

The awareness of postmodern narrative writing

Asma SAMET^{1,*}, *Youcef ATTIA*²

¹ Laboratory of Linguistic, Literary and Critical Studies and Interdisciplinary
Approaches (E0281900).

Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University – Tebessa (Algeria)

asma.samet@univ-tebessa.dz

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0509-4495>

² Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University - Tebessa (Algeria)

youcefattia01@univ-tebessa.dz

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6854-1221>

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Abstract: The research examines the evolution of narrative storytelling amidst contemporary transformations, focusing on renewing writing through cultural dialogue and embracing postmodern diversity. It highlights storytelling's shift beyond conventions, celebrating global creativity and fostering a shared space between creator and reader for reinterpretation.

It also explores intersections between metamodernism, metafiction, and narrative experimentation, clarifying their literary distinctions. Using techniques like metafiction, postmodern narratives challenge reality, address the unspoken, and reflect a new existential awareness that rejects singularity and celebrates diversity in creative expression.

Keywords: *metafiction; narrative consciousness; narrative experimentation; postmodernism.*

*Corresponding Author

I. INTRODUCTION

The experiment aimed to transcend the traditional and dominant by posing questions that lay the foundation for this creative game. Narrative, with its flexible nature and continuity, embraced deviations from the ordinary. Postmodernism took a position beyond modernity, pointing to hidden worlds and circumstances closely tied to the creative process, which cannot be overlooked in any way (Khreis, A., 2001, p. 13). It sought to make these open to all interpretations and readings, acknowledging cultural diversity.

It removed from the art of the novel the old coldness that had placed it in a state of qualitative exhaustion. Thus, awareness of writing acknowledged the human dimension neglected and excluded by waves of modernism, as the creator empties his feelings from the existing world through writing. These existences form the raw materials that the creator will build a linguistic structure from, reflecting his consciousness of existence through the influence of various streams surrounding the circumstances of writing. The novel placed its creator before an important question: What is his stance toward the self? And what is his stance toward the world? He then begins to write consciousness, condensing all old sayings and grand narratives to represent only himself. What the novelist writes is an expression of his overwhelming sense of existence, his elements, and a statement of his intellectual perspective and psychological depths (Nabil, S., 2006, p. 41). Hence, postmodern novels sought to practice criticism, what Patricia Waugh called metafiction, characterized by the breaking of the boundary between creativity and criticism (Waugh, P., 2018, p. 9). The presence of criticism alongside creativity indicates a growing awareness, transforming the process into writing consciousness, a process that is the partial result of increasing self-awareness, social awareness, and cultural consciousness.

There is a deep understanding that both reality and history are temporary, causing the self to question this condition, as reality is no longer comprehensible, and history is nothing more than a narrative. Postmodern storytelling sought to break the illusion of reality, employing creative play and deceptive arts, and using temporary structures where both the creator and reader engage in an interpretive experience (Abu Rahma, A., 2019, p. 15). Critics of postmodern metafiction pointed to the death of the novel, claiming that the creator exposes his narrative methods and techniques, breaking the worlds of imagination in his writings. Meanwhile, enthusiasts argued that it grants the novel unlimited potential, once thought to be introverted and self-referential, but in fact, it is materially open. Through existential rather than epistemological inquiry, the novel exposes itself before the reader, granting them awareness of its construction, thus making it a shared ownership where the creator becomes the critic and the reader becomes the creator. Reality, in its truth, merges with the imagination and its worlds. Thus, this technique goes beyond reality by interrogating it and making it a subject of questioning, leaving the narrative to stand on its own in a kind of conscious narcissism.

Therefore, our research paper attempts to understand the creative evolution of narrative storytelling amid contemporary transformations that aim to innovate by enriching cultural and intellectual dialogue and embracing the cultural diversity produced by postmodern culture, which was primarily concerned with opening the horizons of writing and celebrating its global character (Toleima, A.-M., 1983, p. 12). Here, we face many intersections between metamodernism, metafiction, and narrative experimentation, where there is a significant distinction between them in the fields of literature and criticism. To clarify our view, we have divided the research into two main sections:

- Narrative experimentation and its mechanisms.
- Metafiction and its manifestations. These sections will be followed by a synthesis that reveals the features of postmodern writing, while also addressing the overlap between the three terms to remove the ambiguity surrounding the phenomenon of metafiction, which exposed both the spoken and unspoken, expressing the unsaid by filling in the gaps and questioning the known, elevating the existential dimension and revealing the new consciousness that rejects singularity.

