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Is it about a Novel?

Metafiction in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* by Flann O'Brien

Ik verklaar plechtig dat ik de masterproef, Is it about a Novel: Metafiction in At Swim-Two-Birds *and* The Third Policeman *by Flann O'Brien, zelf heb geschreven. Ik ben op de hoogte van de regels i.v.m. plagiaat en heb erop toegezien om deze toe te passen in deze masterproef.*

8 mei 2015   Carolien Van Nerom,

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This study focuses on metafiction in the novels *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* by Flann O'Brien. Linda Hutcheon's model of metafiction was used to analyse metafictional elements. It is made up of four categories of metafiction that have a specific way of confronting the reader with novelistic features and the need for his active involvement. A new category was added to the existing model, i.e. 'readerly metafiction,' as O'Brien thematises the role of the reader explicitly. To add substance to the latter category, a criticism of Norman N. Holland's literary response theory was provided. All categories, except covert linguistic metafiction, were present in both novels. *The Third Policeman* was found to be a more internalised metafictional novel, while *At Swim-Two-Birds* is more explicit in its metafictionality. O'Brien's metafiction grants the reader his freedom as it was found to provide communicative bridges such as a plain style and humour.

Key Words: Metafiction, Flann O'Brien, the Reader, Literary Response Theory

Trefwoorden: Metafictie, Flann O'Brien, de Lezer, Receptietheorie

Samenvatting

Deze thesis betreft de analyse van metafictionele elementen in twee romans van Ierse auteur Flann O'Brien, namelijk *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) en *The Third Policeman* (1967). De romans worden bestudeerd met behulp van een metafictioneel model, opgesteld door Linda Hutcheon. Haar model bestaat uit vier categorieën: metafictie is op een expliciete manier aanwezig (*overt metafiction*) of eerder geïnternaliseerd (*covert metafiction*). Daarnaast legt metafictie de nadruk op narratieve elementen (*diegetic metafiction*) of op de taal van de roman (*linguistic metafiction*). De verschillende soorten metafictie beklemtonen ook de actieve rol van de lezer op een specifieke manier. In deze studie wordt een categorie toegevoegd aan het bestaande model, namelijk '*readerly metafiction*.' Het metafictionele thema van de lezer komt immers expliciet voor in O'Briens romans, zonder dat hij refereert aan fictie.

De bevindingen van Norman N. Holland in zijn receptietheorie worden onderzocht om de categorie van '*readerly metafiction*' in te kaderen. Holland zegt dat we plezier ondervinden aan het creëren van betekenis. Daarnaast wordt de roman door lezers gezien als een veilige omgeving die geen effect heeft op de 'realiteit.' Een ander interessant gegeven met betrekking tot de lezer is de '*willing suspension of disbelief*,' namelijk het feit dat de lezer zich inleeft in een verhaalwereld, ondanks de onmogelijkheid ervan. Een kritische lezing van Hollands receptietheorie legde ook enkele van zijn eerder achterhaalde ideeën bloot. Zo geeft Holland de voorkeur aan een freudiaanse lezing van de roman. Bovendien veronderstelt hij dat een roman slechts één 'correcte' betekenis heeft.

In het werk van O'Brien werden verschillende overte, diëgetische voorbeelden van metafictie gevonden. Het gebruik van kaders was daar het opvallendste voorbeeld van. *At Swim-Two-Birds* is namelijk een roman over een naamloze student die een boek schrijft over een auteur. *The Third Policeman* is structureel opgebouwd als een cyclus. Het betreft een naamloze protagonist die een tocht door de hel blijkt te maken omwille van zijn zonden. Andere overte, diëgetische elementen omvatten onder andere het wijzen op hoe fictionele personages worden gecreëerd, verwijzingen naar andere romans en weergaves van het schrijfproces. Coverte, diëgetische metafictie thematiseert de roman zelf door bestaande genres te parodiëren. Er wordt hierbij dan ook van de lezer verwacht dat hij deze genres herkent. Zodoende neemt de lezer eerder onbewust een actieve rol aan. De genres die in

deze thesis werden besproken zijn Ierse legendes, *fantasy* en academisch schrijven. Deze laatste twee genres zijn opgenomen in beide romans, terwijl Ierse legendes enkel voorkomen in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Hutcheons model werd dus aangevuld aangezien ze voor de categorie van *covert diegetic metafiction* slechts vier genres voorstelt: de detectiveroman, *fantasy*, spelstructuur en het erotische. Bovendien werd aangetoond dat parodie niet de enige vorm van *covert diegetic metafiction* is. Er werden namelijk coverte verwijzingen gevonden naar *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) van Lewis Carroll. De stijl van O'Brien is zeer eenvoudig om de lezer tegemoet te komen. Er werden dan ook geen voorbeelden gevonden van *covert linguistic metafiction* aangezien Hutcheon deze categorie definieert als literair, linguïstisch experiment zoals de *nouveau roman*. *Overt linguistic metafiction*, daarentegen, was aanwezig in beide romans. Voorbeelden van deze soort metafictie leggen bij O'Brien de focus op de onmacht, maar vooral ook op de creatieve kracht van taal.

