

## **The Paradox of the Narrative Event in John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores, via a postmodern approach, how Barth dealt with the intricate relationship between postmodern fiction and its modern counterpart by constructing a subjective narrative event in his novella, “Lost in the Funhouse”. It examines the transparent and correspondent representation of the narrative event as a category of Barthian critique of modern literary exhaustion, and how Barth appropriates remedial recycling for fictional conventions. This apocalyptic homogeneous narrative device involves a constant reciprocal examination of contemporary fiction and its possible future. It is carried out through mutual subversion and, ultimately, challenges the notion of inherited literary forms and their utilisation over time. As such, the whole narrative event is achieved via a self-reflexive trajectory and multifarious textual solipsism.

*Keywords: Exhaustion, Intertextuality, Metafiction, Narrative Event, Postmodernism, Replenishment*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Postmodern fiction problematises the grand narrative revealing relative authoritative perspectives which are, to a great extent, self-reflexive. In other words, individual’s inscribing to subjectivity, whereby

authoritative consciousness interrupts the narrative stance within fictional works. Henceforth, postmodern fiction adheres to genuine fictional focats, i.e., parody, pastiche, and ironic modes. According to William May’s (2010) view, “truth seemed contingent; artworks increasingly turned to parody, pastiche, and ironic modes; omniscience and the notion [of] the grand narrative were abandoned for the free play of competing voices and reader-oriented meanings” (p. 53).

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Accordingly, Barth's fiction "restores, from a certain perspective, its classical status as fiction" (Marr, 2007, p. 16). In Barth's fiction, there has been a relative recognition of postmodern novelty and a sense of lamenting reconciliation with the seemingly "exhausted" literary modes of modern literature. As such, he is obsessed with retelling previous literary forms to provide new experimental simulacra. In this sense, he justifies his deconstructive strategy to come up with new literary forms as modern authors lack artistic innovation in their fictional works.

In "The Literature of Exhaustion", Barth postulates the idea of creative "imitation". In so doing, he develops literary stylistic semiology as a reaction to contemporary modern fictional modes. This style leads to novelty in fictional forms; and thus it becomes an independent literary style, Barth (1982) purports: "The imitation, like the Dadaist echoes in the work of the 'intermedia' types, is something new and *may be* quite serious and passionate despite its farcical aspect" (italics in original) (p. 72).

Furthermore, Barth describes modern literary forms as "used-up" and in need of a different artistic representation. This is embodied in his feeling of literary forms exploited over time. This literary exploitation results in literary decline. Mainly, Barth argues that contemporary literary forms need to be innovative. He, therefore, proposes that authors overcome this problem in their works to maintain the fictional genre. In this respect, he

quotes Borges as one of those writers who experiment with fiction to avoid employing "exhausted" forms in their works. If writers follow the same path, they will write permanent fictional forms.<sup>1</sup>

In *Fiction's Present: Situating Contemporary Narrative Innovation*, similarly, R. M. Berry and Jeffrey Leo (2008) argue that the literature of exhaustion is a "transitional" shift from modern literature to postmodern literary representations "which marked an earlier sea change, the transition from modernism to the next thing, and which can be regarded as a manifesto for the kind of literature that critics and scholars would soon be calling 'postmodernism'" (p. 104). Furthermore, such new literature sparks a "rebellion steeped in the desire to reconnect language and literature to the social world" (p. 104).

Alice Ridout (2010) approaches the issue of the literature of exhaustion through parody. If fictional writers utilise parodic literary styles, they will come over the "problem of literary exhaustion" (p. 28). Consequently, Ridout ascribes parody to literary exhaustion "arguing that literature was dead and that parody was a sign of its exhaustion" (p. 28). In this manner, literary exhaustion could be reduced through parodic imitation.

In evoking the idea that authors ran out of fictional forms, Barth (1984) claims that "postmodern" fiction is the ideal solution to contemporary "exhausted" artistic

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<sup>1</sup>Barth here advocates the literary experimentation in his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" (p. 71).

literary forms. By the same token, this "apocalyptic" perspective foreshadowing the "replenishment" of contemporary literature is appreciated for providing an answer to such a problem.

The notion of "replenishing" literary forms is tackled in another follow-up essay entitled, "The Literature of Replenishment". In this essay, Barth (1984) contends that there is a remedy for the "ongoing" narrative forms exemplified in what he hopes "one day" to be the literature of replenishment. This is similar to Barth's argument that postmodernism is not a discontinuity with modern literature. It does, however, depend on modern literary forms but in a different literary representation.