1. Narrative experimentation

1.1. The Concept

The novel has sought to keep pace with the ongoing social, political, economic, and cultural changes, engaging with various scientific theories and philosophical trends to pave the way for creativity in this rich human endeavor. Its aesthetic standards and artistic characteristics have evolved, particularly as it is deeply connected to the ever-changing life of society. Its subject matter is human beings and their experiences with the various challenges of time. As an ancient art form, different studies have sought to explain its structure, moving beyond outdated patterns that no longer align with the current trends in reading and reception. This has led to the need to break free from the chains of tradition. (Toleima, A.-M., 1983, p. 12)

To clarify this creative process, it is essential to first explore the meaning of experimentation:

A. Linguistically: Experimentation comes from the root "J, R, B". (Ibnmanzur, 2016, p. 110). In *Lisan al-Arab*, "al-Mujarrab" is defined as: one who has tested things and knows what is at hand. In *Al-Qamus al-Muheet*, "Jarrabah" means: to test something. (Al-Fayrouzabadi, 1999 p. 60)

The *Al-Mujam al-Waseet* confirms the same meaning, stating "Jarrabah" as: to test something repeatedly. (Ibrahim, M. et al., p. 114)

Based on the above, we can summarize the meaning of experimentation as testing for the purpose of acquiring knowledge.

B. Terminologically

This term differs based on the field of specialization. In the scientific field, experimentation is understood as testing the phenomenon to be studied through scientific observation aimed at revealing a certain result. Thus, experimentation is the test based on observation, seeking to determine specific outcomes. It is the study of a work or phenomenon to reach new results. (Ibrahim, M. et al., p. 114)

In the literary field, this term emerged with (Émile Zola) in his book *The Experimental Novel* published in 1889, in which he attempted to prove the scientific nature of these literary works, as their study is based on examining observations, conclusions, and facts related to the conditions of production and creativity.

Arab studies have agreed that experimentation is, in fact, creativity, achieved through the creation of various techniques in both form and content, aiming to surpass all that is old and stereotypical in order to reach innovative and contemporary works, relying on modern methods and tools. (Fadl, S., 2005, p. 3)

Dr. (Salah Fadl) sees narrative experimentation as embodying all forms of breakthrough. This process involves (Yaqtin, S., 1985, p. 287) :

- Creating new imaginary worlds not explored by previous narratives.
- Employing modern artistic techniques.

- Discovering alternative linguistic levels.

Experimentation indeed touches these aspects, breaking the monotonous linearity of the narrative time, presenting contradictory and complex characters, highlighting deep conflicts, and engaging the reader in the narrative game, encouraging them to think, reflect, and seek the new.

As for (Saeed Yaqtin), he saw experimentation as practicing transcendence during writing, breaking the traditional form and moving beyond it to new techniques to achieve innovation (Yaqtin, S., 1985, p. 287). (Shawqi Badr Youssef) took a middle stance on experimentation, emphasizing drawing from the well of the past and creatively presenting the new by combining experimentation with both form and content consciously, so that creativity neither strays from its original roots nor distances itself from contemporary developments (Ibrahim, H., p. 134). This means that the creative process opens up by embracing a venture free from all traditional forms and contents, destabilizing the conventional and raising new questions related to human and civilizational issues. (Shawqi, B.Y., 1997, p. 26)

1.2 Reasons for the Emergence of Narrative Experimentation

- Keeping up with the changes occurring in contemporary societies and simulating the development it has undergone on various levels and fields, and interacting with it.
- Advocating for postmodern principles by experimenting with literary works in response to intellectual and philosophical challenges.
- The desire for renewal and surpassing the old to expand the boundaries of creativity.
- Artistic creativity, whether in terms of form or content.
- Revitalizing the narrative scene through various techniques employed.
- Developing literary language by searching for a new, innovative language.
- Expressing the conscious self, exploring the psychological space of the creator, and involving the reader in the process of producing and critiquing the writing.

1.3 Mechanisms of Narrative Experimentation

The new novel took an experimental direction by employing various techniques and methods that broke it free from its traditional form, dressing it in a creative garb. This was done by posing different questions that reflected the development of both creative and critical consciousness. We can summarize these techniques as follows:

A/ Experimentation at the Level of Textual Thresholds and Paratexts:

The Title: The title is the first threshold of the novel, designed to capture the reader's attention toward the narrated subject. It serves as the primary linguistic marker that precedes and tops the text (Medas, A., 2007, p. 4). For this reason, the creator dedicates significant care to this threshold, exerting effort in its selection, much like the text itself, which is the subject of narration.

