literary critics argue that in this collection of short stories Barth puts a big burden on the readers. This issue can be explored in many stories within the collection where the narrator of the story fails to control his story mainly because he is lost between the process of telling and the process of writing in which are both discussed simultaneously. Thus, in this case the reader is forced to interfere and help the author and participate with him in order to construct the story and make a meaning. Therefore, this means that the authority of constructing a meaning for the text no

longer resides with the author; it is rather shared between him and the reader (Worthington 9).

Moreover, there is a kind of disagreement among literary critics concerning the status of the reader in *Lost in the Funhouse*. Some critics on the one hand, argue that the reader in *Lost in the Funhouse* is given more freedom toward the interpretation of the texts. The argument provided to support this view is that by asking the readers to participate in the creation of the story, the readers are given the freedom to make their own stories, create their own meaning of the stories rather than one meaning imposed by the author. Others on the other hand, argue that the reader of *Lost in the Funhouse* has a big responsibility toward the texts. When the readers are asked to participate, they are given a responsibility to help the narrator in order to construct a meaningful story (Worthington 10).

Interestingly, John Barth's stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* demand a skilful reader. Barth's stories do not demand simple readers or even active readers, but rather they demand skilful readers who are qualified enough to go through the mirror mazes that Barth creates in his stories, and come out with a meaning from their readings. The stories of the collection are highly self-conscious, in one paragraph the narrator is telling the story and in the other one he is discussing the making of the story. Thus, the readers need to be qualified enough in order to follow with the narrator till the end and understand the meaning of the story (Worthington 11-13).

Furthermore, some stories within the collection such as "Frame-Tale" take the form of a puzzle. In such stories the readers are asked to follow the narrator instructions and connect letters in order to create the story, so if the readers do not have some qualities or skills they will not be able to follow the instructions and construct the story that the narrator asks them to construct. In this regard, Beth A. Boehm argues "Barth creates an audience of active, self-

conscious readers capable of re-experiencing the pleasures of discovery whenever they are confronted with a new puzzle” (118).

In *Lost in the Funhouse* “the old analogy between Author and God . . . can no longer be employed” (Lost 125). In this collection the God- like authority that the author used to have in the traditional literary stories has diminished as stated by Edwards Brian that the stories of *Lost In the Funhouse* includes a “reduction of traditional forms of authority” (265) which clears the way for reader participation in the construction of textual meaning . The author is no longer the one who poses the ultimate power over the text; the authority is shared between both the author and the reader. In some stories of the collection the author is unable the construct a story by himself, he either does not know how to begin his story or how to end it and he asks for the help of the reader. Thus, by doing so, the author shifts the authority over the text from himself to the reader which means that they are both responsible for making the text.

Marjorie Worthington argues that although the texts in *Lost in the Funhouse* suggest that the power of the author is decreased and the power of the reader is increased, the author still possesses an important role. She states “ even as the metafictional elements of *Lost in the Funhouse* project a new direction for late twentieth-century fiction, closer examination reveals that they also serve to revalidate the very tenets of traditional narrative that they ostensibly repudiate: the centrality of authorial authority and the creative power of the individual”(9). It is true that self-conscious writings request the readers to play a powerful role, however, it also demonstrates the need for a self- conscious “constructing authorial figure” (10). According to Worthington when the texts self-consciously reflect the processes of their own construction, they also reflect the importance of its author. Commenting on the author of *Lost in the Funhouse* she states:

By claiming to be unable to control the story he is crafting, the author-narrator demonstrates his continued presence in and creative influence over the text. By asserting his failure, he simultaneously asserts his (albeit waning) power, illustrating that the self-consciousness, the self-reflexivity of metafiction is simultaneously and necessarily a recognition of authorial presence. (10)

This quotation indicates that even when the author seems to lose control over his story, he is reflecting on his presence in the story. When commenting about his inability to control the story he demonstrates the self-consciousness of the text.

According to John Barth “the text... asks of the reader a practical collaboration.”(7).With this statement Barth argues that writing self-conscious fiction needs the efforts of both the writer and the reader. This view is demonstrated in his collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse*, in which both the writer and the reader play an important role working hand by hand in order to construct a meaning for the texts.