In *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium*, Jeremy Green (2005) asserts that the literature of replenishment "presents the postmodern novel as a model and agent of cultural consensus, appealing to literary critics and general readers alike" (p. 55). Green further connects literary replenishment to cultural dimensions as "an area of activity that might speak to and perhaps even resolve divisions of class and access to knowledge" (p. 55).

Berndt Clavier (2007) maintains that the literature of replenishment is a logical phenomenon through which the author expresses his predilection to literary innovation. When the literary exhaustion is "disseminated by the author himself, we must critically scrutinize the argument on which that logic is based" (p. 171). Being

so, the literature of replenishment provides "a fact which the contemporary, critical author has learned to cope with by being 'self-reflexive' and therefore conscious of the historical and ideological determinants of the novelistic fiction" (p. 171).

This corresponds to Barth's (1984) description of the fictional genre in "The Literature of Exhaustion", when he describes modern "novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author" (p. 72). It is, in the first place, through unprecedented and groundbreaking "imitation" that artistic experimentation is technically internalised. The pivotal literary mode, according to Barth, is the potential of the self-centred orientation of postmodern literary virtuosity for the ostensibly "exhausted" modern fictional modes. It is not surprising that this generic experimentation is of paramount necessity. This is because an ingenious fictional reciprocation of importance ultimately requires exposing modernism's lack of innovation and postmodern aesthetic sufficient capabilities.

A belief in postmodern experimental innovation lies at the heart of Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" (1980). Postmodern critique of modernism's "exhausted" literary forms and the possibility of "replenishing" them through a narrative device are acknowledged as "narrative event". As will be illustrated, Barth's fictional writing aims to write fictional works in an avant-garde literary form. Consequently, Barth (1984) supports his aim by what he calls a "rich paradox" (p.

75), where the writing techniques of literary works interact with their precursors. This obsession with literary artistic imitation is fundamental to his novella.

### **“LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE:” A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO THE LITERATURE OF EXHAUSTION**

First published in 1980, “Lost in the Funhouse” is a metafictional postmodern novella recounting the story of its protagonist, Ambrose. It hinges on the protagonist’s car journey with his parents, uncle, Magda and Peter, his elder brother. All of them participate in two games along the way. Sighting towers and cards are played on the journey, until they reach Maryland. As they arrive, Ambrose is given a sum of money by his mother to have fun on the trip. In the course of the novella, Ambrose develops a passionate admiration for Magda, who is being neglected by Peter, which makes him a bit nervous. When he reveals his love for Magda, they go into the funhouse, accompanied by Peter. Ambrose is suddenly and ultimately alone in the funhouse, as Magda and Peter leave there together.

The novella’s metafictional status is unproblematic. Consequently, it makes great use of a literary technique called the narrative event. Whatever the generic nature of a literary text, the narrative status involves an event and a plot. The mechanisms of the plot go beyond narrative fiction. Events at the level of narrative involve “principles of Organization”. These include the habit of certain narrators interrupting the descriptions of characters’ routine actions by

digression. This results in a warm-hearted and playful synchronisation of the narration with narrated events. This predilection is referred to as narrative “deviation” on the experimental scale of postmodern metafiction in “Lost in the Funhouse.”

The primary focus of the present article is specifically on the narrative event in “Lost in the Funhouse”. An earlier critical investigation of the narrative event was tackled in Roland Barthes’s (1977) *Image, Music, Text*. The repeatedly quoted “narratives of the world are numberless” are deeply and further defined in a more inclusive terminology by their being definitively “present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation” (p. 79).

Most prominently, the element of subjectivity is a reaction which culminates in pronouncements by postmodernists. The structured fictionality of subjectivity is an inclusive emergent call for misery or trouble in postmodernism. However, subjectivity has been a privilege constantly and detrimentally withheld from some postmodern perspectives. It is the bizarre identity that pushes literary texts to be subjective, yet in a linguistic performance as Steven Connor (2004) puts it through the semantic identity of linguistic words and their connotative meanings.<sup>2</sup>

In *A Grammar of Stories*, Gerald Prince (1982) illustrates that same concept in the

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<sup>2</sup>Connor (2004) emphasises the textual subjectivity rather than objectivity (p. 34).

idea of narrative mode, yet in terms of a text which "requires at least three events, linked by three different principles of organisation: chronology, causality, and closure" (p. 31). Later on, Prince favours "at least two" (p. 4) tenable principles. Nevertheless, the necessity for event in narrative textuality is fundamental. Consequently, if we are to speak of a narrative "event" or "change of state", it is a key and fundamental element of narrative.

