論　文

Metafiction:
An Introduction on Dramatizing
the Boundaries of Social Discourse

John Wolfgang ROBERTS

要　旨

　メタフィクションは創作と現実の境界を霞ませ，テクストの意味生成を実現するために著者と読者を協働的な関係へと導く。メタフィクションは我々の社会的アイデンティティと環境に対して本質的に「批判的」であるがゆえ，我々はメタフィクションに意味を追い求める。このようなメタテクストは，社会構造の信憑性に疑義を呈し，まさにその構造を考察するための代案を明示することで，我々の社会構造の幻想を断ち切るのである。遊戯的メタフィクションの結果，読者の意図と動機しだいで社会変革が可能となる「対話的（dialogical）」なプロセスが生じる。

Keywords: Dialectics（弁証法），Dialogism（ダイアロジズム），Discourse（ディスコース（文化）），Hermeneutics（解釈学），Metafiction（メタフィクション），Play（プレイ理論），Postmodernism（ポストモダニズム）

Abstract

　Metafictions blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, and bring together the writer and reader into a cooperative relationship to realize the meaning of the text. We search for meaning in metafiction

because it is inherently critical of our social identities and environment. These meta-texts break the illusions of our social structures by questioning their truthfulness and revealing alternative ways of thinking about those same structures. The result of ludic metafictions is a dialogical process by which social change is possible depending on intentions and motivations in the reader.

1. Introduction

Stories are everywhere. Metafiction matters because ultimately our engagements with culture are centered on story. We *are* stories, constantly absorbed in and with stories. The stories we accept define who we are and they become our identities. Likewise, we are born into stories, which influence the type of story we would like to portray ourselves as in this complex network of narratives. When stories interact with other stories, we are embarking on a metafictional relationship with our surroundings. When stories interact with each other, and the interaction influences changes in how we define ourselves or our cultures, we become aware of how impermanent the person we thought we were, actually is. When we let stories, and new stories into our lives and we engage with them and become aware of how we define ourselves in comparison to those new stories, we are also forced to define and redefine our social discourses.

Metafiction matters because it teaches us that we are stories in perpetual intertextualization, and this is metafiction's most liberating element. To understand that we are stories, is to know that we are 'authors' and that we can co-create the narratives around us. In a nutshell, stories are constantly in play, and the way one story-world influences the other, is 'meta' because it forces us to use story in order to engage other stories in a critical manner. For the curious and willing individual then (*intention*), this provides the foundation for deeper investigations of these all-encompassing social narratives.

2. The Hermeneutical *Intent* for Knowledge

Here I provide a short overview of hermeneutics according to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976), which serve to make the case for intention. The observer's quest for knowledge can be seen as hermeneutical intention. For this reason, open engagements with theory and

culture are necessary. 'Open' in the sense that they are approached in the way Gadamer (1976: 9) describes his universal hermeneutics as a process via an ethic of prejudices, 'constitut[ing] the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world'. In other words, in the search for knowledge, whatever the method or discipline, we must first approach the question of inquiry through our open prejudices.

Gadamer, (1976: 9) elaborates on the principle of prejudices in quests for knowledge,

> This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, "nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity.

What Gadamer provides here is the ethical component to culture. A duty, if you will, to engage with culture and knowledge in a way that does not allow stagnating ideologies to grow cancerous. It invites (to use a loaded word) change, and like evolutionary biology and postmodern theory, does not petrify a particular discourse or stasis as fixed.

Gadamer goes on to state in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976), on what it means to create a 'productive scholar' (12), that one does not rely solely on methodology, but on imagination to create something new. Gadamer makes clear the necessity for methodological rigor, but places the value of its application on imaginative engagements with acquired knowledge. 'The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable' (Gadamer, 1976: 13). In other words, to expose the fictionality of our social narratives, glimpse the prejudices that inform those narratives and address those fictions. To see what is questionable is to see *possibility*.

This hermeneutical ethic, as I've briefly outlined through the theories of Gadamer, serves to show the way a 'reader' or cultural agent can be most useful in molding the type of society that can be most beneficial. As 'literary' beings we possess this cultural 'molding' power to engage the discourses that surround us. And we perhaps should, since not to means a certain delusional passivity to the various discourses, which in its worst form is complacent and unexamined. Metafiction, in the way it operates textually with the reader and her environment is one such way to activate the openness of our prejudices.

3. The Nature of Metafiction: Visions, Playfulness and Evolutionary Need

The word 'metafiction' was coined by William H. Gass in an essay entitled 'Philosophy and the Form of Fiction' (1978). Since then, many theorists have written on metafiction, namely, Patricia Waugh (1984), Linda Hutcheon (1980;2013), Robert Scholes (1979), and Mark Currie (1995). What is interesting to note is that though there have been a number of fairly recent writings on metafiction and postmodernism, metafiction is not solely a late twentieth century literary genre or trend. Nor is it 'postmodernist'; though I contend that a key postmodernist feature is its metafictional quality. There are metafictional works that go far back into the canon, including Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (14th century), Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (part 1:1605; part 2: 1615), and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy*, *Gentelman* (1759-1767).

Metafiction is inherently critical, but not inherently judgmental. Therefore, the correspondence between an 'active' engagement with 'meta' art and the 'active' engagement with culture lies solely in an informed hermeneutical quest for knowledge and understanding; from which we can say the 'meta' arts when engaged through the ethical hermeneutical paradigm, creates the awareness of possibilities, first in the individual's understanding, and then in the social discourses, that inform the dialectical processes of a *dialectics of discourse* (Fairclough, 2003).

Though theories about what metafiction is and how it affects us vary, the general consensus is that metafiction is a self-reflexive form of fiction. That is, the fiction communicates an awareness that it is a work of fiction, and is therefore inherently critical of the conventions that are being communicated in the story. Metafiction then, holds the proverbial double mirror to those conventions, illuminating the fictionality of those very conventions. For this reason, metafiction is not necessarily moral, nor does it suggest degrees of value for or against social convention. In dramatizing the convention with its own fictionality, all it does is recognize the malleability of our various levels of identity and social structures. In other words, metafiction simultaneously creates and destroys the fictional illusion so that the author and reader find themselves in a cooperative relationship in order to realize coherent meaning.