Involving the readers in the process of writing the story can be done either explicitly or implicitly. In the explicit way the author directly addresses his readers in order to attract their attention and highly engage them in the story. In this case the author can address them using either the word “reader” or the pronoun “You”. The following section will attempt to analyse the reader involvement in selected stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* to show the great importance that Barth is giving to his readers in his writings.

2. The Reader as an Active Agent in “Autobiography”

The story “Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction” makes a clear exposition of the reader involvement technique which characterizes most of self-reflexive narratives. One of the prominent features of self-reflexive narrative is to include a straight-forward dialogue

between the author and reader where the author directly addresses the readers and explain to them the processes that he uses in the composition of the text. In this story the reader is given a prime emphasis as he is asked to be a co-creator of the story.

In “Autobiography” the traditional role of the reader as a mere consumer “to be lectured to” is challenged. Rather, in this story he is an active agent who is making efforts to decode the meaning of the text and even the story itself involves the reader in the process of its own narration. Barth’s story starts with “You who listen give me life in a manner of speaking”. This statement can hold two different interpretations. The first interpretation is that the narrator is asking the readers to let him speak and listen to him to make his narration purposeful which gives him life. The second interpretation is that the narrator is asking the readers to speak to him, so that he feels alive by being the addressee of the speaker and with this he can also construct his identity and feel revived. The second interpretation makes the listener the doer of speaking and thus shifts the role of the listener to the narrator (Al-Rubaiee 6).

Accordingly, in this story both the narrator and the audience are given two different roles. Although the narrator gives his story for the readers in the written form, he does not address them as readers but rather as listeners. This indicates that the audience of “Autobiography” have to play the roles of a reader and a listener. Similarly, the narrator of the story from one hand, he writes his story and on the other hand he plays the role of a speaker. Interestingly, the point that Barth is making here is “that people are identities constructed through either one of these four roles: readers, writers, speakers and listeners. This is Barth’s strategy to attend to all identities first in their textual context and second in their constructed posture” (Al-Rubaiee 7).

In the first statement of the story the narrator asks the readers to give him life which indicates that the narrator is giving the readers a kind responsibility to construct an identity for him. However, in the second statement the narrator takes back this responsibility from the readers by saying "I won't hold you responsible". With this statement the narrator takes back the responsibility that he gives to the readers. This act shows that the narrator is somehow lost; he does not know what he wants exactly which creates a kind of confusion in the mind of the readers.

Moreover, in the next statement the narrator checks whether the reader is following him, as he asks "Are you there?" (43). Through this question the narrator emphasises that the presence of the readers is very important to him. The readers are the ones who will construct an identity for him. He further adds "If so I'm blind and deaf to you, or you are me, or both're both. One may be imaginary"(43). With this statement the narrator tells the readers that his voice can only be heard through them, they represent him, and they are the ones who can give life to this story.

"Autobiography" is a "self-recorded fiction" which means that it is meant to be heard. Ironically, when the narrator addresses the readers he states "Look, I'm writing"(43). Which means that the narrator is asking the audience to visualise him while he is writing; then he quickly remembers that he is "self-recorded" fiction, meant to be heard and he immediately corrects his fault and states "No, listen, I'm nothing but talk" (43). Here the narrator addresses his audience's auditory dimension. Through this twist, Barth emphasises the importance of both the text and the talk. Stories should be both written and recorded so that they can be read and heard. This action can guarantee a wide audience for his stories.

As the case in many stories of *Lost in the Funhouse* the narrator of "Autobiography" reaches a point when he becomes unable to end his own story. He states "I'll turn myself off

if I can this instant” (46). The narrator wants to end his story but he is unable, so he asked the readers to end the story “if anyone hears me, speaking from here inside like a sunken submariner, and has the means to my end, I pray him do us both a kindness” (46). With this statement the narrator begs the readers to end his story which shows the great importance that the narrator gives to the readers.

Therefore, the narrator gives the readers the authority to interfere in the creation of the story by finding an end to the story. The narrator even gives the readers more importance in the creation of the narrative than himself as he points out “I see I see myself as a halt narrative: first person, tiresome. Pronoun sans ante or precedent, warrant or respite. Surrogate for the substantive: contentless form, interestless principle; blind eye blinking at nothing. Who am I. A little crise d’“identite for you” (44). The problem of finding the appropriate closure to the story is very common in *Lost in the Funhouse*. The narrators of some stories are unable to find an end and other struggles to find a beginning to their stories. In “Autobiography” the narrator faces the both problems because he is not satisfied with his beginning as he states “My first word weren’t my first words. I wish I ‘d begun differently” (143). In *Lost in the Funhouse* the reader is asked to play different roles. Thus, the following section will examine the role of the reader as a constructor of the story.