In the first phase of postmodernism, Barth favours narrative experimentation with the label "exhaustion", which serves as a working remedy for "replenishing" such a degrading phenomenon. In working on these, he has been an important advocate of literary innovation. An experimental tendency appears inherently in his "Lost in The Funhouse".

One of the major issues that Barth tackles in this novella is literary exhaustion. He claims that all "high modern" literature has previously utilised literary modes and forms. In "The Literature of Exhaustion", he theorises his intellectual notion regarding the past and future of literary forms. He also adds that the twentieth-century literature draws from the previous literary sources, which indicate "exhausted" forms of modern fictional narratives.

In the course of "Lost in the Funhouse", the idea of literary "used-upness" is exemplified in Ambrose's insightful concerns about the "age" when "Ambrose was 'at that awkward age.' His voice came out high-pitched as a child's" (italics in original) (p. 72). Additionally, Ambrose's

reaction towards the unfamiliarity of the place embodies his inclination to be different and go along another path in the course of the plot. Here, it is Barth's authorial voice that insists on treading a new path towards creative fiction.

In so doing, Barth (1982) critiques modern literary forms in opposition to which he wrote his fiction. Barth argues that modern fiction authors have followed their precursors like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Balzac for literary purposes without making an experimental contribution. Furthermore, he urges contemporary writers to "succeed", even the experimental authors among the modernists, such as James Joyce and Franz Kafka.<sup>3</sup>

Barth's theories, as projected in "Lost in the Funhouse", deal with new phases in postmodern fiction. The manner in which narrative and fictional forms are addressed and portrayed is fundamental to these emerging forms which have responded to developments in science and politics. While these postmodern modes are as diverse in structure as they are in subject, they do have a number of features in common. Foremost among them is a narrative event pattern, which is disjunctive and structured in such a way as to emulate at least one or more contemporary narrative forms.

Barth pinpointed such an idea of metafictional representation in the novella, where "It is also important to 'keep the senses operating'; when a detail from one

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<sup>3</sup>According to Barth, Kafka and Joyce are two modern experimental authors Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion" (p. 67).

of the five senses, say visual is, ‘crossed’ with a detail from another, say auditory, the reader’s imagination is oriented to the scene, perhaps unconsciously” (p. 74). Here, the allegorical allusion to the writing status of contemporary writers is highlighted for those critiquing modern literature. However, writing styles within narrative events must now depart to form new standard representations at the hands of literary practitioners. This is evident in Barth’s incitation to consider “reader’s imagination” within the flakes of narrative events.

It is this lack of predictability that has been adopted by an emerging field of modern authors. By turning to narrative models that exploit dialogical, fictional and narrative strategies, they succeed in moving towards a literature of “chaos” which embraces the anti-modern condition of intellectuality. Additionally, Barth’s (1982) main interest lies in the “intellectual” imitative perception of previous canonical literary works such as *The Arabian Nights*.<sup>4</sup>

The very idea of experimental innovation is expressed in another essay entitled, “The Literature of Replenishment”, where Barth (1982) hails a number of his contemporaries who stayed true to a postmodern sense of experimentation. In the same fashion, he endorses the prospect of highlighting fictional longevity to suggest regenerative beneficiaries for enhancing modern debilitated literary modes.

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<sup>4</sup>Barth focuses on the intellectual imitation which is synonymous with literary experimentation (p. 68).

With regard to such experimentation, the novella celebrates intertextual elements to express the author’s advocating of previous canonical works.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the design of the early modern novel, like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, is determined by linear and non-linear experiences. By the same token, this is the main idea which Barth hailed and found lacking in almost all other modern writers’ fiction, i.e. the experimental narrative event.

At the end of “The Literature of Replenishment”, Barth (1982) acclaims a number of contemporary writers who were writing in the same way he was writing. They experiment with their fiction in order to lead modern literature towards innovative experimentation in artistic forms which respond to the ability of writing a creative fictional narrative.<sup>6</sup> This apocalyptic feature sweeps through “Lost in the Funhouse”. The allegorical nature of the text embodies this visionary artefact. Ambrose, alongside others, tries to swim but in a new fashion. Apparently, the core conceptual implication of this action refers to a new way of diving. In this manner, Barth creates a symbolic meaning to fill the conspicuous literary gaps prevailing in modern literature.