Lezers van O'Briens romans worden veel vrijheid toegekend, ondanks het feit dat zijn werk een 'Elitist Carnival' werd genoemd (del Río 2005). Hoewel het latere werk van O'Brien meer obscuur kan worden genoemd, zoals zijn roman *The Dalkey Archive* (1954), zijn *At Swim-Two-Birds* en *The Third Policeman* beiden zeer toegankelijk voor de lezer. O'Brien heeft een eenvoudige schrijfstijl en het gebruik van humor werkt zeer bemoedigend zodat de lezer zich zonder problemen kan wagen aan '*highbrow*' literatuur. *The Third Policeman* is op metafictioneel vlak doorgaans eerder geactualiseerd en gethematiseerd. Deze roman bevat meer coverte metafictionele elementen, terwijl *At Swim-Two-Birds* eerder overt is in opzet. Hoewel *The Third Policeman* postuum werd gepubliceerd, kan de roman worden gezien als O'Briens meest ontwikkelde metafictionele roman.

Synopsis

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of metafictional elements in two novels by Irish author Flann O'Brien, namely *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *The Third Policeman* (1967). Both novels are studied with Linda Hutcheon's metafictional model as a tool. Her model consists of four categories: metafiction is either perceivable on the surface of the novel (overt metafiction) or more internalised (covert metafiction) and either focused on novelistic features (diegetic metafiction) or on the language of fiction (linguistic metafiction). The different kinds of metafiction highlight the active role of the reader in specific ways. However, an additional category is suggested in present study – i.e. 'readerly metafiction' – as O'Brien frequently thematises the role of the reader explicitly rather than via a focus on fiction.

Norman N. Holland's findings in literary theory were used to give substance to the latter category. He says that we read because we find pleasure in making meaning. Additionally, the novel is presumed to be a safe environment for the signification process as the reader assumes fiction has no consequences in 'reality.' Another element that concerns the reader is his willing suspension of disbelief, i.e. that he unconsciously engages in fictional worlds, how unbelievable they may seem. A critical reading of Holland also revealed some rather outdated ideas. For example, Holland gives a Freudian analysis of the novel a superior place. Additionally, he posits that any novel has but one 'correct' meaning.

A variety of overt diegetic metafictional elements are present in O'Brien's works. The most obvious one is the framing technique of *At Swim-Two-Birds*: the unnamed main character is writing a book about an author, whose manuscripts are featured in the novel. *The Third Policeman*, then, is constructed as a cycle: the story world is revealed to be a travel through hell as a consequence of the unnamed protagonist's sins. Other overt diegetic features include a focus on how fictional characters are brought to life, references to other novels or glimpses into to the writing process. Covert diegetic metafiction highlights novelistic principles by providing parodies of existing genres. As such, the reader is assumed to recognise said genres and is coaxed rather than forced to take up his role as active reader. The genres under scrutiny in this study are Irish legends, fantasy and academic writing. The latter two genres are parodied in both novels, the former can be found in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Hutcheon's model was expanded as she suggests but four novel paradigms for covert

diegetic metafiction: the detective story, fantasy, game structure and the erotic. Moreover, a technique other than parody was found in *The Third Policeman*, namely covert references to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Consequently, Hutcheon's category of covert diegetic metafiction was broadened to include more than just the technique of parody. O'Brien has a fairly plain style to accommodate his reader. Therefore, there were no covert linguistic metafictional instances found in O'Brien as Hutcheon rather limits this category to literary linguistic experiment such as the *nouveau roman*. However, overt linguistic metafiction was found to be very much present in both novels, drawing attention to both the impotence and, mostly, the power of the language of fiction.