3. The Reader as a Constructor in “Frame -Tale”

“Frame- Tale” is the first story within the collection and the shortest one. It is composed only of two pages and it contains no characters or events. “Frame- Tale” is composed only of two sentences “once upon a time there”(11) in one side and “was a story that began”(12) on the other side. Additionally, it contains some instructions from the narrator in which he asks the readers to take a stripe of paper twist it and fasten the ends in order to create the story of “Frame- Tale”.

Furthermore, when the readers follow the author's instruction they will create a Mobius strip of endless stories about stories. All the stories that result from the Mobius strip begun with the same sentence which is "Once upon a time there was a story that began". "Frame-Tale" emphasizes another aspect of the postmodern writer's thoughts and ideas which argue that all the language codes and expressions are used before. Hundreds of the stories written in the English language start with "Once upon a time there was a story that began". Through this story Barth once again refers to the exhaustion of literature during the postmodern times, where all the stories seem to resemble each other and writers are repeating themselves. Barth urges the writers for renewal that can differentiate the postmodern writers from the others and make their writings original.

The reader in "Frame -Tale" is not a co-creator of the story; he is rather the only constructor for the story. The role of the author in this story is only giving instructions for the reader and the reader is the one who will build up this story. The whole text of this frame is a request for the reader to construct a story for this frame. The reader is the one who takes a stripe of paper and a scissor to "Cut on the dotted line"(11), Twist and fasten AB to ab, CD to cd in order to construct a number of stories within stories. Thus, without the interaction of the reader it is impossible that this story will be constructed.

Becoming the constructor of the story, the reader is given a big responsibility. Now the reader is himself the author of the story and he has a big responsibility to fulfil towards the narrative. In "Frame- Tale" "the conventional responsibilities of the author and the reader eroded" (Slethaug 138). Generally, in literary stories writing a text is the responsibility of the author and reading the text is the responsibility of the reader. However, what is noticed in this story is that the roles of the author and the narrator is mixed up. The reader now is the one responsible to make the story and the author only gives instructions. Addressing the readers

can be done either directly or indirectly. The following section will endeavour to analyse how the narrator directly addresses the readers.

4. Directly Addressing the Readers in “Life-Story”

“Life- Story” which is a story about a writer writing a story of another writer writing a story about another author emphasizes the importance of involving the readers in the creation process of the story. According to the narrator the story is composed of “teller, tale, and told” (123). This means that the story needs an author a content and a reader. These three factors are related to each other and they depend on each other as he states:

If this life was his fictional narrative it consisted of three terms—teller, tale, told—each dependant on the other two but not in the same ways. His author could as well tell some other character’s tale or some other tale of the same character as the one being told as he himself could in his own character as author :his “reader” could as easily read some other story, would be as well advised to ;but his own “life” depended absolutely on a particular author’s original persistence, thereafter upon some reader’s .(125)

Sometimes in self-reflexive novels the relationship between the author, the text and the reader overlap because in some cases the author becomes a character in his novel, and in other cases the reader becomes the author of the text. However they are important to each other and they depend on each other.

In self-reflexive fiction there is a great demand to involve the readers in the creative processes of the work. Barth emphasizes this idea in his collection because most of his stories demand an active involvement from the part of the reader. Barth requests his readers participate with him in order to make meaning to his works. This request can be made either

explicitly or implicitly. In “Life-Story” the readers are addressed directly to interact with the story as he states:

The reader! You, dogged, uninsultable, print-oriented bastard, it’s you I’m addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction. You have read me this far, then? Even this far? For what discreditable motive? How is it you don’t go to a movie, watch TV, stare at a wall, play tennis with a friend, make amorous advances to the person who comes to your mind when I speak of amorous advances? Can nothing surfeit, saturate you, turn you off? Where is your shame? (125)

The readers are addressed in different ways. Sometimes the author addresses the readers using the pronoun “you” and sometimes he uses the word “reader” to address them. In “Life-Story” the narrator uses both of them in the same sentence which indicates his insistence to involve the readers in his story.