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<sup>5</sup>Canonical works, specifically Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and *The Arabian Nights* are abundant with literary modes such as the frame narrative and narrative labyrinth which are viable to be imitated in postmodern intertextuality (p. 74).

<sup>6</sup>Barth refers to Vladimir Nabokov and Borges as prominent practitioners of postmodern fiction in its earliest phases, “The Literature of Replenishment” (p. 206).



The very idea of this enterprise is to suggest alternative literary modes and "discuss what artists aspire to do and what they end up doing except in terms of aesthetic categories, and so we should look further at this approximately shared impulse called post-modernism" (Barth, 1982, p. 200). Equally important, the epithetic appellation of this "post-modern" susceptibility is a "gifted writer" who "is likely to rise above what he takes to be his aesthetic principles, not to mention what *others* take to be his aesthetic principles" (italics in original) (p. 200).

With his usual meticulousness for structure, yet with a sense of playfulness, Barth constructed a very revolutionary form, whose central subject is his vocation as a writer, and which offers precious insights into his modern contemporaries. In addition, it is characterised by a re-orchestration in a prototypical key of the inspirational motifs inherent in "Lost in the Funhouse". Ambrose's expressed admiration for Peter, for example, as a deft diver or a professional swimmer.

Peter's skilful swimming development could be changed from amateur to professional with time and practice. This is what strikes Ambrose's admiration and epitomizes Barth's "post-modern" scheme vis-à-vis literary experimentation. With this in mind, literary modes could be manifested in "how an artist may paradoxically turn the felt intimacies of our time into material and means for his work" (Barth, 1982, p. 71). Such an innovative archetypal writer can "transcend what had appeared to be

his refutation, in the same way that the mystic who transcends finitude is said to be enabled to live, spiritually and physically, in the finite world" (p. 71). Whenever this is achieved through literary artefact, a "genuine *virtuosi* (italics in original)" (p. 66) comes into prominence.

Narrative event and writing, to put it in another way, function as a means of survival. At this point, "avant-garde" experimentation finds its path by imputing each character's chance of ascribing meaning to their life through narrating the self. And, this is one of the culmination tokens of postmodern fiction. To quote "Lost in the Funhouse", it is illusory in Ambrose's remarks, whereupon one can give life to others by dint of this augmentation.<sup>7</sup> Being the author's voice, Ambrose continues with the narrative event experimental scheme.

The other important distinction between narrative event and number of events arises between the levels of the novella. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983), in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, is content with "any two events, arranged in chronological order" (p. 19). Presumably, this textual "chronological order" entails the "focalization" factor, which determines the narrative stance to pursue the author's critique.

Rimmon-Kenan explains it with exemplary brevity, whereby "the novella is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' 'angle of

<sup>7</sup>Ambrose, in this regard, exemplifies the Author's (Barth) metafictional voice, "Lost in the Funhouse" (p. 85).

vision,' verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his" (p. 71). This take on narrative "perspective" also requires further elucidation of the textual aspects of fictional characterisation. The literary nature of fictional characters is assessed through certain traits of their characterisation. M.H. Abrams (1993), in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, lists the textual attributes of characterisation as follows: "A broad distinction is frequently made between alternative methods for characterizing ...the persons in a narrative: showing and telling" (pp. 33).

In "Lost in the Funhouse", metafictional devices undergo the paradoxical nature of characterisation. The suppositious intervention of the author in the text exemplifies this characterisation per se. In the following excerpt, Barth appears metafictionally to critique the manner of "repetition" in modern fiction by celebrating a new literary "fact" at the outset of the novella: "If passages originally in roman type are italicized by someone repeating them, it's customary to acknowledge the fact. *Italics mine*" (italics in original) (p. 72). In so doing, Barth portrays authoritative characteristic intervention in the narrative event through the eyes of the omniscient narrator who self-consciously uses the term "italics mine" to comment on the status of his writing.

### INTERTEXTUALITY AND METAFICTION IN "LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE"

The features of characterisation are approached in terms of intertextuality due to some pertaining features. In *The Theory of*

*Criticism from Plato to the Present*, Raman Selden (1988) discusses Northrop Frye's treatment of intertextual influence which originates in the archetypal construction of critical modes.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, intertextual theorists, however, tackle the linguistic implication of the subject disappearance. It is the manifestation of the "apersonal" subjectivity of utterance and it alludes to both speaker positions and other people. This is axiomatic in John Anthony Cuddon and Claire Preston's (1991) *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Cuddon and Preston maintain that the "I" is the utterance agent of linguistic discourse.<sup>9</sup>