Meta-art is aware of it's existence as a work of art. Consider this self-awareness. As such, it is an art-form that expresses an often puzzling knowledge of it's own artificiality. Since it is aware of itself as a work of art, it therefore also communicates an awareness that

it was created and is being observed, or to use a more appropriate term, co-created through its reception by the observer, or reader as is the case with metafiction. Linda Hutcheon (1980; 2013: 5) hints toward this sentiment when she states,

> Reading and writing belong to the processes of "life" as much as they do to those of "art." It is this realization that constitutes one side of the paradox of metafiction for the reader. One the one hand, he is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the "art," of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience.

The very nature of a creative process is the building of an illusion. When the metafiction invites the reader to co-create, it also communicates the continuous and perpetual creation process. The text exists within its exposed form, in a way that brings the creator and co-creator, or author and reader, together in a dialogue regarding its meaning. Mark Currie (1995: 15) states, 'Above all, metafiction is committed to the idea of constructed meanings rather than representable essences'.

Since the text has 'dramatized' (Currie, 1995: 4) the two spheres (reality/fiction) against each other, we, the readers become fully aware of its artificiality. We are conscious of ourselves as readers and we are conscious of the story-world. We are engaged in the rules of the fictional game by the author and we are engaged in filling in the story-gaps as co-creators. As readers of metafiction, since our responses are crucial to understanding what the piece means, we become a sort of co-author of the text. Since metafiction is presented to us in the form of a game that must be 'figured out' or 'deciphered', it requires active, rather than passive participation in its understanding. This active participation could be characterized as a cooperative relationship between the author and reader.

Meaning then is subjective, as it can vary from reader to reader, but herein lies the value: the work of art poses a question through its playful elements and the reader engages these occurrences with critical and creative thought processes in order to generate textual meaning. And this is the game of meta-arts. This is the dramatization between fiction and reality. Without the reader's cooperation with the creator to establish meaning, or in other words accepting the creator's rules of play to the text, and engaging the creator in a dialogue over what the piece means, the fiction would just be a 'meaningless' jumble of imagery,

senseless metaphor and language. Hermeneutical intention is key. The meta-text is more than anything, a posed question-in-itself that generates dialogue.

4. The Metafictional Fabric of Evolution, Play, Language and Social Action

The lowest common metafictional denominator is this: we, like the text, exist knowingly and simultaneously on a real and fictional plane; both in a bio-cultural sense, and in the metafictional paradoxical sense. That is, embodiments of cultural narratives, but with the awareness of our fictivity. The author exists as a visionary or seer, or to use Keith Hopper's terminology, in a 'shamanistic' (2009: 3) existence through the probing nature of the fiction. Contrary to the many nihilistic criticisms against postmodernism (as metafiction is often viewed as part of the postmodernist condition), metafiction is a reclamation of the romantic inspirations of literature. And in considering that sentiment, it is important to understand that metafiction goes beyond the epochs of postmodernism, modernism and romanticism, but to early modern, ancient texts, oral traditions, and even further thanks to our fundamental nature of storytelling.

Rather than present stories in the fixed word for consumers, metafiction re-ignites the proverbial campfire and gathers us beside the storyteller. The storyteller and listener are able to break frames, enter in and out, change the route, and cooperate on the construction of the story. We see the story being told, yet we are engaged. Our concerns help shape the story, yet we are the audience. Our concerns change over time, and as we continue to participate in these stories, the way we engage these stories changes as well. And consequently, thanks to its very malleable and decentered nature, participatory stories like metafiction continue their relevance in helping us construct who we are in the world. Hopper writes (2003: 2)

> All literature is either shamanistic or ritualistic. Most novels are ritualistic in that they follow a prescribed order of procedures and conventions which are handed down by history.

This shamanistic tendency within literature, which Keith Hopper attributes to Pat Sheeran in the book *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (Hopper, 2003), sets the lens for how we should initially approach metafiction. In fact the spirit associated with a shamanistic approach to art, in general, is key in visualizing possible

societies, behaviors and philosophies. This is the dialogic nature of meta-art's shamanism. Dialogue is cooperative, investigative, and dialectical. Dialectical because societies change and old truths are sometimes insufficient for modern problems. It questions old truths and puts into play new ideas for discussion. This is not to say that the old works, and the ideas associated with and hermeneutically extracted from them must be subverted. In fact, the mark of classical art is that they possess within themselves shamanistic qualities that have preoccupied ages filled with meaningful dialogue. And, to be clear, metafiction is not in the business of subversion. As Johan Huizinga states in *Homo Ludens* (1955), his first criteria for play: 'Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty' (1955: 8). It is not play till the parties have agreed to the rules by which to play it, and, have willingly come to play it. Play is not political, in it's purest sense. The 'play' for meaning, as it occurs in metafiction, is critical and political in the meanings it produces, but the adherents of the game come willingly. It is not a moral duty, as Huizinga states, but the individual's intention to arrive at meaning in an otherwise incoherent text. As Kieth Hopper suggests, "[m]etafiction does not abandon tradition but critically reappraises and enriches it" (Hopper, 2003: 8). Culture is in a dialogue with itself. Massive changes to the social structure do not occur instantaneously.

Within metafiction, more so than other forms of literary works, the reader assumes a shamanistic role as a co-shaman, if you will. It is precisely because of the cooperative and playful nature of the genre, that it carries a higher potency for change. Since meaning is elusive, a great emphasis is placed on the reader to understand what is being communicated and to arrive at coherence. Michael Mack, in *How Literature Changes the Way We Think* (2012: 2), describes an ethics of art, which sums up the shamanistic ethic very well. He states,

> Art's ethics is one of resilience. On account of its distance from the real world—its virtuality, in other words—the aesthetic has a unique capacity to help us explore different and so far unthinkable forms of action and interaction. Resilience here denotes more than strategies for coping with change. Art performs an ethics of resilience which resists the repetition and thus perpetuation of harmful practices.

