



Narrating Metafiction: Reading Tibor Fischer's *The Thought Gang*.

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Abstract:

The question of Metafiction rises in the context of the postmodern narrative, in which fictional writing is carried out self-consciously and systematically, posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. This kind of narration, with the self-consciousness and systematic posing of questions in relation to postmodernity and postmodern fiction, can be examined in Tibor Fischer's *The Thought Gang* (1994). The present paper attempts to examine the narration from the postmodern point of view by tracing how Fischer utilizes postmodernity in constructing postmodern fiction and Metafiction.

Keywords: *Narratology, Metafiction, Postmodernism, Contemporary British Literature.*

INTRODUCTION

The case I would submit in this paper is that metafictionality. Despite the ambiguity and complexity of the term, it is an underlying characteristic of postmodern narrative fiction. Additionally, since a novel's narrative structure is its primary distinguishing feature, I would try to conduct an unbiased analysis of the chosen text using fundamental patterns and codes found in the system as a whole (literature). Specifically in the text taken as a whole (the metafictional text as a specific literary genre). Moreover, I would further demonstrate that my textual reading is primarily theory-based to support my claim (metafictionality). As a result, it is founded on an analytical framework, specifically Patricia Waugh's theory of Metafiction. Finally, I would show that the metafictional text is essentially a literary genre despite the postmodern paradox of use and abuse of conventional norms because metafictionality is an essential component of the postmodern mode of representation, namely the narrative. Numerous postmodern techniques, including nonlinear narrative, self-reflexivity, and others, will be used in this initiative.

The paper also attempts to conduct an objective analysis by sorting out the essential metafictional elements dealt by Tibor Fischer's novel *The Thought Gang* (1994).

Therefore, the type of study I would like to conduct is expected to be theory-based. The presentation of Patricia Waugh's technique will show the metafictional self-reflective mode of representation. This inward-directed representation mode will investigate the corpus's standard metafictional features.

PATRICIA WAUGH'S MODEL: METAFICTION.

Since William H. Gass coined the term in the year 1970, the term metafiction, which cites the novel's self-reflexive tendency, has been described by various terms mentioned in Mark Currie's book entitled *Metafiction*(1995). Among these terms, we find "self-conscious," "introspective," "introverted," "narcissistic," or "auto-representation." In her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh (1984), provides a comprehensive definition of Metafiction by describing it as "Fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, p. 2). She further adds that metafictional works are those that "explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction" (Waugh, p. 2). This double definition of Metafiction, which other theorists also employ, makes it difficult to know whether it

applies to contemporary Metafiction or all works containing self-reflexivity. As we have seen above, while some critics claim that Metafiction marks the end of the novel as a genre, its advocates argue that, on the opposite, it signals the novel's rebirth. P. Waugh states that far from "dying." The novelist has reached a mature recognition of their existence as a writer, which can only ensure its continued vitality in and relevance to present times which is likewise commencing to gain awareness of incisively how its evaluates and practices are constructed and legitimized. She also asserts that the definition of the novel itself has undergone the same reflexivity as other genres. "notoriously defies definition" (Waugh, p. 2). She continues to add as well that "Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history is provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh, p. 7). She further claims that "by studying metafiction, one is in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity" (Waugh, p. 5). Some supporters, in their attempt to defend Metafiction, the novel *Don Quixote*, William Shakespeare's sixteenth-century play *Hamlet*, Jane Austin's nineteenth-century novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and many others. These are cited instances in which classic works display metafictional tendencies. However, other detractors question the provisional use of the metafictional technique since it is not only identified in some isolated works of fiction but mainly deployed temporarily. Thus, they believe that these works cannot be considered metafictional. On the other hand, Mark Currie claims that "metafiction allows its readers a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative while providing an accurate modal for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a series [of] constructive systems" (Currie, p. 7). He further highlights the significance of Metafiction by claiming that it provides an "unlimited vitality: which was once thought introspective and self-referential is, in fact, outward-looking" (Currie, p. 2).

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Importance as a writer.

Tibor Fischer was born in 1959 in Stockport, England, to Hungarian parents who left Hungary in 1956 to pursue careers as professional basketball players. Before attending Cambridge University to study Latin and French, Fischer was raised in South London. He was a journalist in the past. Like Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Conrad, Fischer is not a native English speaker. "when I was very small I would speak Hungarian with my parents at home, and then, when I went outside into the big wide world, I would speak English." (Fischer, 1997) His debut book, *Under the Frog* (1992), made the Booker Prize for Fiction shortlist. *The Thought Gang* (1994), *The Collector Collector* (1997), *Good to Be God* (2008), a new collection of short stories called *Don't Read This Book if You're Stupid* (2000), *Crushed Mexican Spiders* (2011) and *How to Rule the World* (2018) are among his works of fiction.

Tibor Fischer gained national attention and critical acclaim after the publication of *Under the Frog* (1992) and *The Thought Gang* (1994), which was given the Betty Task Award for 'new romantic fiction' and became the first debut book to be nominated for the Booker Prize. Fischer was listed alongside renowned authors like Hanif Kureishi, Kazuo Ishiguro, Will Self, and Jeannette Winterson in a literary journal by the spring of 1993, still on the strength of just one book. On Granta's list of the top twenty 'Young British Novelists,' Fischer was listed. He has merged these roles during the intervening years, earning best-seller status, winning various literary awards, primarily for short stories, and being appointed as a visiting writer in residence in Iowa and Singapore.

