
This is Not a Meta-Review of Three Books on Metafiction.¹
(But what Account should be given of a Self-Referential
Title?)

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Literary games are everywhere and the spirit of play, it might be said, not only pervades literature but is that in the absence of which the enterprise would be unthinkable. Play does seem to be an important, even a necessary, condition of literary production. It has been argued that the necessary, if insufficient, conditions of literature must include freedom, spontaneity, a willingness to accept some randomness or even the purely aleatory, an openness to engage oneself and one's potential audience in heuristic exploration or (if no more) some interplay, a capacity to invent rules and to draw out their implications, to see imagined experience within such rules, to see 'frames,' spaces, or worlds as self-enclosed, rule-governed, exploratory, open to shifts in context and in contrast to the marked otherness of non-literary nature. If, however, playfulness may be thought to underlie all literature, then it may also seem that certain literary works, or even certain literary modes and certain literary times, must display this spirit more than others. Some good questions do arise: is comedy more playful than tragedy? are highly rule-bound forms, such as the sonnet or the detective story, more playful, or at least more gameful, than other forms? do some historical periods, moments of decadence or of revolutionary upheaval, stimulate ludic activity? Questions such as these suggest how difficult it might be to develop an exhaustive, touching-all-bases model of literary play. Such a model, even if conceived of as bearing upon all literature, might be best undertaken by

1 Linda Hutcheon *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Library of the Canadian Review of Comparative Literature, Vol. V. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press 1980). \$17.25

Linda Hutcheon *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1984) paperback; first published, Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press 1980. \$9.95

Allen Thiher *Words in Reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1984). \$22.50

Patricia Waugh *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1984). \$8.95; Pp. viii 176

trying to account for contemporary fiction. Fiction written in this century in many languages, but especially since World War Two, seems particularly to manifest the characteristics of play and to link its production to game structures and analogues. The three books under review here all make some thoughtful commentary upon the nature of play, and the uses of games, in that fiction.

Literature, Linda Hutcheon observes, 'creates its criticism' (p. 45). Stressing its self-consciousness, flaunting its literarity, holding steadily in the foreground its conventions, contemporary fiction has prompted an equivalently self-aware criticism. If the opacities of literature (all those translucent, unregarded windows of canonical realism now crazed and clouded), its inherent difficulties, paradoxes and aporias, constitute the concerns of criticism, then criticism must become highly analytic and theoretically informed.

The current symbiosis between fiction and criticism (with theory making a shadowy third) may reflect, as Allen Thiher argues, the general contours of twentieth-century philosophy in so far as the dismal conviction that language is arbitrary, gamelike, separated from the reality it pretends to account for, and 'fallen' leads to a literature that both distrusts and mocks language. Thiher proposes the general cultural term 'postmodernism' to describe the consciousness of language's inadequacy and the kind of literature this consciousness entails, but there are a number of other candidates for the role of generic denominator. David Lodge once proposed, with an altogether English bluntness, that fiction arising out of self-consciousness and distrust of traditional realism should be called 'problematic'.² Hutcheon's own proposal, 'narcissistic,' is offered as an imprecise synonym for a series of other terms, including 'self-reflective,' 'self-reflexive,' and 'auto-representational.' The most common term for this literature, however, has been, at least since William H. Gass coined it and Robert Scholes gave it currency,³ that

2 'The Novelist at the Crossroads', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1977) 105

3 'Philosophy and The Form of Fiction', in *Fiction and The Figures of Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1970) 25; *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: The University of Illinois 1979). In the past few years several number of books and articles have been written on the subject of metafiction. Some of these in English are: Margaret Rose, *Parody/Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to The Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London: Croom Helm 1979); Steven Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel* (London: MacMillan 1980); Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of The Unreal: Studies in narrative and structure, especially of the fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981); Inger Christensen,

which gives the title to Patricia Waugh's book: metafiction. This clearly indicates a kind of fiction that comments upon fiction, that foregrounds, lays bare and defamiliarizes the literary conventions that make writing fiction possible, occupies a place with regard to fiction that meta-anything (meta-linguistics, say) fills: a commentary, theoretically informed, abstract, even notational, upon some cognitive discipline in terms of which its ordinary procedures are questioned, made explicit and formulated. Such commentaries are, in Gass's words, 'lingos to converse about lingos.' Evidently, one may contrive for any discourse (or lingo), including fiction, another meta-discourse.