In other words, there are physical and philosophical aspects to our bio-cultural 'being,' and 'evolutionary' resilience depends on continual criticism and creation of art (in our case),

that ensures a being (or society of beings) over time. I speak of the consilient nature of our biology and our culture, and specifically how metafiction serves to foster change, discursively and consequently, adaptively. The focus here however is mainly on the discursive implications of metafiction.

Robert Scholes creates a simple diagram, to demonstrate this concept visually on page 23 of *Metafiction* (1995).

Fig. 1   <u>Fiction</u>   <u>Being</u>

forms   existence

ideas   essence
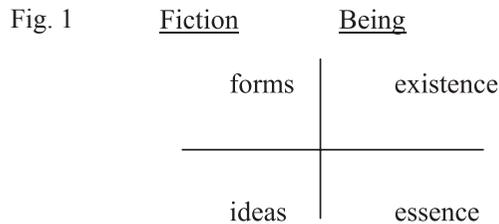
This is the foundation to how we are to view metafiction and its boundaries. From here we will be able to determine the way certain aspects of our nature and social structure are being dramatized or blurred. Likewise, the way the metafictional dynamic derives meaning.

First, the two underlined lines. These, we shall consider the two spheres, Fiction and Being (Man's culture and biology). This is the main boundary that is obscured in metafiction. Since metafiction is a story about the creation process of fiction, it is often difficult to differentiate whether the narrator is the real author or the story author. It is startling when Borges refers to himself in his own fictions, or when the protagonist of Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) begins to hear her own story being narrated by the author, Muriel? Or is it a fictional Muriel Sparks that is narrating? How easy it is to want to place Tim O'Brien directly in the Vietnamese jungles of *The Things They Carried* (1990), because we know he is actually a Vietnam veteran. Yet he tells us 'I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth' (179). Does this come from Tim O'Brien, the protagonist, or the author? It is a metafictional commentary on the paradoxical role of the storyteller as a liar and a professor of truth. Instead of allowing us to suspend our disbelief, the text confesses to be lying, as far as actual events go. At the same time, we are told of how much more authentic these lies are than the actual events, because they better convey the intended message or sentiment. Had the protagonist merely stated that he has been lying to us the entire time, O'Brien would have better maintained the fictional illusion. The reader would have read it as covertly

metafictional at best, providing characterization for the unreliable narrator. However, the additional commentary makes us overtly aware of the fact these lies better convey the horrors of war. Not only are we told that we are being lied to, but also that the lies are actually more accurate. At the same time we are forced to confront this conundrum in two spheres, the fictions we engage in (the novel and culture in general) and the realities (in our case, the biological reality, as opposed the Platonic metaphysical one), whether it is worth it to lie and in our nature to do so. Metafictionally speaking though, the importance of this 'realness of the lie' is crucial because it demonstrates that the fiction is supposed to communicate something of the truth to the real. It is to demonstrate to the real, that there is something to be learned and held as valuable in the fictionality of the artifact. They are dramatized, as Scholes tells us, because they mirror each other and reflect elements of the other, which are to be engaged with in discussion.

Within these two spheres there are two sub categories. In the sphere of Being, we have the 'existence' and the 'essence,' the existentialism of the physical world and the essentialism of the ideas that inform that existence. Scholes attributes this to a Platonic understanding of the world, but where I differ and wish to contribute to this theory, is in the essence embodying the biological pre-dispositions. We are still dealing with a deterministic foundation, but with the material laws of the way the universe operates. I will also add that these two sub-categories, also represent two general groups of criticism, behavioral (existence) and philosophical (essential). The behavioral is primarily concerned with the way we function in the world. Scholes contends that most criticism in this sub-group is socialist in nature (Scholes, 1995: 28). This is the sub-group that we will most be focusing on, since the purpose of the essay is to determine the social significance of metafiction and its abilities to create change (a type of dialectic). On the same page in *Metafiction*, Scholes makes the point that the philosophical critics are concerned with the world of ideas, and are therefore phenomenological, and are mainly 'critics of consciousness' (Scholes, 1990: 29). This is what informs our behavior.

On the Fiction side, the two sub-groups are 'forms' and 'ideas.' As it is in the Being sphere, forms and ideas are representative of the existential (forms) and essential (ideas) of our culture. The cultural side (fiction) is slightly different than the behavioral side. Paul Naour writes in *E.O. Wilson and B.F. Skinner: Sociobiology and Radical Behaviorism* (2009: 33/34), 'Culture emerges as the collective behavior of many individuals aligning to create cultural patterns.' I contend that the existence of being symbolizes the actions of

individuals (the way we act), and the fictional side deals with the actual structure of the cultural patterns.

The ideas of fiction are the rules that govern narrative/culture. It is the narratological structure that enlightens us to the fact that we are witnessing a construction. In the critical sense, the ideas of fiction are the structural. The forms of fiction on the other hand, do not dive into the narratological elements, but into the formal elements. The formal is the formalist type of criticism. As Scholes reminds us, the structuralist critic is 'synchronic in his orientation' (Scholes: 28), meaning he investigates the scientific structure of the fiction. Synchronic study seeks to uncover the way a meaning exists, or is conveyed in a given structure at a given time. This terminology is primarily used in linguistic study, but is equally applicable to cultural studies and for our purposes here since we are talking about meaning. In cultural studies, and in the Scholes diagram, the synchronic study of structure is what seeks to understand the conventions of the status quo. These are the underlying social structures. This is one social sphere that is engaged in metafictions.

The formalist critic, on the other hand, is 'diachronic' (Scholes: 28), meaning he is largely concerned with the aesthetic elements of the fiction. 'Diachronic' is another linguistic term associated with how meaning is derived at. However, where the synchronic focuses on a certain structure at a given time, the diachronic focuses on the structure as it's evolved over time. Things that are investigated diachronically both hint towards its synchronic structure and represent a deviated form of that structure (hence conveying an historical record of sorts). In other words, diachronic study tries to make sense of these deviations and come to a meaningful understanding. The diachronic approach is also dialogic in the way it keeps in touch with its past and offers something to the future. This is why, in our artistic case, the fiction of forms (fig. 1), and the associated formalist criticisms are aesthetic; they deal with the relativistic variety associated with the structural foundation. In this diachronic approach we try to understand what makes a specific piece of work, a poem, story, university, etc. As we will see later, this formalist quadrant is also associated with the romance novel (traditional literary term, as opposed to the realist novel) because this is where variety to the structure is created.

