

## Thesis Abstract

The present thesis investigates correlations between a selection of metafictional texts and narrative theory. The selection consists in two sets of self-reflexive texts. The first one explores metafictional tendencies in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century novels. To achieve this, the selection largely ignores their provenience. In addition to Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, it also examines Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The latter set of texts focuses on post-War American metafiction (John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*). These represent a coherent body of works from a particular period.

Metafiction is generally understood as fiction about fiction. The present thesis challenges those assumptions and suggests interpreting metafiction within the framework of Michel Foucault's epistemes. Metafiction is not conceived of as a separate genre of literature but in the context of broader cultural tendencies in the understanding of representation. Representation is a key concept in metafiction and the increasing degree of narrative self-awareness is viewed in this light. The thesis emphasizes this contrastive and interdisciplinary approach.

The text is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is a theoretical introduction addressing the difficulties of defining metafiction. As a visual guide, it draws on Michel Foucault's analysis of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. The chapter includes a discussion of narrative theory employed in the thesis. Chapter two consists in the analysis and interpretation of the primary texts from the earlier days of the novel. They are presented in chronological order: Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Chapter three presents the selection of post-War American metafictional texts (John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*). It applies narrative theory to them and interprets them. Chapter four is the focal point of the entire thesis. It consists in a historical survey of the human understanding of representation which is based

on Foucault's framework of epistemes. The present thesis views metafiction as a constituent of broader sociocultural context, not as a separate genre of literature. In addition, Chapter four includes a discussion of Wolfgang Iser's concept of the meaning of the text in relation to framing. Chapter five concludes the thesis, reiterates the primary arguments, summarizes and discusses its results.

**Key words:** metafiction, self-conscious, self-aware, self-reflexive, narrative, Cervantes, Fielding, Sterne, Barthelme, Vonnegut, Barth, narrative theory