'Metafiction' has the advantage of avoiding the cultural baggage of 'postmodernism' but the corresponding disadvantage of foregoing a systematic explanation for the appearance and dissemination, in several national literatures, of the cultural phenomena that postmodernism names. In her preface to this edition of *Narcissitic Narrative*, Hutcheon observes that, having formerly rejected the term, she would now accept postmodernism because 'it would be foolish to deny that metafiction is today recognized as a manifestation of postmodernism' (p. xiii). Although this seems, disturbingly, rather like an *argumentum ad populum* (or worse), it does indicate the extent to which a technical vocabulary, that of literary criticism included, must employ terms that, even if not common, have gained some acceptance. Thiher's book, bearing 'postmodern' in its subtitle, offers a general argument for its use: the contemporary distrust of language and of literature, seen as a powerlessness to make valid reference and representations, can be distinguished both from the realist conviction that language does refer to and represent (things) and the modernist conviction that it can be made to represent, if not reality, consciousness.

If one does think of contemporary narcissistic, or postmodern, fiction and its complementary criticism as metafictional, then it becomes possible to see its characteristic self-consciousness in perspective as an

The Meaning of Metafiction (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget 1981); Charles Caramello, *Silverless Mirrors: Books, Self & Postmodern Fiction* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press 1983); Jerome Klinkowitz, *The Self-Apparent Word: Fiction as Language/Language as Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1984); Alan Singer, *A Metaphorics of Fiction: Discontinuity and Discourse in the Modern Novel* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press 1984); The subject, by one name or another, might be said to have become pervasive in French criticism. For a starting-point see, Lucien Dällenbach, *Le Récit spéculaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1973). Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of The Unreal* discusses in detail metafictional elements in contemporary French fiction.

unavoidable, and quite logical, entailment. Every attempt to comment upon, render explicit, schematize, or convert into an appropriate model any set of procedures will be essentially self-conscious. All construction of models is self-conscious since models are, in themselves, heuristic, interpretive *meta* discourse. Metafiction often embodies such self-conscious models, though normally they are quite indirect, even oblique, such that metafictional texts comment both upon the writing of fiction generally and, reflexively, upon themselves. The 'very notion of system,' Allen Thiher writes, 'derives much of its plausibility from the way it is characterized as a game construct with ludic autonomy and rule-bound enclosure' (p. 158). The term 'metafiction,' then, allows one both to see normal fictional conventions in a concentrated focus and to observe the presence of self-conscious techniques not traditionally associated with fiction, though never outside the range of narrative possibilities, such as heteroglossic levels of discourse, aporetic structures or embedded analogues to the fictional process, all of which function as, or as elements within, models.

The concepts of play and game figure importantly in any discussion of metafiction since contemporary writers, metafictionists at least, have athletically explored the possibilities for the creation of problematic situations. Such situations, whether structural to the whole fiction or embedded within an otherwise aludic construction, make possible the metafictional enterprise. For this reason, any study of contemporary metafiction that intends to deal with the important aspects of the phenomenon (rather than merely dismissing it in the name of reconstituting canonical realism and/or moral 'seriousness') must include some discussion of play and the possibilities of literary games.

Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative*, unchanged other than by the addition of a short preface, reprints her 1980 book in an attractive Methuen format. There are no other changes and this means that, surprisingly since the new edition would seem to aim for a popular audience, the original comparativist methodology of citing in original languages only remains unmodified by notes. Although Hutcheon accedes to the popularity of 'postmodern' in her preface, it plays no role in her discussion. Her central term, 'narcissistic,' has a number of strengths since, with archetypal signification, it forces attention upon the central importance of the self-regarding act in metafiction. However, her terminological catholicity is not, in general, a positive factor: to use every available term for metafiction as, somehow, interchangeable does nothing to promote clarity. In particular, her even-handed use of 'self-reflexive' and 'self-reflective' (since metafictional works both turn back upon themselves, as their own subjects, and mirror themselves) en-

courages confusion. (One might, in the interest of simplicity, use 'reflexive' alone.) The potential fuzziness inherent in a too-pluralistic vocabulary does not, taking her discussion as a whole, greatly affect her study of contemporary narrative. It remains, five years after its first publication, a fruitful analysis of the literary problem it confronts.