O'Brien is revealed to grant his reader a lot of freedom, despite his work being called an 'Elitist Carnival' (del Río 2005). It must be noted that his later works gave way to a more despotic kind of writing, as in e.g. *The Dalkey Archive* (1964). Nevertheless, both *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* are very indulging towards their reader. Indeed, O'Brien's humorous and plain style aid the reader in reaching 'high-brow' musings about literature. *The Third Policeman* is found to be generally more internalised regarding metafictional elements. It contains more covert instances of metafiction as opposed to *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which contains rather more overt metafictional elements. Though *The Third Policeman* was only published posthumously, it might be seen as Flann O'Brien's most accomplished metafictional novel.

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1. Introduction

> Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told
> at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because
> the man who had the strange experience we are going to
> talk about never mentioned it to anybody, and the fact
> that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his
> memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must
> admit that handicap at the beginning – that it is absurd
> for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it,
> and unthinkable that anybody should believe it.
> – Flann O'Brien

Flann O'Brien was an Irish writer who, next to being a novelist, also wrote short fiction, satirical columns, journalistic pieces and plays. He was born in Northern Ireland and wrote in both English and Irish. Flann O'Brien is actually a pseudonym for Brian O'Nolan – or Brian Ó Nualláin in Gaelic (Murphy & Hopper vii). In this thesis, he is referred to as Flann O'Brien since the primary works under scrutiny were published under that name. Incidentally, Brian O'Nolan had other pseudonyms, such as Brother Barnabas and Myles na Gopaleen (Ibid.). Moreover, according to Murphy & Hopper, the editors of the 2013 collection of O'Brien short stories, "not all of [O'Nolan's pen names] have been discovered or confirmed" (vii). One of the motives for writing under a *nom de plume* was O'Brien's main profession, which was that of a public servant. As a member of the Irish Civil Service, he was not allowed to publish under his own name (Shephard 2). The multiplicity of both his pen names and the styles of his work show that O'Brien was not interested in his readers' finding the one, true meaning of his texts. Indeed, "[f]or O'Brien as much as Roland Barthes, the death of the author is the birth of the reader" (Murphy & Hopper x). Moreover, the power of the reader is a recurring theme of the primary works at hand, i.e. *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*. The former, O'Brien's first novel, was first published in 1939, while the latter was written before the Second World War but only posthumously published in 1967.

An Irish student of literature is the unnamed main character of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (referred to as *At S2B* from here onwards). He attends college, but does not seem to go to class. Rather, he goes on beer brawls with his friends or can be found sleeping or lazing

about in his bedroom at his uncle's house. The rest of his time, the protagonist spends writing a book about Dermot Trellis, an(other) author. This fictional character creates a number of other characters, all of which live in Trellis' own house. As a consequence, Trellis' stories begin to merge. Ultimately, all of his characters decide they have had enough of his tyranny and decide that Trellis has to be tried in court. In the end, the protagonist succeeds in getting his degree, while his book ends with Trellis conquering his characters because the maid accidentally throws the latter's manuscript, in which his characters were given life, into the fire. Needless to say that a novel about a novel about a novel is profoundly metafictional in conception.

The Third Policeman (referred to as The 3PM from here onwards), on the contrary, is less obviously metafictional. The story revolves around an unnamed character who confesses to killing a man for his money at the beginning of the novel. After he and his accomplice – John Divney – go back to their victim's house to pick up the money they had buried, however, the protagonist stumbles into a number of fantastic adventures. After an unusual journey, the anti-hero finds himself in a police station, where the police men are mainly concerned with solving crimes involving bicycles. The illustrious third policeman only reveals himself at the end, when it becomes clear that the main character has been dead this whole time and is paying for his sin of taking a man's life in hell. Indeed, this plot does not seem to give way to a metafictional reading at first sight. However, judging from other works by O'Brien, he was very much interested in the workings of fiction itself, which led me to choose the framework of metafiction for The 3PM as well.

Indeed, next to an obvious interest in the Irish theme, a humoristic approach to self-conscious fiction is present in several of O'Brien's works. According to Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper, the editors of the 2013 collection of O'Brien's short stories, the metafictional element is definitely present in the "scathingly parodic treatment of Irish myth and legend" (Murphy & Hopper viii). Short stories in Gaelic such as "The Tale of Black Peter" and "The Arrival and Departure of John Bull" are examples of O'Brien's parodies. Additionally, works in English such as "Scenes in a Novel" and At Swim-Two-Birds itself constitute a play with novelistic principles. Consequently, The Third Policeman is the culmination of previous endeavours of self-conscious novels and short stories. At least, that is what Murphy & Hopper conclude: "several years in advance of his most important novels, many of O'Brien's metafictional ideas had already emerged in embryonic form" (ix).