Fig. 1.2

formal criticism	behavioral criticism
(aesthetic)	(socialist)
structural criticism	philosophical criticism
(narratological)	(phenomenological/consciousness)

(Scholes, 1995: 27; words in parentheses are mine)
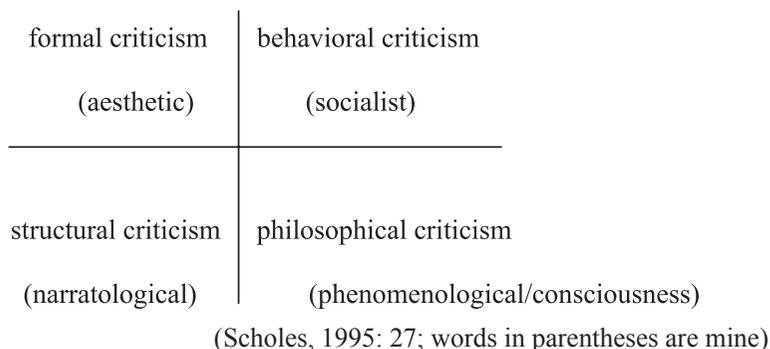
Scholes goes on to mention that the phenomenological, and what I have termed the narratological are dramatized through language. Scholes (1995: 29) states,

> As the structuralist looks for the ideas that inform fiction, the critic of consciousness looks for the essential values that inhere in the experience of fiction. Clearly these two activities are connected, and language is the bridge that connects them.

Though we will be focusing critically on the behavioral side of metafiction, the play between the narratological and phenomenological is crucial. This is the epistemological foundation to the argument. This is where we will theorize on the decentering of meaning and develop a discursive dialectics. These are the ideas, between Fiction and Being (culture and biology) that will determine how the forms of fiction (the formalist) will be dramatize against the existence of being (the behavioral).

So far I have provided two diagrams very similar to those of Robert Scholes. The first is a diagram representing the relationship between fiction and reality, and the second represents the general types of literary criticisms that exist. As far as the genre of metafiction goes, we would be primarily concerned with the forms of fiction, as in figure 1.

Seeing as how it is in metafiction's nature to dramatize boundaries, and decenter and challenge what we know, we should take a moment to consider the boundaries that are actually being blurred within the fiction.

If we take the 'forms of fiction' part of figure 1,

Fig. 1.3   <u>Fiction</u>
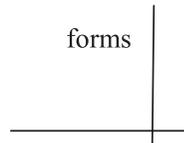
forms

and superimpose figure 1.2 on the forms of fiction,

Fig. 1. 4   <u>Fiction</u>   <u>Being</u>

(existence)

forms   existence

(Romance)   (Novel)

((aesthetic))   ((socialist))

ideas   essence

(myth)   (allegory)

((narratological))   ((phenomenological))
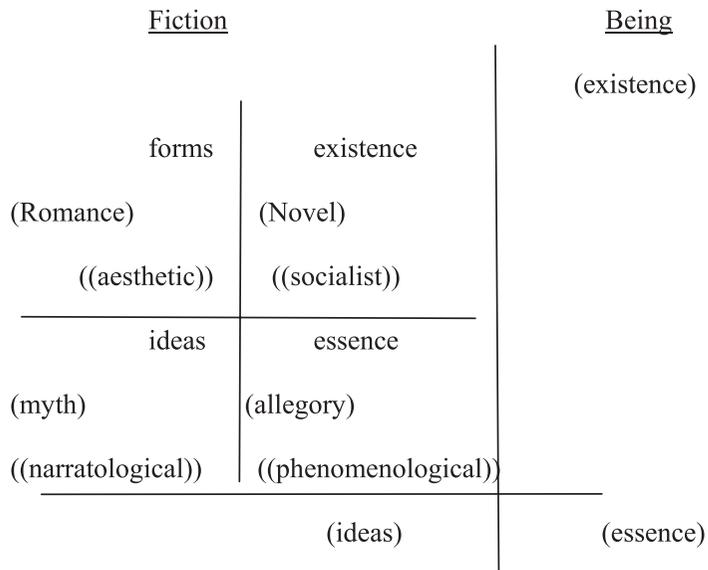
(ideas)   (essence)

then we are able to see the types of fictions that emerge. I have added the critical explanatory labels in double parentheses.

Robert Scholes terms these four sections of fiction as: forms-*romance*; existence-*novel*; essence-*allegory*; and ideas-*myth* (Scholes, 1995: 24). Allegory and myth are both fictions of ideas, because allegory is also phenomenological. Allegory often serves to uncover truths about the nature of our being, the ideas that are inherent to us as conscious creatures. Myth on the other hand serves to give explanations to those phenomenological ideas. Myth is the synchronic study of the phenomenological ideas that exist about our human nature.

Likewise, there is play between romance and the novel. The novel simply put is the existential novel, or rather, the fiction that addresses realism. 'The most typical form of behavioral fiction is the realistic novel. . . .The novel is doubly involved in time: as fiction in the evolution of fictional forms, and as a report on changing patterns of behavior' (Scholes,

1995: 25). In other words, fictions that attempt to capture the times that they are written in.

Scholes describes the term romance in it's traditional literary definition; 'fiction of forms is usually labeled 'romance' in English criticism, quite properly, for the distinguishing characteristic of romance is that it concentrates on the elaboration of previous fictions' (Scholes, 1995: 25). The romance takes into account the literatures of the past and this makes parody possible. It contains an inherent space for fictional interstices thanks to its formalist, aesthetic and diachronic nature. Scholes (1995: 25) elaborates:

> There is also a dimension of the fiction of forms which is aware of the problem of literary legacy and chooses the opposite response to elaboration. This is the surgical response of parody. But parody exists in a parasitic relationship to romance. It feeds off the organism it attacks and precipitates their mutual destruction. From this decay new growth may spring.