Discussing the title also involves addressing everything surrounding it as an initial entry point. This includes the set of accompanying introductory elements (Abdelhaq, B., 2008, p. 44), such as the publishing house, a list of publications, and other elements that initially appear to the reader. These elements are used by the author to inaugurate their work, ringing the bells of reading to unveil the worlds of the text and immerse the reader in the realm of reading (Khaled Hussein, H., 2007, p. 56)

The Cover: The cover is another paratext that reveals the spatial domain in which the reader's eye moves—not the location of events, of course, but rather a symbolic dimension and a fundamental component of the novel. Its design is never coincidental or arbitrary but receives particular attention and study due to its strong connection to meaning, its semantic value, and its communicative and informational role (20). (Ban Salah, E.M., 2013, p. 7)

The Dedication: The dedication highlights several significant keys, conveying meanings and defining semantic fields. In this element, the author expresses appreciation and gratitude, whether directed toward individuals, events, or the novel itself.

The Image: The image is one of the thresholds that delivers a visual message just as words do; both contribute to conveying meaning (Thani., K.A., 2005, p. 22) . Images have distinct impactful qualities due to their use of shapes, colors, and lines, serving as iconic signs that open avenues for interpretation and exploring significance. Experimental approaches in this context aim to merge the linguistic with the non-linguistic.

B- Experimentation at the Level of Vision and Content:

Language: Language is the fundamental material of the novel and exists only through it. Experimentation with language has manifested in the necessity of linguistic diversity, such as combining narrative language with poetic language, dialects, or foreign languages. This combination serves to distinguish the text and transcend traditional narrative language. Such an approach reflects linguistic awareness by integrating two distinct linguistic types (Mikhail, B., 1988, p. 22) , thereby breaking away from traditional norms and old narrative conventions.

Time: Time is a central structure in narrative work. Scholars have sought to distinguish between internal and external time in the novel, each with its own characteristics. Internal time relates to the events of the novel and their sequence, whether through foreshadowing or flashbacks. External time pertains to the timeline of the story and the act of reading, both of which accompany the author in the narrative process. Gérard Genette referred to these as narrative time and story time (Sharif, H., 2010, p. 39) Experimental novels have diversified narrative time, liberating it from logical rules and sequential order. The creator has the freedom to transcend this framework, breaking its linearity and defying rigid structures.

Space: Space is the framework within which events and characters move. It has also undergone experimentation, as it is a dynamic element in the modern novel, representing various dimensions—political, cultural, or social. Thus, it has garnered significant attention. Space can be seen as a set of interconnected elements that share relationships akin to spatial connections. In the modern novel, space is neither singular nor confined; rather, it encompasses everything, as Gaston Bachelard described it (Gaston, B., 1982, p. 39).

Character: The character is the agent and creator of the narrative events, occupying space and filling time, thereby enabling the creation of meaning and the opening of interpretive dimensions. A narrative work cannot be imagined without characters driving it forward, as they construct language and embody dialogue (Abdelmalek, M., 1989, p. 91) , whether as primary or secondary figures. Experimentation with characters is evident in imbuing them with diverse meanings, embodying contradictions, and reviving conflicts. This is achieved through careful selection of their names, attributes, and struggles, making them builders and generators of meaning.

Intertextuality: This phenomenon obliterates the markers of uniqueness in a single text. A new text is not created in isolation but is an accumulative process where numerous texts integrate and merge within the written work, opening it up to various literary genres. Consequently, the creative text becomes a synthesis of the language of multiple texts (Yaqtin, S., 1985, p. 5). This critical concept broadens the scope for interpretation, whether through deconstruction, stylistic study, or semiotic analysis. A text does not close in on itself; instead, it opens up spatially, temporally, and creatively.

Intertextuality has gained considerable credibility and acceptance, making it a widely adopted interpretative framework within various critical methodologies and theories of interpretation (Yaqoub, N., 2004, p. 211)

The field of experimentation remains open as long as its goal is to explore new narrative techniques capable of reflecting the postmodern world. Thus, the levels of experimentation are limitless, as they are subjected to inquiries aimed at dismantling the conventional and seeking open-ended responses to these trends. The novel, in particular, is suited as a field for change, being the only literary form that remains incomplete (Mikhail, B., 1988, p. 19).