Although Hutcheon admits the possibility of metafiction for any historical period (*Don Quijote* is the nominal example), her discussion focuses directly upon contemporary fiction. First, Hutcheon makes an important distinction between modes of narrative reflexivity. It is 'narrative in general,' she writes, 'that is narcissistic' (p. 19) and manifests its narcissism in 'baring its fictional and linguistic systems to the reader's view' (p. 20). This initial move immediately clarifies a frequent confusion between the kind of metafictional playfulness that occurs on the level of language (paronomasia, syntactical ellipsis, homophonic recursiveness, orthographical and typographical permutations, for example) and that which occurs on the level of 'fictional system' or, one might say, the system of narrative conventions, however complex or simple, that has been adopted for the purposes of narration. This distinction leads to a further classification: narcissistic texts may be either overt or covert. The resulting quadripartite schema makes it possible to distinguish between works that, having little in common other than their literary narcissism, are quite different yet can all claim the status of being metafictional. Thus Hutcheon can find the species within the common genus for works that either overtly thematize or covertly *actualize* their language and/or their narrative conventions. When the language and/or narrative conventions are actualized, not merely placed at the 'content's core' (p. 29), they are embedded, as in Cortázar's *Rayuela*, in the fiction's structural design.

Second, Hutcheon makes a distinction between mimesis of product and process. 'Metafiction is still fiction, despite the shift in focus of narration from the product it presents to the process it is' (p. 39). One might grant that overtly metafictional works can thematize the process of literary production (the problem of writing will be at the 'core' and the author, or many authors, will be characterized as in, say, Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs*) and also grant that in covertly metafictional works the reader is compelled to assume a 'co-producing function' (p. 37) and actively engage in the creation of the 'coherent, motivated "heterocosm" or other world' (p. 42) that is fiction, yet still deny that the distinction is so simple (all works are confusingly both) or that the intricacies of metafiction can be caught in the net of mimesis. Perhaps it would be better to admit that, in the most compelling of covertly metafictional works at least, no single process is self-represented, and certainly no single

heterocosm, but rather a vast range of fragments of possible processes. If the grounds of possibility for fictional discourse are being actualized, as seems to be the case in much metafiction, then no single process, and perhaps no process at all, will be discerned or 'co-produced,' but only the conceivable, splintered and fragmented, indices of what might be the case.

Third, Hutcheon distinguishes between the situation in which a narrative makes itself, its language or conventions, into its own subject and, more specifically, the way in which elements in the fictional production may be self-consciously thematized. She discusses three modes of 'thematizing narrative artifice': parody, *mise en abyme* and allegory.⁴ This is a valid move but gives rise to at least two difficulties. One may wonder why, once device has been isolated as the subject of metafictional exploration, there should be so few. One must suppose that every fictional device (convention or technique) can be self-consciously thematized. Rhetorical play must be a basic aspect of all metafiction (one need only recall Cervantes's exuberant playfulness with the authenticity of narrative voice) and Hutcheon's division, while pointing the direction, does little to suggest the wide, and historical, scope of possibilities. Her analysis of the narrated description of the engraving of the battle of Reichenfels in Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe* indicates one part of the problem. Hutcheon subsumes this under the general problem of creating narrative *mise en abyme*, which it would seem to be, but it is also an instance of the rhetorical device of ekphrasis and, as such, functions much as that device does in, say, Homer, Virgil, Spenser, Shakespeare or Keats: it opens a narrative to the intrusion of narrative alterity (another story, another time and space, another potential sequence). The second difficulty that Hutcheon's discussion raises is internal to her own argument. The claim that metafiction represents its own singular process must be undercut by the additional claim that it thematizes its devices. On the one hand, the argument, borrowing what seems to be an inappropriate organicist metaphor, postulates a unique wholeness (this process, now, here, in the reader's constructive imagination) while, on the other hand, it postulates a field, a conceptual or intertextual space, in which all literary conventions invoke, mimic, and *display* one another.

Fourth, Hutcheon distinguishes four actualizing narrative structures, the detective story, fantasy, games and the erotic, all of which function to provide 'certain models favoured by metafictionists as internalized

4 Hutcheon develops further her ideas of parody in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd. 1985).

structural devices' (p. 71). As she clearly notes, this set is not intended to be exclusive but only to identify 'four of the visible forms' employed in contemporary metafiction. Each of these structures functions as a 'self-reflective paradigm' that makes the act of reading 'into one of active 'production,' of imagining, interpreting, decoding, ordering, in short of constructing the literary universe through the fictive referents of the worlds' (p. 86). The 'hermeneutics of reading' becomes, as a consequence of all narcissistic strategies encoded within metafictional texts, the central, inescapable problem of metafiction. Once that translucent window of canonical realism has become crazed, then the primary focus must be upon perception, not landscape.