These forms are excited by other forms and create new forms and generate new discussions. This is in itself a metafictional relationship between the different romances and a visionary exercise in form that serves to play against the existential sphere to which it is mirroring.

Within the fiction of forms, it is important to understand that there is interplay between all the fiction types. This is the metafictional element at work, parodying and challenging philosophical ideas, and literary trends, human behaviors and the structures that inform them. Parodying and challenging it's own allegories, myths, romances and novels. Any combination of interplay between the forms of fiction and the outlying categories is possible. This play is the scope of this essay; the effects of R on existence using an epistemological language that makes such behavioral criticism possible.

Fig. 1.5   <u>Fiction</u>   <u>Being</u>

(((Cognitive)))

forms   existence   ((Cultural Time))

R | N
M | A

(Time):

ideas   essence   ((Evolutionary Time))
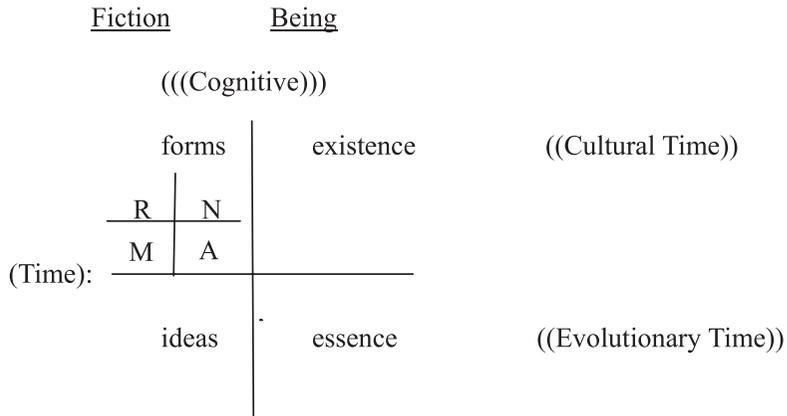
　　　Scholes goes on to explain that the 'forms of fiction and the behavioral pattern of human existence both exist in time, above the horizontal line in the diagram' (23). I have thus added the label, 'Time' beside the horizontal line. Time exists in this sense, as we should consider it for pragmatic purposes, *culturally* above the line and *evolutionary* below, labels, which I have also added.

　　　Whereas the social forms and behaviors change in cultural time, the epistemological realm below the timeline, those of the ideas of fiction and the essential values and morals, are the universals that inform the way we behave and construct our artifacts in evolutionary time. Our ideas, unlike our essences however, depend on local variation rather than universal traits. Therefore ideas represent the social structure of a long evolution of culture. They are malleable, but with resistant tendencies. Of course the only way to elaborate on these evolutionary commonalities is through language. Thus, here we have between the evolution of our bio and cultural essentialisms, the play of language communication. It is quite obvious that culture evolves quicker than our biology. In *cultural time*, superficial changes occur which reflect communal adaptations to societal issues. In *evolutionary time* we are considering biological adaptations that are genetic to us through processes of natural selection and continued human survival.

　　　Considering our *theory of mind*, which allows us to 'describe our ability to explain behavior in terms of underlying thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions' (Zunshine , 2010 b: 117), it would be important to consider our cognitive faculties at an intersection with time. I have added 'cognitive' to the vertical line to demonstrate that it is our cognition that allows us to couple our biological selves with the culture. On the evolutionary timeline it

has served us by seeking social structures that inform the method and parameters of our biological dispositions. Likewise, on the cultural timeline, it ensures more immediate personal survival within societies by mediating our behaviors within our cultural forms. The line illustrates that the relationship between the biological and cultural spheres occurs through a cognitive engagement that is genetically predisposed towards certain biases and is in search of cultural meaning.

Cognition is also the medium by which play between our Being (reality) and Fiction (aesthetic) worlds exist. Cognition allows us create art and think about it critically, applying what we learn to our environments. In this sense we are concerned with the cultural timeline since ages of natural selection and genetic mutations would be required to have an effect on the evolutionary timeline. As Robert Scholes goes on to suggest in *Metafiction*, (1995: 23),

> [t]he ideas of fiction are those essential qualities which define and characterize it
> [fiction]...They are aspects of the essence of being human. To the extent that fiction
> fills a human need in all cultures, at all times, it is governed by these ideas.

The ideas of fiction represent the localized versions of inherent biological adaptations (essences) to storytelling. They represent the micro adaptations of the literary universals we find across cultures, certain archetypes, and even tendencies in storytelling.

Here's a quote by Jorge Luis Borges from *Borges and I*, (1998: 324):

> Years ago I tried to free myself from him, and I moved on from the mythologies of the
> slums and outskirts of the city to games with time and infinity, but those games belong
> to Borges now, and I shall have to think of other things.

Here we see various forms of play at work. We can map the literary formalism (forms of fiction) and see how metafiction contains within itself the dialogic function. We will come to see how metafiction, in its very form and practice, amalgamates poststructuralist decentering of meaning in texts, with the perseverance of a larger grand-narrative (if not the grandest), human survival.

The first metafictional element that strikes us is the self-referential nature of the story. Borges is both the author and the protagonist, that is, the real and the fiction. It is from the awareness of this separation that all metafictions emerge from. The fiction is aware of the

being and vice versa. They are being played on.

Play is an important concept needed in applying the metafictional framework (Fiction), back onto reality (Being). Borges writes, '...but those games belong to Borges now, and I shall think of other things' (Borges, 1998: 324). So what exactly is the 'game' that Borges (author/protagonist) is referring to? He tells us earlier that they are stories, which are games with 'time and infinity' (324); changes in his development as a writer from realism to metafictions. Since the story is about the man, Borges (Being), coming to terms with the celebrity Borges (Fiction), we can see how the 'man' created these stories, but for the world these stories don't belong to the 'man,' but the 'persona' (Fiction). 'I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can spin out his literature, and that literature is my justification' (324). And so, since he must 'think of other things' (324), Borges is obliged to continue participating in the game between the 'I' and the 'He' by writing new fictions that will serve his persona. He writes, 'and everything winds up being lost to me, and everything falls into oblivion, or into the hands of the other man' (324). Borges demonstrates for us the necessary cooperative relationship essential in playing the 'game'.