2. The Metanarrative in the Novel

Metanarrative is one of the key manifestations of postmodernism. Its emergence stems from linguistic and critical studies that have significantly influenced literary arts as a whole. The term first appeared with the critic William Gass in his essay *"Philosophy and the Form of Fiction"*. Over time, its concept has evolved through successive studies, although it has not reached a stable definition due to the constant innovation of experimental techniques applied to the novel.

To avoid delving too deeply into the various translations of this term or the nature of its composition, we will attempt to approach the meaning of "meta." Would you like to explore the linguistic roots of "meta" or its application within narrative

Language: Language in the context of metanarrative resembles a wall around which the cart in a racetrack turns to reverse its direction toward another track (Barqrq, R., 2016, p. 52). This suggests a backward movement but not along the same path. Through various translations, the term "metanarrative" has been rendered as *meta-fiction*, *meta-narrative*, or *descriptive discourse*. To link narration with the concept of "meta" mentioned earlier, we can define it as "narrating narration" or "telling the story of storytelling." In essence, the narrative reflects upon itself; instead of narrating reality, it narrates the act of narration.

Why does the narrative reflect upon itself?

This reflective turn raises questions about the purpose and implications of narration turning inward. Would you like an exploration of the reasons and effects of such a self-referential approach in literature?

To answer this question, metanarrative reveals hidden worlds related to storytelling, clarifying them through various comments on narrative methods and its diverse components (Neich, S., 2017, p. 6)(32). Here, we observe a form of narrative consciousness. Patricia Waugh describes it as "a fiction that is self-conscious" (Waugh, P., 2018, p. 23)

This awareness turns inward, uncovering the depths of discourse and exposing them. This is what Fadhel Thamer expressed when he described metalinguistic discourse as "a

manifestation of deliberate awareness aimed at uncovering the inner essence of concepts, values, and discourses" (Thamer, F., 2013, p. 3)

The postmodern paradigm leaned towards embodying self-reflection by constructing notions around the duality of *imagination and reality*, drawing on philosophical, linguistic, and literary theories to unveil the process of novel construction. Cultural diversity, self-questioning, and uncertainty explicitly contributed to dissatisfaction with traditional values (Waugh, P., 2018, p. 13). Language then becomes an expression of its awareness of its own realms. It is as if the focus shifts from the creator's consciousness to the consciousness of creativity itself.

This transform writing into the subject of the narrated event, leading to a *novel within a novel*. The narrator tends to reveal their anxieties and concerns during the writing process, creating a moment of candidness and exposure where the creator and reader meet. By disclosing the hidden worlds of storytelling, the illusion of reality is shattered. Language no longer represents reality but instead points to an imagined world through another imagined world, which approximates reality. The boundaries between the two worlds blur and merge.

What Are the Manifestations of Metanarrative?

Given what has been presented, metanarrative seeks to allow the reader to uncover the hidden worlds behind the novel, thereby involving the audience in its structure and breathing new life into the act of writing. This rejuvenation serves to revive the novel, which seemed to be taking its final breaths (Hamdawi, J., pp. 7-8). Consequently, metanarrative focuses on:

Would you like me to expand on the specific aspects that metanarrative emphasizes?

Metanarrative Through Textual Thresholds:

Metanarrative is evident in the textual thresholds, such as the title, dedication, images, footnotes, and other introductory elements. These elements present a challenge to the narrator during their selection process (Hamdawi, J., p. 34).

Metanarrative Through Content: A metanarrative novel acknowledges fragmentation and instability, shifting from telling the story to narrating the act of storytelling. This creates a novel within a novel, merging the imaginative world with the reality of writing. The polyphony becomes pronounced, embodying what is termed *narrative intertextuality*. The metanarrative novel goes further by engaging in narrative theorization, involving the reader in understanding the mechanisms of storytelling and exposing its various dimensions. This type of writing often incorporates a critical perspective by including critical discourses alongside creative ones. The narrative simultaneously critiques and constructs itself, as the creator and the critic align on the same plane.