Like in “Autobiography” when the reader is asked to give life to the story: “You who listen give me life in a manner of speaking” (43), the narrator of “Life -Story” also invites the reader to give life to his text. He states “Because your own author bless and damn you his life is in your hands! He writes and reads himself; don’t you think he knows who gives his creatures their lives and deaths? Do they exist except as he or others read their words” (127). With this statement the narrator refers to the power that the reader holds.

Writers write stories but their stories cannot be alive unless they are read by readers. It is the reader who can give life to the story when he decides to read the story and can kill the story when he decides not to read it. In “Life- Story” the narrator asks the reader both to give life to the story and to kill it. The narrator is not able to end the story as a result he asks the help of the reader “he can’t kill himself without your help” (128). In some stories of “Lost in the Funhouse” the narrator does not address the readers directly. He rather addresses them in

an implicit way. Thus, the following section will attempt to examine how the narrator addresses the readers implicitly.

5. Implicitly Addressing the Reader in “Lost in the Funhouse”, “Petition” and “Ambrose his Mark”

In “Lost in The Funhouse” which deals with the story of Ambrose in the funhouse, the reader is not addressed directly, but rather in an implicit way. From the very beginning of the story the narrator explains every detail used in the creation of the story. The narrator describes for the readers all the methods that he uses, why he uses them and their importance to the story. Moreover, he explains for the readers how he planned to make his story, how to arrange it what should the beginning include, the middle and the end. Although everything is provided for the reader but the narrator never addresses her/him directly. In this story the reader is treated as if s/he is absent “To say that Ambrose’s and Peter’s mother was pretty is to accomplish nothing; the reader may acknowledge the proposition, but his imagination is not engaged” (75). Thus, although the narrator does not address the reader directly in the story, but he makes sure to involve the reader in the creation of the story by discussing all the processes used in the composition of the story for her/him.

Moreover, the methods that the narrator uses in “Lost in the Funhouse” play an important role in engaging the readers with the story. The two main methods that the narrator uses are “Description of physical appearance and mannerisms” and “keeping the sense operating”. Following these two methods the narrator describes the main characters of the story in a detailed way using sentences such as “Both had dark hair and eyes, short husky statures, deep voices” (80), “tall, thin and have a fair hair Wore glasses” (95), “the brown hair of Ambrose “and” mother gleaming in the sun” (79). By using such expressions the narrator provokes the senses of the readers and pushes them to imagine the scenes he talks

about, as he states “the reader’s imagination may be unconsciously oriented towards the scene” (78). Attracting the reader’s attention toward the creation processes of the story and involving them in the story is one of the main features of self-reflexive narratives thus, through using those methods the author succeeds to actively involve the readers in the story.

“Lost in the Funhouse” does not contain a single ending, it rather includes different endings. The narrator of the story provides different ending for the story of Ambrose inside the funhouse. “One possible ending would be to have Ambrose come across another lost person in the dark”. According to the first possible ending the story can end by Ambrose meeting another person in the funhouse, and they help and encourage each other until they find their way out from the funhouse. In the second possible ending of the story, Ambrose will die “of starvation” in the funhouse “telling stories to himself in the dark”. The last possible ending of the story is about Ambrose imagining himself to be “successful, married, at ease in the world, the trials of his adolescence far behind him” (96). By giving these different endings to the story, the narrator of “Lost in the Funhouse” seems to be lost; he is unable to decide a single closure to his story. He gives these different endings in order to make the readers consider the different possibilities that he has for ending of the story and asks them to participate with him in the creation of the story by choosing the appropriate ending for the story. By doing so, the reader in “Lost in the Funhouse” becomes the operator of the funhouse because he is the one who chooses how to end the story of Ambrose in the funhouse.

However, according to Hutcheon not only the author and Ambrose are lost in the funhouse even the reader is lost in the process of reading as she states “an allegory of the position of the reader who is lost in the funhouse with Ambrose as he tries to find his way out of the mirror-maze of the story”(56). “Lost in the Funhouse” is not a usual story since the

making of the story is provided along with the story which demands great effort from the part of the reader in order to make meaning from the text.