However, the games are much more profound than this. At the surface level, this is play between the fictional and real Borges. But is it? The real story Borges is the protagonist. Even the real is maintained within the story. The metaphor of the mirror is essential in speaking about metafiction, but a house of mirrors is more appropriate. We have the real Borges who has written a story about a fictional real Borges, who writes to maintain a fictional persona, which is reflective of the actual persona of the real Borges.

Moving beyond the textual analysis, we must notice where we fit in the story. Herein lies the game. Let us consider once more the Borgenian dilemma: we have the physicality of the story, a play-text between the author and the persona. But we also have the writer Borges, who actually penned the story. And since all three of these characters (one real and two fictional) share the same name, we, the reader, must decide whether it is the true Borges speaking to us, or the fictional Borges relating his reflections on his celebrity. We too, then find ourselves in a cooperative relationship (not unlike the relationship between Borges and his persona) with the real Borges. Forced to play his game as he invites us to look into the two mirrors he's holding up for us, and think critically about topics such as truth, lies, reality, storytelling, textual messages, and our relation to it all, and to be creative participants to the story as we consider the actual celebrity Borges that we all know about and all the other Borgeses.

To quickly demonstrate, the interplay of fiction here, *Borges and I* (1998), is a play between the form of fiction and the form of existence: the two fictional Borges. It is also allegorical in the sense that it questions what it means to be alive and have a place in society. Are we to serve our selves or our personas? It is also a mythical interplay between the Borgenian myth and his philosophical inquiry mentioned in the previous paragraph (made possible through the decentered language of the story). Additionally, beyond the play within the forms of the story, there is the play with the real existential, which has societal application by generating discussions in the reader. It is worth mentioning as well that the discussions that metafiction creates about the structural, formal and philosophical, always lead back to the existential. At a micro level, these issues are cause for introspective dialogue within the metafictional reader. At the macro level, they are presented for larger dialogue and societal engagement and possible change.

The metaphor of the mirror is not only important to metafiction, but also crucial in thinking about metafiction as a tool for change and survival. These metafictional stories are mirrors in themselves that are also proverbial playgrounds where we gather to play, exercise, and even tryout our critical and creative skills in important ways. Brian Boyd writes in *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (2005: 381):

> We see *art* as a form of *cognitive play* that appeals to our intense human appetite for the rich inferences that *patterns* allow. Art in this broad sense is a human adaptation, its chief functions being (1) to *refine and retune our minds* in modes central to human cognition-sight, sound, and sociality—which it can do piecemeal through its capacity to motivate us to participate again and again in these high intensity workouts; (2) to raise the status of gifted artists; (3) to improve the coordination and *cooperation* of communities, in our very social species; and (4) to foster *creativity* on an individual and social level.

This is the evolutionary (in social and biological senses) function of art. 'Play is facilitated by rules and roles, and metafiction operates by exploring fictional rules to discover the role of fictions in life. It aims to discover how we each "play" our own realities' (Waugh, 1984: 35). Metafiction, contains within it, additional layers of play which provide a more intellectual participation with the writer and the text, and subsequently a more critical approach to the social world. To make a more Marxist point, Terry Eagleton (2003: 35) states:

> Because subjects like literature and art history have no obvious material pay-off, they tend to attract those who look askance at capitalist notions of utility. The idea of doing something purely for the delight of it has always rattled the grey-bearded guardians of the state. Sheer pointlessness is a deeply subversive act...art and literature encompass a great many ideas and experience ...They also raise questions about quality of life in a world where experience itself seems brittle and degraded....those who deal with art speak the language of value rather than price.

I would add, that there is nothing pointless about such endeavors. The language of value spreads to all aspects within the spheres of fiction and being when we search for meaning.

Storytelling is in itself a form of pretend play (make-believe play), which is unique to humans. As Boyd states, '[a]nimals love to play...only humans would play simultaneously with dinosaurs and ducks or dragons and skeletons' (Boyd, 2009: 177). We use pretend play and develop stories that more cognitively ensure survival in a different way than more physical forms of play, they are about 'mommies and babies, monsters and heroes, spaceships and unicorns' (Gottschall, 2012: 33). In other words, they are absurd, deal with real concerns, and are symbolic of real human character traits and desires. As Gottschall states, 'Pretend play is deadly serious fun. Every day, children enter a world where they must confront dark forces, fleeing and fighting for their lives' (Gottschall, 2012: 32). Metafiction, though not operating at such a primordial level (though it often deals with these same issues), can and does provide the same sort of preparation for social interaction. 'Fictions foster cooperation by engaging and attuning our social and moral emotions and values, and creativity by enticing us to think beyond the immediate in the way our minds are most naturally disposed—in terms of social actions' (Boyd, 2009: 383).

Additionally, children's storytelling, contains another trait that is also characteristically metafictional. As Boyd (2009: 177) notes,

> [c]hildren's social pretend play lacks form as story or drama. It proceeds in fits and starts; it lacks consistency and direction. Children easily and naturally "break frame," stepping outside the action—an utter no-no in modern adult improvisatory theater—to narrate the story, or to act as codirectors or scriptwriters as they negotiate the next development. (This phenomenon, incidentally refutes the narratological tradition that

insists that only narrated and not enacted stories count as narratives.)

Children's play not only utilizes metafictional elements, but also challenges tradition. In this way metafiction is not only more intellectual, but also intuitional. Though one may argue that we humans develop our skills to the point that we no longer have to tell disjointed narratives to each other, I would argue that that isn't necessarily true. We develop our intellect and skills so that we can become social animals, ensuring our and the species' survival, but the more complex our capacities become, the more complex situations manifest around us. It would seem then, that more intuitional approaches, in this case, playful boundary-blurring stories mirroring the issues of the times (new and reoccurring), would serve us better.