Hutcheon's analysis of games as actualizing narrative structures is limited but perceptive. She bases her discussion on works such as Nabokov's *The Defense*, Calvino's *Le città invisibili* and Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh, Prop.*, each of which may be said to call attention to a 'free creative activity' that unfolds within 'self-evolving rules' (p. 82). A game, then, provides an analogue for fictional production and, in particular, the hermeneutics of reading since the game-player, like the reader, must either learn the requisite code or fail (even fail to begin) utterly. When a game-like structure is embedded within a fiction, the reader confronts a double challenge: learn to play and learn to read. Either process might be said to comment upon the other, though the literary point of embedding a game must be to model the difficulties, even aporias, of reading. Hutcheon makes another distinction between games as actualizing structures and what she calls 'generative word play.' The latter, seen paradigmatically in Nabokov's *Ada*, constitutes a kind of 'interlanguage play' that massively engages the reader, creates a peculiar verbal space in which the narrative can develop, and proposes as a narrative problem its own inexhaustiveness. The only major shortcoming in Hutcheon's discussion of generative wordplay is her disinclination to take up the implications of Deconstruction for her analysis. Granted the idea of an infinitely systematic play (Derrida's play of substitutions within a finite field), then the concept of wordplay can never again appear as an entirely mapable concept. In itself, the wordplay of Derrida, and of other Deconstructionists, is eye-catching, if not mind-stunning (Geoffrey Hartman, for example, refers to Derrida's *Glas* as a philosophical *Finnegans Wake*⁵) and generates for itself a style that is, to cite a recent account, an 'extremely powerful instrument, arguably boundless in its power, flexible and ex-

5 'Monsieur Texte: On Jacques Derrida, His *Glas*,' *Georgia Review* 29 (1975) 760-1

pandable enough to envelop all varieties of paradox and contradiction, chiasmus and catachresis, metaphor and metonymy, original and replica, error and truth.⁶ A fully adequate account of wordplay would have to accept the lessons of Deconstruction. Nonetheless, Hutcheon's discussion is learned and perceptive: it should be worth reading for anyone who is interested in verbal mirrorplay (the flair and flares of linguistic narcissism) generally.

In contrast to Hutcheon's exclusively literary and essentially comparativist approach, Thiher's *Worlds in Reflection* follows a method of philosophical and cultural investigation. Thiher places his discussion of postmodern fiction ('not an attractive term, and I have looked for a better one' [p. 7]) within a context of twentieth-century thinking about language. One might suppose that there must be a correlation of some nature between, on the one hand, the linguistic theories, philosophies of language and the abundant meta-linguistic commentary in literature that have characterized speculative thought generally and, on the other hand, the specific literary production of the major writers, moderns and postmoderns alike, in this century. Demonstrating a direct line of causation between linguistic theory and literature would be difficult, though certain relatively evident affiliations do suggest themselves (Saussure and the *nouveau nouveau roman*, say, or Wittgenstein and William H. Gass), but the possibilities of linking literature and a corresponding linguistic theory in terms of a complex symptomatology are open. What has happened in literature over the past seventy-five years or so and what has been said about language in linguistics and in philosophy point towards the same underforming obsessions. Thiher follows the second line in his book: his central proposition, he writes, is that 'the writings of contemporary authors offer numerous homologies with the thought of theorists about language' (p. 6). To this end he divides his study into three initial chapters dealing with Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Saussure (with Derrida incorporated into the same chapter) and a subsequent four chapters that centre upon distinct areas of inquiry — representation, voice, play and reference — that the chapters on language theory have suggested. *Words in Reflection* succeeds admirably in presenting, with acuity and depth, the positions of the three speculative models of language and in showing the common malaise concerning the nature and precision of language that links, in Thiher's view, both the thinkers and the authors.