“Petition” is a story which turns around the Siamese twins who are physically bound to each other. One of the twins is “slight, articulate and mute” (62) and the other one is gross... incoherent but vocal (62). One of the twins decides to write a letter to the King of Thailand begging "His Most Gracious Majesty" to decide a surgery in order to separate him from his “brutish, appetitive brother” (63). Similarly, the story of “Water Message” also includes a letter. This letter is found by Ambrose who is in the fourth grade and he is bullied by his classmates and kids in the neighbourhood. Both of the letters in “Petition” and “Water Message” end with “Yours Truly”.

Generally, in letters “Yours Truly” is followed by the name of the writer and his signature but it is not the case in both stories. Accordingly, the narrator in both stories implicitly asks the readers to participate in the creation of the story and provide a name for the writer of the story. Another interpretation for this action could be that the narrator does not give a specific name for the writers of the letters because he does not want to address a specific portion of his audience who’s their names are similar to the ones who wrote the letter. Moreover, when writers write stories their major aim is that their stories reach a wide audience. The following section will study the author’s hope to be read by many readers as much as possible.

6. Searching for a Wide Audience in “Anonymiad”

Although self-reflexive fiction writers are confident about their writings but they cannot be considered successful unless their works reach a wide audience. “Anonymiad,” is about an anonymous minstrel who is trapped in an isolated island. In order to save himself, he decides to write letters and throw them in the sea, and he hopes that his writings will be read

by many readers across the world. This story can represent the contemporary writers who write this new type of fiction which is very different and highly self-conscious and they hope that the readers will accept to read their works and like them. Moreover, the anonymous minstrel states “No use, this isn’t working either, we’re halfway through, the end’s in sight; I’ll never get to where I am; Part Three, Part Three, my crux, my core, I’m cutting you out; there, at the heart, never to be filled, a mere lacuna” (183). This statement expresses Barth’s worries that he may not achieve his objectives because his stories may not have readers and without readers they will not have a meaning or exist at all. However, in another statement he says “Now I began to imagine that the world contained another like myself” (196) which means that with all the circumstances, he has a hope that there are other persons like him in the world who had fed up from the old forms of fiction writings and will appreciate his efforts to provide something new and read his works.

The stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* emphasize the importance of the role of the reader. Sometimes the reader is a co-creator of the story and sometimes s/he is the only creator of the story. This demonstrates John Barth’s view that writing a fictional work is the result of the collaboration of both the author and the reader.

Conclusion

The use of Self-reflexive narrative was widely spread during the 1960s and 1970s in the American postmodern literature. The main reason is that self-reflexive narrative was the solution that postmodernist writers provided in order to refresh the exhausted literature of that time. In self-reflexive writings, topics which are concerned with the real world are no longer the subject of fiction writing anymore. The focus of self-reflexive writings is on the process of writing fiction itself, the aesthetic qualities of fiction.

Chapter one discussed that the post- WWII era witnessed the emergence of postmodernism as the new dominate literary movement. The prominent literary practice during that period is writing self-reflexive narrative. Although writing self-reflexive stories is not exclusive to postmodern writers since it existed centuries before in works such as Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* written in the 16th century ,but it witnessed its heyday in the postmodern time mainly during 1960s and 1970s.

The main characteristics of self-reflexivity is providing self-commentaries about the fictionality of the work and involving the readers in the creation process of the story .The aim behind writing self-reflexive narrative is explained by Jon Barth in his famous essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967). Barth argues that literature is exhausted and the contemporary writers are trapped by the old forms of fiction writings. That is why; he sought for new innovative ways and writing self-reflexive narrative is the new literary mode that was developed to refresh the exhausted literature.

The second chapter demonstrated that John Barth 's collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse* is the best American postmodern fiction work which exposes the theme of self-reflexive narrative. In this collection of fourteen short stories, Barth experimented with new techniques and narrative self-criticism is the main technique that Barth uses in the title short

story “Lost in the Funhouse”. In this short story the intrusive narrator frequently abandons the storytelling in order to comment and provide the readers with all the methods that the author used in order to create his story.

As mentioned previously in the second chapter, among the issues that Barth talked about in other stories in the collection such as “Life-Story” and “Title” is the condition of contemporary writers who are unable to write stories using the old realistic forms. The narrators of both stories are trying to write realistic stories but they are unable to develop their stories and they end up by writing self-reflexive stories. This alludes to the solution provided by Barth to postmodernist writers and which is writing self-reflexive fiction.