This brings us back to the shamanistic role of the teller/author. This intuitive playfulness serves as a preliminary re-envisioning of all the spheres and sub-categories, which we have talked about. David Richter, in his editorial on Friedrich Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, in *The Critical Tradition* (2007: 437/438), tells us:

> Language works precisely by depriving the things of the world of their individuality: a word like "leaf" can only stand for each and every leaf, regardless of shape, size and color, by becoming a concept deprived of color, shape, and size....These metaphors are in a sense lies, but once they become structured into concepts, built into a framework that expresses the society's understanding of its world, they become truths:
>
>> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer coins.
>
> ...And cultures change, slowly, as this mobile army of metaphors change, as original thinkers conceive new relationships that later harden into new concepts. (Nietzsche clearly agrees with Shelley, that the poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of mankind.")

Here we draw the connections between the importance of an intuitive re-imagining of structures of fiction and being. We have set the linguistic foundation for not only re-imagining meaning, but the notion that meanings are lies in and of themselves. And therefore, can be decentered and recentered to create new structures and avoid blind acceptance of metaphors that are doubly lies: as metaphors-in-themselves, and as modern anachronistic irrelevancies. It seems then, in light of the Nietzschean description of the fictive process of language (and of 'truth'), the shamanistic tendency of the romancers (authors of forms of fiction), and the cognitive parabolic function of making sense of the world, that the very epistemological engagement with the world is centered on the creation of 'fictions' to impose an 'order' onto that which can be then taken to establish meaning and knowledge. This does not mean that there is no truth and that nothing is knowable, as critics of poststructuralism would argue against poststructuralism, but that by our very creative abilities to formulate fictions to explain and understand that which we encounter in our environments, we can come to learn a great deal about the world we live in. I contend, that even the concept of 'truth' is a linguistic and fictionalizing attempt to explain the processes of the world as things-in-themselves. By this I mean, assigning fictional patterns (words, metaphors, plot, etc.) to that which begs articulation. But because our fictional patterns are not precise, we open ourselves us up to interpretation, and thus meaning is decentered. Since the term 'truth' itself seeks to assign value to that which is merely existent and valueless as a process, it seems plausible that the greatest 'truth' is perhaps, as Nietzsche (2007) argues, 'knowable' through intuition.

It is up to the creator of cultural artifact to re-imagine these new metaphors and to do so requires an intuitional sense of play that jumbles the old tired structural combinations and presents a vision for a new approach and outlook towards society. This is the difference between the Nietzschean 'liberated intellect' and the proverbial lemming, or 'needy man' who only sees culture as master rather than tool. Metafiction I argue is not only the practice for the liberated intellect, but also the overt and egoless invitation to intellectual liberation. Friedrich Nietzsche states in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (2007: 458):

> That enormous scaffold and framework of concepts to which the needy man clings for
> dear life is merely a stage plaything for the boldest feats of the liberated intellect; and
> when it smashes and jumbles, and ironically reassembles this framework, pairing what
> is most foreign and separating what is closest, it reveals that it has no use for such

makeshifts of need and that it will no longer be guided by concepts, but by intuitions. There is no regular path which leads from these intuitions into the land of ghostly schemata, the land of abstractions. No word exists for them, man is speechless at their sight; or else he talks only in a great many forbidden metaphors and unheard-of phrasings so that by smashing and mocking the old conceptual barriers he might at least creatively approximate the impression of intuition in its mighty presence.

This mirrors the intuitive stories of children, who smash, jumble, and reassemble the frameworks surrounding their stories and games of play. This is, in a sense, a call for the return to the intuitive spirit that takes to its heart the simultaneous creative and critical approach to the world. The criticism of the old and the creative towards the new. And just like children, who lack the vocabulary necessary for metaphorical construction and explanation to the playful stories they tell and enact, the liberated intellect, or metafictional creator, will engage in, as David Richter (2007: 438) summarizes about Nietzsche's theory 'aesthetic play, harvesting suffering, but experiencing a kind of satisfaction unavailable to those who live by the "truth" of socially accepted concepts.'

Nietzsche creates for us an evolutionary return to the trust of intuition. An ethics of understanding the necessity of change. A bridge between the biological organism and the societal culture (in the biological and social sense of the word). An electrification of language and the drive within, to utilize language as a tool for survival instead of a force of repression, as resilient shamans who understand the fleeting nature of 'truths' and the dangers of stagnation.

Language is our medium for understanding ourselves and the world; our relationship with and within. It articulates our emotions and forges stronger social bonds. It is the method of literature. Language is a driving social force and a biological necessity. It is an evolutionary adaptation that has allowed us to come together as a species and connect. Language is in the best interest of all because it ensures social and biological survival. Our investigation into language begins with an epistemological defining, from which we are able to build an ethics, that perhaps, will be more useful outside of metafiction in re-imagining the way groups and societies address problems.

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory decenters meaning within signs and structures. There is enough *freeplay* inherent in their meanings that we are able to extrapolate various meanings. Derrida further explains, on the paradoxical concept of centering structures of

meaning, 'although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *epistemé* as philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. And...coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire' (Derrida, 2007: 915). This concept of the coherence in contradiction is important because mere coherence is ignorant acceptance without investigation, what Nietzsche calls, 'the needy man' (Nietzsche, 2007: 458). In any aspect of life, this sort of acceptance can have drastic consequences. The value of the decentering quality of metafiction is in its ability to beg coherence through its contradictions. It allows for the contradictions to be considered and it revels in the play from which these contradictions generate momentary coherence.

Coherence in contradiction provides the 'both/and' framework, which is not definitive, but necessary in acknowledging so as to move forward in our analysis and general outlooks of the world. In other words, contradiction fuels the search for an agreeable meaning. The contradictory 'both/and' framework is one that generates desire. The 'force of a desire' (Derrida, 2007: 915) that Derrida speaks of, is this: the natural movement of disharmonious elements to resolve themselves. I argue, this is the case because, we are not content to leave the world as it is, sequences of random events; the performative thing-in-itself. We constantly are in search of patterns and coherence. What we get with 'force of a desire' is dialogue. Since meaning is perpetually elusive, dialogue is perpetually necessary. And since dialogue is perpetually in play, there is social interaction, cooperation and participation, regardless of the adversarial status of the other (since anyone who engages in play (dialogue) recognizes the need for it and therefore acknowledges the rules by which the game is to be played).