6 Ronald Schleifer and Robert Con Davis, 'Introduction: The Ends of Deconstruction,' *Genre* 17: 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1984) 6

Each of the thinkers (one is driven to this old-fashioned word since it seems wrong to call Saussure a philosopher and absurd to call either Wittgenstein or Heidegger a linguist) whom Thiher discusses distrust the traditional view that language adequately unites speakers to the innumerable diversity of the world as it seems to be and, in particular, the view that language makes vision possible ('to make you see' had been, Conrad wrote, his task, 'above all,' in writing) and naturally achieves, or somehow *is*, a visual relationship between things and the users of language. Each of the thinkers develops a model of language that excludes the traditional primacy of the visual and which stresses the arbitrary, atomistic and, in the case of Heidegger, the inauthentic aspects of language. Wittgenstein provides an especially interesting case for Thiher's analysis since his first book in the philosophy of language, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), argues the visual relationship between words and things, presenting a pictorial model for language, while his second book, *Philosophical Investigations*, argues for a view of language that ties meaning to use and substitutes the heuristic notion of 'family resemblances' for iconic correspondence. The *Tractatus*, Thiher observes, presents a 'powerful metaphysical vision of how a world without ambiguity might exist in mythic purity' (pp. 14-15) while in *Philosophical Investigations* the richer, but more elusive, argument points towards the conclusion that 'language, much like play, is a natural activity, embedded in our human history of being in the world ... [and] enmeshed in all our activities, since language is constitutive of the sense of the world we live in' (p. 21). Thus Wittgenstein embodies in his own work the twentieth-century rejection of pictorial correspondence as an account of language and for this reason provides Thiher not merely with the subject for an initial chapter but also with an emblematic figure.

Thiher's two other thinkers, Heidegger and Saussure, both in their different manners reject the nineteenth-century confidence in the natural and iconic properties of language. For Heidegger language is essentially inauthentic, a fallen *Gerede* in which speakers repeat endlessly a kind of hand-me-down everyday chatter. Saussure's linguistic theory expresses the *Zeitgeist* of disillusion and pessimism about the power of language since it depends upon the axiom of the sign's arbitrary nature and upon the postulate of a synchronic, ahistorical state of language always available, if never completely knowable, that makes possible individual utterances. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* certainly suggests that no speaker of a language is ever in direct, natural or necessary (that is, non-arbitrary) relationship with the world or with whatever may exist beyond language itself. The kind of linguistic analysis that Saussure's theory makes possible has brought 'an extraordinary self-consciousness

with regard to the limits of expressing original meaning in language' (p. 81). If language is a system of arbitrary significations, and not a gazetteer of natural relationships, then originality must consist in the skill with which a speaker makes combinations, or elects paradigmatic alternatives: the skills of playing out the range of permutations. Derrida, to whom Thiher ascribes a semiological kinship with Saussure, appears, in Thiher's view, as the 'Borges of philosophy who introduces the labyrinth into theoretical thought' and who makes of Saussure's concept of difference a 'generator of semantic mazes in which words refer only to words, in an infinite play of difference for which there can be no center' (p. 83). Derrida's work is seen to articulate, in the fullest play of logical entailment, the development of Saussure's linguistic model. Thiher's analysis of the three thinkers (plus Derrida) is remarkable. It gives his discussion a forceful opening since, from that basis, he is then able to argue that the writers whom he considers all manifest, if dissimilarly, a conceptual distrust both of language and of the naive views of language upon which canonical realism had founded itself. Postmodern fiction, then, emerges from Thiher's discussion as a cultural phenomenon that reflects both the distrust of language and the conviction that language is systematic, game-like (either as a series of self-contained games or as the space in which play occurs) and inauthentic.

Traditional views of language held that the purpose of language was to represent, but this, in the tidal wash created by the language thinkers, now seems exactly what it cannot accomplish. In a lucid analysis of Sartre's *La Nausée* Thiher argues that modern writers have had to confront the unyielding bulk of physical presence while stripped of any confidence that language can capture it in representation. 'Language fails in the presence of the tree root' (p. 95). Of course, that does not mean that postmodern writers would not like for their language to 'reach' the world, he remarks, but they 'often find the evidence forces them to accept Roquentin's unhappy impasse: language represents and even refers only to itself' (p. 97). Thiher's method allows him to provide a ground for what usually seems the most self-evident fact about metafiction: that it is reflexive, even narcissistic, and auto-representational. Literature is 'a kind of model for the construction of reality in the same way that language games allow the articulation of the various taxonomies and models that literally articulate or construct what we take to be real' (p. 111.). Postmodern writers, or metafictionists, merely accept the disillusionment of language theory and construct self-conscious and 'self-given' games, as secondary systems within the general system of language, for the articulation of what seems to be the case.