Argument

The second book by Tibor Fischer is titled *The Thought Gang*. Eddie Coffin, the protagonist and narrator, is a middle-aged, balding, obese, and alcoholic who teaches philosophy at Cambridge and has a specific interest in the Ionian Philosophers, the first Greek thinkers before Socrates. His 'collected works' are a few unpublished book titles and a single lecture that he continuously gives without revision. At the beginning of the book, Coffin escapes from all of his previous lives. In not one, but three symbolical rebirth scenes. He awakens in a

pornographer's apartment with "a thoroughly installed hangover," unable to remember how he succeeded in getting there, and he remains naked when the police arrive and take him into custody.

"However... occupation?"

"Philosopher."

"Philosopher?"

"Philosopher."

Then Eddie says why ask questions if you don't like answers" (Fischer, p. 4).

Then, after driving off in a car crash in the south of France with several passports (new identities) and several hundred thousand stolen pounds, he runs away to England, leaving nothing but an old suitcase full of books behind. He meets Hubert in Montpellier, a Frenchman with more artificial limbs than the average person (an artificial hand, a glass eye, a hearing aid, an artificial leg) and who has had more spectacular criminal failures than the average person. Coffin after being released from prison that morning, Coffin attempts to support Hubert with the broken, empty gun (he could not afford the bullets). The two pool their incompetence to rob a nearby bank out of a kind of desolation desperation; afterwards, they stroll to lunch around the corner.

A failed professional thief turned amateur philosopher, and a failed professional philosopher turned amateur thief formed the thought gang as a result of their success and discovery of their device. The two become cult heroes as bank robbery become monotonously simple. They distribute Thought Gang t-shirts, rob banks while wearing Nietzschean masks, offer to spare any bank whose tellers can quote them a philosophical passage, rob five banks in one day while avoiding a gang, and trash the apartment of the special agent sent in to apprehend them. Finally, in the piece de resistance, the thought gang achieves its platonic ideal, and a bank robbery announces in advance. Language is very creative, and sometimes it is very colloquial; featuring a Cambridge Philosopher as the storyteller of the book was a device that offers us a wide range of vocabulary because this Philosophy Professor can justify almost anything; "The trouble with taking writing seriously, is that the more seriously you take it, the harder it is to write. Possibly I take writing more seriously

than any other human being that has ever lived"(Fischer, p. 83) he is an intellectual and widely read at the same time he is identical down to earth in many ways, in so doing author may have got a lot of slang and colloquial expression.

Involvement of the Readers:

In her book entitled *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon argues that "The reader's task becomes increasingly difficult and demanding, as he sorts out the various narrative threads. The universe he thus creates, he must then acknowledge as fictional and of his own making" (Hutcheon, p. 49). Thus the role of the reader in the metafictional text is no longer a passive receiver but rather an active participant in the writing process. The novel gives us more information about the nature of the fiction by being very specific about the roles of the reader in the text. The author uses many narrative strategies that make the reader think about the principles of novel writing. One of the hallmarks of literary postmodernism, as well as literary modernism, is the unclear relationship between the author and the reader. There is an increasing demand from the author for the participation of his readers.

For instance, in a metafictional text like *The Thought Gang*, the main character Eddie Coffin is involved, taking a major role in creating the text. In reality, the novel is about a bank robbery and the narration and language used. Fischer purposefully uses the word, which starts with the letter 'Z' "Zamzum-min" (Fischer, p. 40) "Zyzzogetons" "Zoraptera" (Fischer.82) even though the character Eddie Coffin, the author tells us why he used this word.

Z the last letter of our alphabet, the seventh of the first alphabets, Hebrew and phoenician, the sixth of the Greek... when the Romans conquered Greece they were forced to borrow z. It stands like a brand on the forehead of Roman culture, skey porter to the Greeks (Fischer, p. 306)

The author borrows a few words specifically, which starts with the 'Z' letter from Greek, German, French, *Koran* and other Holy books, and even he dedicates a few pages to vocabulary description; this type of novel questions us and encourages us to reconsider what we value novelistic form. So Metafiction

is an act of writing a novel in which the author self-consciously uses this technique for projecting reality; from ordinary language, it is difficult to project a reality. Using Metafiction will encourage readers to have a better understanding of reality.

Conclusion

Tibor Fischer, a contemporary British writer, is writing a novel like *The Thought Gang*; he is giving a model for Metafiction by writing fiction like this and constructing postmodern fiction of his own. Postmodernism is a term applied to various artistic, cultural and Philosophical movements that arose due to and in response to modernism. While modernism constructed itself as the culmination of the enlightenment's quest for authoritatively rational aesthetics, ethics, and knowledge, postmodernism seeks to subvert the enlightenment ideas of progress and justice centrality of human Subjectivity through fragmentation, Deconstruction, and consumerism. Postmodernism celebrates fragmentation and believes unity and coherence are neither possible nor essential.

Fischer's way of language and ridiculing western philosophy and satirical criticism of traditional novel form will significantly contribute to the area of Narratology and postmodern fiction. Postmodern fiction is far diverse in style to be a literary genre. It has not got a historical label like 'Victorian fiction'. To say that 1960 to the present age is the postmodern 'period' would be to misrepresent many contemporary writers whose work cannot be related to postmodernism. It would be preferred to think of postmodern fiction as a particular 'aesthetic' or a set of principles or value systems. Reading Tibor Fisher's *Thought Gang* (1994), I came across these three elements language, narrative techniques, and characters. These three elements may have emerged from writers supporting the postmodern movement or the present condition of life. Peter Barry, in the *Beginning Theory*, says, "modernist lament fragmentation postmodernist celebrates it" (Barry, p. 63) In every page of *The Thought Gang* supports the argument made by Peter Barry. Subversive cosmopolitanism Philosophy, Absurdity features we can see in the works of Tibor Fisher, in the sense that the notion of language as a self-contained

system relates closely to Lyotard's idea of "*disappearance of real*" Patricia Waugh writes "although metafiction is just one form of postmodernism" (Waugh, p. 22).

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