Chapter three demonstrated that the reader in *Lost in the Funhouse* is given a major role to play in the stories. For instance in the “Frame-Tale” story, s/he is the responsible for the construction of the story since the story includes only instructions that the reader should follow to make the story. In other stories such as “Autobiography”, the narrator begs the reader to give him life by reading his story and actively participate with him. The readers involvement can be achieved either explicitly when the narrator directly addresses the readers as in “Life –Story” or implicitly when the narrator demands the participation of the reader but in an implicit way.

To sum up, self-reflexive narrative is the main feature that characterizes the American postmodern fiction. John Barth is one of the main practitioners of this technique. His works mainly *Lost in the Funhouse* offers a great understanding of this technique due to the fact that collection is highly reflexive and its main theme is how to write fiction and draw the reader’s attention to the fictionality of the work.

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ملخص

السرد الانعكاسي الذاتي هو الاتجاه الأدبي الجديد الذي سيطر على الادب الأمريكي في فترة ما بعد الحداثة خاصة خلال الستينيات والسبعينيات. جون بارث هو واحد من أعظم كتاب ما بعد الحداثة الأمريكي. مجموعته من القصص القصيرة "ضائع في بيت الضحك" (Lost in the Funhouse 1968) تتميز بالاستخدام المكثف لطريقة السرد الذاتي الانعكاسية حيث ان موضوع كل قصص المجموعة تقريبا هو كيف يتم إنشاء الادب وعمليات التفكير التي يمر بها المؤلف من خلال خلق العمل. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى التحقيق في كيفية استخدام السرد الانعكاسي الذاتي في قصص مختارة من مجموعة بارث "ضائع في بيت الضحك". والسبب في اختيار عمل بارث هو الميل التجريبي الذي سيطر على معظم كتاباته خلال فترة ما بعد الحداثة، بالإضافة إلى جهوده الجبارة لتحديث الأدب المنهك لتلك الفترة وخلق إمكانيات جديدة لكتابة الخيال. سيتم استخدام نظريات (Patricia Waugh) ونظريات (Linda Hutchoen) فيما يتعلق بالسرد الذاتي الانعكاسي في الخيال الأمريكي ما بعد الحداثة طوال المناقشة. تنقسم الدراسة إلى ثلاثة فصول. يتضمن الفصل الأول لمحة عامة عن الأدب الأمريكي ما بعد الحداثة ويستكشف الخصائص الرئيسية للسرد الانعكاسي الذاتي. أما الفصل الثاني فيتناول تقنية النقد الذاتي السردية في قصص مختارة من المجموعة. الفصل الثالث يحلل تقنية مشاركة القارئ في بعض القصص المختارة من المجموعة.

Résumé

Le récit auto réflexif est la nouvelle tendance littéraire qui a dominé la fiction Américaine postmoderne dans les années 1960 et 1970. John Barth est l'un des plus grands écrivains américains de fiction postmodernes. Sa collection de nouvelles *Perdue dans le Labyrinthe* (Lost in the Funhouse) se caractérise par une utilisation intensive du récit auto réflexive dans lequel le sujet de presque toutes les nouvelles de la collection est la création de la fiction, les processus de pensée que l'auteur a traversés tout en créant le travail de fiction. L'objectif de l'étude est d'étudier le récit auto-réfléchi dans des nouvelles sélectionnées de la collection de Barth *Perdue dans le Labyrinthe* (Lost in the Funhouse). La raison de choisir le travail de Barth est la tendance expérimentale qui a dominé la plupart de ses écrits postmodernes, en plus de ses efforts remarquables pour rafraîchir la littérature épuisée de cette période et créer de nouvelles possibilités pour l'écriture de fiction. Les théories de Patricia Waugh et Linda Hutcheon concernant le récit auto réflexif dans la fiction Américaine postmoderne seront utilisées tout au long de la discussion. L'étude est divisée en trois chapitres. Le premier chapitre comprend un aperçu de la littérature Américaine postmoderne et explore les principales caractéristiques du récit auto réflexif. Le deuxième chapitre examine la technique de l'autocritique narrative dans les nouvelles sélectionnées de la collection, et le troisième chapitre analyse la technique d'implication du lecteur dans certaines nouvelles sélectionnées de la collection.