Thiher's discussion of voice, as a problem in finding authenticity or of

experimenting with the levels of inauthenticity, and his discussion of reference as a problem in addressing history (if language is merely auto-representational, then history must be only another mode of fiction, a 'language game or a series of language games' [p. 190]) are interesting and provocative. Both problems arise from the difficulties that are seen to be inherent in language and are, one might say, simply the gift to literature from language theory. His discussion of play seeks to establish the boundaries of what remains to literature once representation, authenticity and reference have been demystified and driven from the literary field. 'Play's autonomy promises, if faintly,' he observes, 'the possibility of creating a necessary order in the midst of absurd fallenness' (p. 156). Play has become, for the postmodern, a 'generalized and shared therapeutic metaphor to describe the ontology of both language and fiction' (p. 160). Nabokov, like Wittgenstein, aims 'at curing his readers of such maladies as *profunditis*': Thiher's neologism to designate 'the need for organic symbols that might transcend language and express unconscious or invisible depths that lie outside the public space of the world as it is' (p. 165). Hence a paradox emerges from Thiher's discussion of postmodernism. On the one hand, the analyses of language that postmodernism accepts reveal humankind to be trapped within the prisonhouse of language (the world as it lies beyond unknowable, unreachable and inescapably delusive) in which the 'absurd fallenness' of language must be the common fate; on the other hand, not to accept the disillusionment of such analyses, to attempt to go beyond language in the pursuit of fullness and presence, to believe in the efficacy of symbols, reveals the madness of *profunditis*, the madness of not having accepted madness.

Thiher threads each of the three thinkers about language into his discussion of play in postmodern fiction. Wittgenstein argues that language is a number of distinct language games each one of which is constituted by its particular rule. Heidegger employs the play metaphor to describe both language and Being. Play may be taken as a model 'of how creation takes place within the restraints of law ... [in its] rule-bound freedom language offers the free play of unending transformations. Within the *Spielraum* of tradition, such play elaborates the meanings we take to be thought and culture' (p. 61). Saussure's model of language as a vast, self-enclosed system (in which speaking is like playing a game out of a knowledge of its rules and potential combinations) both suggests obvious game metaphors, such as chess, and also joins language to the general theory of models, of axiomatic and self-regulating constructions. Hence the analogy with chess, for both language and fiction, is important. 'Within the closed space of the chess game the writer can hope to find the model for how to create, with a finite number of

elements combining according to the finite number of rules, the paradigm of what a limited combinatory order is' (p. 158). Saussure's linguistic theory has led to a further, and perhaps even more important, concept of play within language. The idea that language is a system ('a limited combinatory order') has made possible the contemporary concept of intertextuality, formulated by Kristeva, popularized by Barthes and transmuted into a world-view by Derrida, which must not be, as so many critics have made clear, conflated into traditional notions of allusiveness, citation or conscious inscription. The concept of intertextuality having been allowed, it is no longer possible to see either language or fiction as other than playful: To read, to write, is to play a kind of hopscotch, to leap from writing to writing in the never-ending play of codes that refer to codes ... in Derrida's view, the indefinite play of *différance* is such that, in their free play, the signifiers of all texts must eventually refer to all others' (p. 183). Thiher's discussion of play in postmodern fiction stems from, and is totally consistent with, his initial analysis of thinkers about language. He supports, with scholarship and careful argument, his thesis that postmodernism in general, and in fiction especially, reflects, but also grows from, twentieth-century concerns with, and views of, language.

Waugh's *Metafiction* is a slighter, less ambitious, undertaking. It presents itself as a general introduction to the subject that would be appropriate for undergraduates or graduate students who have never exposed themselves to contemporary literature. This is not to say that her book is without value, only that it is limited and irritatingly reductive. She offers a number of provocative quotations from metafictional writers which succeed in both posing the problem and, one would hope, in stimulating classroom discussion. Her initial definition of metafiction is extremely good and might well become a possible starting-point for both classroom discussion and subsequent scholarly analysis: metafiction, she writes, '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' (p. 2).