We've spoken about the decentered nature of metafiction and how it contains the necessary elements for change. But what is the process from metafiction to social change? While metafiction may not have direct social results, it possesses qualities that encourage and train us for those results. The principles of decentering and on force of desire are necessary in an establishing epistemology of language. Through this epistemological foundation, we are able to develop the necessary (and in fact, interdisciplinary) vocabulary in theorizing on metafiction's social disposition. On decentering, we are able to theorize on language. On coherence of contradiction, we are able to establish the necessity of dialogue. And on the force of desire, we arrive at the need to restructure. In other words, question, discuss, and change. The first two, 'question' and 'discuss' are inherent in metafiction. The third is the result of questioning and discussing, the exercise and cooperation in playing

with metaphor. Patricia Waugh (1984: 41) reminds us:

> In literature, then, realism, more than aleatory art, becomes the mode most threatening to full civilization, and metafiction becomes the mode most conducive to it!. . . The current 'playfulness' within the novel is certainly not confined merely to literary form but is part of a broader development in culture which is registered acutely in all postmodernist art.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his earlier work, likened the nature of language to mathematics, a menacing metaphor, as he would later find out; a structuralist argument that assumes only orderly rights and wrongs. To construct who we are in the world requires more than just a mathematical formula. This is to say, that there is no right or wrong answer in solving our social problems. In fact, as Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja points out in *Reading Games* (2007: 17), '[e]thically speaking, in such a model there is a reward or punishment for the ability to conform, to the rules of an equation'. A mathematical paradigm would mean an ethics of stagnation and blind acceptance of the social structure.

Wittgenstein comes to explain in *Philosophical Investigations* (2009), regarding what a game is, 'if you look at them (various games; my clarification), you won't see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 36e). He mentions board-games, card-games, and ball-games. There are features of these games that are similar, but no one game features them all. For instance, if we were to say that all games are entertaining, then Wittgenstein asks us to compare chess with naughts and crosses. Naughts and crosses are often performed out of boredom, but perhaps chess and baseball are similar in their entertaining quality. Wittgenstein asks us to consider winning and losing. Perhaps they exist in chess, baseball and blackjack, but what about, as he points out, 'when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 36e). And much like the lonesome child throwing a ball against the wall, the card-game solitaire does not engage others in competition. And so in games, much like in language, 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 36e): a paradigm that is in itself elusive, but nonetheless provides the necessary metaphor for language, art, and reality. It allows for the continued play between categories and spheres. But there is perhaps one aspect that is common to all, as put fourth by Johan Huizinga (1955) and summarized succinctly by Kimberly Boham-

Kajala (2007: 14), 'Play is a voluntary activity'. This is an important tenet because it serves to establish the motivation for change solely within the individual. By its own definition of volunteerism for play, it assumes the opposite also exists; that there are many who would just as well prefer to fester in a social cesspool because they are contented with the illusion of truth.

However, we see in this playful paradigm, not the binary social ethics that reward and punish within an either/or schemata, as is in the mathematical view of language, but a more participatory social ethic that values discussion, reflection, and investigation. One that takes the time to consider the overlapping and crisscrossing values and morals that present themselves in the issues we face in the world, and seeks to arrive at progressive answers. If language is the medium by which we deal with the social world around us, as I believe it is, then the paradigm shift to play from the mathematical perspective is also a shift from authoritarianism to dialogism. It is an acceptance of a paradigm that doesn't necessarily take us to either extreme of a 'both/and' schemata, but to a new schemata that incorporates both 'either/or' and 'both/and', as these two critical approaches encompass any number of possibilities when combined. Instead of an authoritarian framework, dialogism allows us to investigate answers by not outright excluding possibilities. Furthermore, it allows new answers by dismembering and combining pieces of old answers to create new ones. Through language, a cooperative and participatory engagement with the social world, we are active agents in constant dialogue, and as such in constant questioning and investigation of our social environment. The importance of adopting this playful view of language is that it gives us the outlook and momentum to engage the world. It encourages a spirit necessary for cooperative social interaction and philosophical investigation.

5. Conclusion

It is the very language used that ruptures the illusory world of the fiction and communicates to the reader that she is observing a work of art that merely represents a fictional existence. This fictional play is laden with ideas for consideration by the reader as she processes questions related to evolving aesthetics of fiction, the narratological elements of fiction, existential behaviors, and essential philosophical ideas that inform our *being*. It is through this lens that we can apply biological, cognitive and play theories to metafiction and in return apply insights gained from our dialogic exercises with the text to a social

dialectical change. Furthermore, within our behaviors lie biological and social forms that are sometimes at odds with each other. Since social evolution occurs more rapidly, we find ourselves in constant need for social reevaluation. Metafiction then can be seen as a playground for progressive thought, a sort of thought-experiment that can be utilized for larger discussions.

Since we are theorizing upon metafiction as a tool for discussion, and fictions (in general) make use of language as a medium, we must see how language connects us socially. Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja, in her book *Reading Games: An Aesthetics of Play in Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett & Georges Perec* (2007), explains how Ludwig Wittgenstein 'is drawn to play and games as metaphors for the human relations established through language' (Boham-Kajala: 16).

The nature of metafiction is to blur the boundary between fiction and reality, author and reader. This blurring of boundaries is key to understanding the ways in which metafiction not only serves as a literary game, but also as creative and or critical social dialogue. Both the games and dialogues that emerge from metafiction serve purposes outside the immediate text. It is through the metafictional nature, to play with the fictional illusions of the text and the realities of the author and reader across planes of time, that the reader realizes he or she exists in the medium alongside the author and alongside the fiction. Patricia Waugh states in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (1984: 34/35),

> ...it can be argued not only that literary fiction is a form of play (if a very sophisticated form) but that play is an important and necessary aspect of human society. . . . metafiction sets out to make this explicit: that play is a relatively autonomous activity but has a definite value in the real world.

Inherent in the genre, is a self-referential tendency to acknowledge the other side of the boundary. This is the use of metafiction, to stimulate the parabolic mind into contemplating our behaviors and discourses. And because of this elusive nature of our meanings, metafiction maintains a dialogic nature that mirrors any prevailing cultural pattern into its fictional realization.

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