By assigning different attributes to his characters, Barth's message aims to write in "replenished" literary modes. Through revealing authorial "comment" in his narrative, for example, Barth expresses the possibility of the future of these literary modes. A good hypostatisation of these comments is the textual pronoun "I" in the following quotation, where it is implicitly incarnated in Ambrose words: "Strive as he might to be transported, he heard his mind take notes upon the scene: *This is what they call passion. I am experiencing it.* Many of the digger machines were out of order in the penny arcades and could not be repaired or replaced for the duration" (italics in original) (p. 84). The italicised pronoun "I" is the furthest authoritative picture in the

<sup>8</sup>Selden refers to the discussion of intertextuality in Frye's archetypal criticism (p. 355).

<sup>9</sup>The pronoun "I", of course, is the reflection of the authorial extratextual discourse (p. 875).



narrative event. As a final point, it embodies the author's critical literary perspective.

Furthermore, Patrick O'Neill (1994), in *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory*, tackles the concept of narrative event in terms of reading: "The process of 'reading' a text, once conceived of as purely a practical matter of sticking in a thumb and pulling out a plum, deconstructs theoretically into a logical impossibility, a self-sustaining paradox" (p. 130). Here, O'Neill shares Barth's self-referential idiosyncratic "paradoxical" nature of the narrative event in the aforementioned essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion".

In "Lost in The Funhouse", correspondingly, Barth's initial discursive metafictional comments entangle an author-based narrative vision when: "A single strait underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, *which in turn* is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type for titles of complete works, not to mention" (italics in original) (p. 72). And so, Barth proposes that experimental fiction is utterly genuine.

The narrative event crucially encompasses the narrator's point of view. A good analysis of the narrative points of view can be seen in Gérard Genette's categorization of the narrative order. To extrapolate, O'Neill (1994) discusses Genette's classification of narrator types who interact in the course of the narrative event:

In terms of narrative level, since every narrator either produces or is part of a

particular narrative reality – or, as Genette calls it, a diegesis – every narrative first of all has an extradiegetic narrator who produces it; any character within that primary narrative who also produces a narrative is an intradiegetic narrator; and any character within that (second-degree) narrative is a hypodiegetic narrator ... In terms of participation in the narrative reality presented, any one of these three kinds of narrator may either play a greater or lesser role as a character in his or her own narrative, in which case Genette speaks of a homodiegetic narrator, or may be entirely absent from it, in which case the narrator is said to be heterodiegetic (pp. 60-61).

Such categorisation is representative of the writing mode in postmodern literature. Barth, again, utilises this particular mode in his novella. The authorial intrusion into the text represents the extratextual narrative event, in which the author comes from the "future" to comment on the text. It is evident when the "extratextual" narrative stance is called on in the scene. Extratextuality appears properly in the authorial comments on the novella's dénouement and textual structure.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, authorial words carry out the novella's purpose. In extratextuality, the notion of "exhaustion" and "replenishment" comes out, uttering the author's latent critique. The label "discovery"<sup>11</sup> is the final

<sup>10</sup> On this point, the authorial narrative discourse appears in the author's comments on his story's dénouement and textual construction, "Lost in the Funhouse" (p. 85).

<sup>11</sup> The word "discovery" is the symbolic allusion to the postmodern replenishment literature.

solution to the literary dilemma of the time. When literary exhaustion is overcome, it appears genuine to contemporary literary taste. The “paradoxical refutation”, nevertheless, results in radical attribution to literary forms, which, in turn, uncover this genuineness.

In like manner, the narrative event culminates in the process of narrative “enlargement”. In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Genette (1980) favours a narrative predilection to a single event: “*I walk, Pierre has come are for me [Genette] minimal forms of narrative, and inversely the Odyssey or the Recherche is only, in a certain way, an amplification ... of statements such as Ulysses comes home to Ithaca or Marcel becomes a writer*” (italics in original) (p. 30).