Waugh's discussion of play and game elements in metafiction summarizes a number of general considerations in clear and simple manner. In order to explain metafiction as a problem in recontextualization (that is, a shift from one level of discourse to another without formal change) she invokes Gregory Bateson's notion of play developed in *Steps to an*

Ecology of Mind (1972) according to which an activity is playful when it is coded, by a kind of internal metacommentary, in such a way that participants in the activity understand that it is not serious, and that the normal consequences of action have been, for the time being, suspended. This seems like a much less powerful philosophical basis for metafiction than Thiher's, but it does suggest a number of amusing analogies (metafictionists as puppies or young monkeys, perhaps) which could be tossed studentwards. However, Waugh's insistence upon explicit metalingual commentary seems dubious. The more playful a literary work, she writes, the more 'metalanguages are needed if the relationship between the 'real' and the 'fictive' world is to be maintained and understood' (p. 37). If, as Waugh's argument requires, one is compelled to assert that in metafiction the 'metalingual commentary' is made apparent, then it is difficult to know what one will do about those metafictional texts which Hutcheon calls covert: those whose very metafictionality has been recessed by the reader-ensnaring games the text plays. One of Waugh's more interesting contributions to the discussion of play in metafiction is found in her analysis of role-playing. Discussions of metafiction seem to neglect role-playing as an aspect of play. This may follow from a poststructuralist belief that roles, however multiply played, are the stuff of realistic fiction or require an explicit psychological ground to give them sense and, thus, can not figure in a fiction that systematically creates splintered, depthless and paracinematic characters. Still, as Waugh notes, role-playing within fiction constitutes 'the most minimal form of metafiction' (p. 116).⁷ It is not simply that certain novels, such as Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, call fiction into question by placing the role of the artist, in all of its illusive duplicities, at the centre of the action, but that roles, all roles, query the steadiness of fictional assertion, the solidity of psychological construction, and foreground the discontinuities, the character-splinters, of characterization. On this 'minimal' level, metafictionists as diverse as Thomas Pynchon and John Fowles (to name two writers who are invariably discussed in studies of metafiction) appear to share a common insight into the uses of play.

Although Waugh's book does summarize a number of critical and theoretical positions fairly successfully, breaking the discussion into a series of separate items, not all of her commentary is equally satisfac-

7 For a recent study of role-playing in literature see, Uri Rapp, 'Simulation and Imagination: Mimesis as Play,' in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Mihai Spărișu (Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co 1984) 141-71.

tory. In particular, her analysis of intertextuality seems inadequate. She approaches the concept with neither the philosophical sharpness that Thiher brings to his discussion nor the grasp of literary theory that Hutcheon brings to hers, but rather with fairly straightforward recuperation of the concept into the more manageable notions of allusion and citation.

Each of the three books considered in this review offers some helpful commentary to students of metafiction, of postmodernism and of play. Although there is considerable overlap between them (they take up many of the same issues and, inevitably, cite many of the same writers), they have been written on very different levels with, it might seem, dissimilar audiences in mind. Waugh's book, the most introductory of the three, seems to have been written for a basically undergraduate readership; Thiher's study searches in twentieth-century philosophy and linguistic theory for the roots of postmodernism and, for this reason, might prove rather hard-going for readers with no background in philosophy but it promises magnificent rewards to those, wishing to understand *why* contemporary fiction is as it is, who can attend to the argument; Hutcheon's clear, and often brilliant, book seems to have been written for intelligent readers of literature (graduate students, let's say) who wish to know both *what*, in the labyrinthine realm of contemporary fiction, is going on and *how*. Waugh's book provides a useful bibliography but, distressingly, neither Hutcheon's nor Thiher's books offer this elementary assistance (though Thiher's book does possess discursive, indirectly bibliographical, footnotes). Scholarship is, of course, a complex undertaking and much has already been written on the subjects of postmodernism and metafiction, but it is, nonetheless, painful to observe that neither Thiher nor Waugh cite the first edition of Hutcheon's book. This lack is especially striking in Waugh's case since she and Hutcheon share Methuen as a publisher. It may, of course, merely reflect upon the unbridgeable insularity of English scholarship and publishing, but it may also suggest a specific disinclination to take seriously Canadian (or perhaps Commonwealth) scholarship. One can only hope that, intractable English attitudes overcome, she will have read her predecessor by now. Solely on the question of play and game in metafiction, Hutcheon's discussion (forgiving her coyness about Deconstruction) is too helpful to ignore. All three books, allowing for their different approaches and granting certain limitations, can be recommended. Any student of literature, finding him/herself driven by a passion to discover the truth about metafiction and postmodernism, could read all three proceeding, in order of ascending difficulty, from Waugh, to Hutcheon, to Thiher. The effort would not be lost.

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