The metanarrative novel attempts to document its construction, turning the narrative inward to examine its composition descriptively, critically, and evaluatively. It narrates different storytelling experiences, reflecting the struggles of writers with their creations, while emphasizing the creative self without negating the reader's role in meaning-making. The reader is drawn into an interpretive labyrinth, perpetually puzzled in their search for truth and its distinction from fiction—whether through the narrated text or the characters who bring it to life. Reality and imagination blend into an inseparable unity.

Intertextuality in Metanarrative Writing: Intertextuality is a prominent feature of this type of writing. It brings residual traces from the collective or individual consciousness of the

creator, opening references that permeate the narrative. The result is a text saturated with creative elements that are open to culture and various other narratives.

Metanarrative as Experimentation: Metanarrative itself is a form of experimentation, striving in diverse ways to transcend and disrupt traditional forms. This aligns with the essence of *metamodernity*, which calls for employing all techniques of the stream of consciousness—whether through memory, free association, imagination, or internal monologue (Al-Heif, A.A., 2000, p. 457) -to address existential questions of the self and narrative.

This artistic disarray manifests as:

- Characters being aware of the act of writing.
- Language being conscious of itself.
- The audience being attuned to the realms of storytelling by breaking the fourth wall.
- Awareness of culture and diversity.

This approach demolishes the traditional form of the novel while maintaining its dynamism by engaging with human reality. It offers a renewed interpretation of life and reality amidst contemporary changes. Would you like to explore any particular aspect in greater detail?

Awareness of Writing and Writing Awareness: The act of uncovering a text's hidden meanings and exploring its layers reflects the human mind's pursuit of truth. This endeavor establishes a creative dialogue between the text and its reader. The reader, as a producer of language and an interpreter of meaning, draws upon cultural texts embedded in the collective memory alongside the written text.

This inclination toward experimentation marks a clear rebellion inspired by the wave of postmodernism, characterized by the evolution of media, the blending of high and low culture, and the rejection of grand narratives (Maher, S.F., p. 289) . The new narrative transformations—driven by pluralism in perspectives and consciousness of the fictional world—indicate the application of postmodernism's principles. Metanarrative parallels postmodernism by encouraging individuals to delve into themselves, acknowledge the humanity of their art, and take responsibility for what they create (Abbas, A.J., 2005).

By liberating the self from centralized authority, dismantling hierarchical structures, and giving precedence to the marginalized and the overlooked, a deliberate awareness of writing emerges. This awareness also involves bringing the realm of imagination into existence and understanding the structure of artistic work. It prompts readers to distinguish between illusion and reality, recognizing hidden traps within illusions. These fosters heightened awareness and enables a reimagining of the world through suppositions that expose agreements capable of altering and falsifying reality. Postmodernism thus challenges modernist conventions, questioning and testing its frameworks and laws. It significantly reshaped writing by transforming how art is perceived, received, represented, and produced (Nabil, S., 2006, p. 39) . This shift stems from a growing awareness of systemic injustices and the ideologies and unethical practices they conceal.

The Role of Fiction in Counteracting Decline To prevent the novel from fading into obsolescence, it must cultivate its audience's cultural understanding and immersive experience of its realms. It does this by constructing a shared phenomenological world through its artistic play with language.

The language employed in such works alternates between the imaginative—sometimes mirroring or diverging from reality—and the realistic, which seeks to interpret reality. This raises a critical question: *Which approach best represents reality, and why does such chaos in writing persist?*

The answer lies in the postmodernist aim to establish an identity opposed to modernist novels. The traditional quest for imaginative representation has transformed into a search for imagination itself (Waugh, P., 2018, p. 18). As a result, reality in all its details becomes a subject of writing, and language emerges as its creation—since everything, potentially or feasibly, is text (Maher, S.F., p. 298).

Amid the fragmentation of the self and its growing awareness, writing has become a *realist television* par excellence, capturing and representing the intricacies of human existence.

II. Conclusion

This paper explores how new writing, particularly in postmodern literature, represents consciousness by questioning existence and viewing reality as a dynamic, changeable force. The novel embraces creative experimentation, shifting from traditional, fixed narratives to more fluid, evolving forms that mirror reality's transformations. Metanarrative is not just a narrative tool but the very act of experimentation, aimed at deconstructing established models. Through metanarrative, writers demonstrate awareness of their craft, guiding readers through the challenges of writing and blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Ultimately, metanarrative in postmodern literature embodies a form of intellectual awareness, encouraging the reader to engage in the narrative's complexities, thereby reflecting the self's relationship with the world in a constantly changing, creative process.

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