Similarly, in “Lost in the Funhouse”, there remain scenes held too close to be properly revealed in terms of the narrative event. Those terms are most usually deployed when the textual act is involved in what critics, like Genette, hold to be wholly pertinent and indeed relevant fashion by using metafictional characteristics as an inescapable marker of the narrative event. One way to keep a propensity to the concomitant textual event is essentially accepting that the physical structure of the text is basically self-reflexive. In “Lost in the Funhouse,” self-reflexivity appears directly in the form of paradox. Such physical paradox is an authorial self-consciousness of exhausted literary forms. Barth expresses this paradox through Ambrose’s story, which

is told in a triangular manner as illustrated in the novella (p. 95). In the quotation below, Ambrose’s story is unconventional because it is narrated from A, B, C, and D’s narrative points of view. Thus, it becomes anti-traditional A, B, and C’s narrative points of view:

*Ambrose wandered, languished, dosed. Now and then he fell into his habit of rehearsing to himself the unadventurous story of his life, narrated from the third-person point of view, from his earliest memory parenthesis of maple leaves stirring in the summer breath of tidewater. Maryland end of parenthesis to the present moment. Its principal events, on this telling, would appear to have been A, B, C, and D (italics in original) (p. 96).*

## DISCOURSE FOCALISATION AND THE NARRATIVE EVENT

The narrative event is treated to some extent as being in favour of discourse. Seymour Chatman (1978) economically puts it in *Novella and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*: “In simplest terms, the novella is *what* in a narrative ... is depicted [in] discourse [as] the *how*” (italics in original) (p. 19). Textual discourses of postmodern works, markedly, entail a sense of “lost realism” which found their proper manifestation in previous modern fiction.

This claim finds its way through Ambrose’s contemplation on the brothers Peter’s and Magda’s recollection of a “true” event happening to them in the

swimming pool. It metaphorically refers to the pervasive nature of modernity to present events in a real depiction which is no longer fruitful in postmodern literature.<sup>12</sup>

One last reminder of the narrative event is the focalization on iconicity. Mieke Bal (1985) argues that focalization is a determining factor in "manipulative" texts, being "the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of 'manipulation' available to the narrative text, whether literary or otherwise" (p. 116). In addition, according to Bal, focalization is: "the insight that the agent that sees must be given a status other than that [that] the agent narrates" (p. 101).

The possibilities of the narrative event enacting meaning are virtually unlimited as the author's imaginative power over the expressiveness of language, or the reader's capacity to see connections. In this respect, iconicity has a power like that of paradox; it rests on the intuitive recognition of similarities between reader and text. This is paradoxically alluded to in the novella when Barth justifies it as the latent purpose of writing his novella.

Equally important, Barth provides paradoxical iconicity for his "Lost in the Funhouse", which is not so much a novella as a celebration of plot and structure. The narrator purports to be telling his own novella but instead, he manages to produce a discourse in which narrative digressive

events triumph over the main narrative. Barth, being conscious of his narrative fabrics, introduces a narrative iconicity through Magda's words, "no character in a work of fiction can make a speech this long without interruption or acknowledgement from the other characters" (p. 90).

## CONCLUSION

The narrative event in Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" is a critical vicissitude involving modern "used-up" literary forms. Further, it procures generic writing which can retain the presence of "replenished" fictional forms. The relentless pursuit of relative verisimilitude eventually inures literary deviance in the reader. In the long run, the result is a postmodern narrative encompassing traditional literary conventions and their possible replenishment.

This adherence to artistic "virtuosity" conventions and disruption of their omniscience create a work which succeeds in removing the binary demarcation between modernism and postmodernism. Consequently, it rebels against the collective and autonomous representation of literary texts. For this reason, presumably, it is the writer who has abandoned this monotonous inclination towards experimentation. Just so, the writer integrates the reader's relative perception of reality with the boundaries of narrative events.

Barth is, in any case, not simply a postmodern precursor. He is a hypothetical theory godfather construing the malaise inherent in contemporary literature. As the

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<sup>12</sup>Magda's and Peter's remembrance of the past corresponds to Barth's nostalgic imitation of previous literary modes but in avant-garde styles, "Lost in the Funhouse" (p. 85).

theory is refined, fiction should increasingly come to resemble modern literary forms, but in generic vanguard texts. On balance, this apocalyptic vision inhibits potential “exhausted” literary forms prevailing in modern literature, whereby any forthcoming artistic experimentation could maintain these forms appropriately. The fact is the self-referential narrative event of the novella underscores the shift from “imitation” to “experimentation” in stories with solipsistic narrative. It differentiates, at the level of narration, between literary poetics which have disinherited fictional context as a mode of narrative identity to recognize how narrative evolves.

In comparison to modernism’s hyperbolic credence in reality, such sensible paradigmatic reliance will seem dormant. Yet grasping deliberate postmodern modelling is essential to understanding the nature of social fragmentation in the age of scientific formulation. Thus, the narrative event in “Lost in the Funhouse” provides remedial experimental simulation to imagine the whole body of fictional literature on the verge of imminent demise.

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