The quality of O'Brien's novels is much disputed, especially the status of *The 3PM*. Contemporary critics regard it as a masterpiece (Murphy & Hopper ix), while older critical texts, such as *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986) by literary critic Seamus Deane, consider it less accomplished than *At S2B* (194). The publisher's decision not to publish *The 3PM* in 1940 also shows that O'Brien's collaborators believed the public to be unprepared for it. Yet, from the publisher's note included in the 2007 edition of *The 3PM*, it is clear that O'Brien himself was pleased with it: "I've just finished another book. The only thing good about it is the plot and I've been wondering whether I could make a crazy … play out of it" (O'Brien qtd. in O'Brien, *The 3PM* 207). Moreover, O'Brien's reaction following the rejection of *The 3PM* shows that he did not agree with his publisher at all: "Perhaps enraged, or inspired, by this carelessness, he abandoned all attempts to place it with anyone and began telling friends that *he* had mislaid the manuscript, even inventing different fates for it. … it lay unread for twenty-six years" (Shephard 6). As to the metafictionality of the novels, I believe that both are accomplished since they are different in style and in thematic focus.

The goal of this thesis is to analyse the self-conscious elements of *At S2B* and *The 3PM* in particular. Though self-conscious endeavours in fiction have been around for as long as the novel itself, the degree of metafiction has changed (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 1; Waugh 4). Novels such as *Tristram Shandy* (1767), *The Canterbury Tales* (1478) or *Don Quijote* (1605) show that works of literature have always, albeit in varying degrees, been aware of their own fictionality. According to Hutcheon, this holds true for any art form and any art period (*Narcissistic Narrative* 17). However, the 1960s witnessed the publication of a never-seen amount of fiction about fiction in Europe as well as the Americas (Hutcheon ix; Waugh 4). O'Brien, then, is a prodigy of sorts since the wave of metafiction had not yet happened when he wrote *At S2B* and *The 3PM*.

Though metafiction has supposedly been practised for about four decades now, methodical analysis remains scarce. Some literary scholars are writing about metafiction as a postmodernist mode in theses or doctorates, but the main sourcebook is still Linda Hutcheon's book *Narcissistic Narrative* (referred to as *NN* from here onwards), first published in 1980. Her book is descriptive and analytic at the same time as theory is matched with sufficient examples. Her contemporary, Patricia Waugh, wrote another one of the first books on metafiction, called *Metafiction*, though with a clear focus on practice

rather than theory. While William H. Gass was probably the first to use the term 'metafiction' in 1870 (Waugh 2), Waugh was the one who put it back on the literary map in England (Currie 39). Prior to her book, metafiction was already a subject of literary interest in France, with works by Jean Ricardou and Lucien Dällenbach. In North America, Robert Scholes was one of the first to re-examine metafiction (Hutcheon 4). Though valuable as a revaluation of metafiction at the time, *Metafiction* (Waugh) is largely an enumeration of exemplary novels rather than a useful tool for actual analysis. Waugh mentions a lot of techniques and processes, though a methodical approach is missing. Still, the form of her book leads me to believe that a heuristic approach is fitting to the study of fiction about fiction. Hutcheon suggests the same in her answer to the question why so little systematic study of metafiction exists: "fiction which constitutes its own literary analysis is, to the critic, naturally somewhat suspect" (*NN* 20). For that matter, I will draw on Hutcheon's model of metafictionality, i.e. four categories of metafiction, to guide my analysis. Being very broadly conceived, it allows for a structured, but heuristic approach to self-conscious fiction.

One actor of the metafictional novel has not been addressed: the reader. Both Hutcheon and Waugh point out his importance in this age following the death of the author. Metafiction, too, shines a new light on reader response. Therefore, the major concepts of Norman N. Holland's literary response theory are elaborated. His main principles can be found in his 1975 book *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (referred to as *DLR* from here on). In addition, his more recent book, *Literature and the Brain* (from here, referred to as *L&B*), dating from 2009, is discussed since its novelty lies in neuro-scientific support for observational phenomena. Holland's concepts, though slightly flawed in my opinion, touch upon some elements of the self-conscious novel that Hutcheon forgot in her own model. It should accordingly become clear from the analysis of O'Brien's works that the diegetic and the linguistic are not the only novelistic characteristics that metafiction reveals. Unfortunately, the reader was quite left out in Hutcheon's model, though not so in the rest of her theoretical book. "Curiouser and curiouser!" (Carroll 23).

Firstly, this thesis introduces metafiction and elaborates its general features. Subsequently, Hutcheon's model of metafiction is presented since it is the main tool of analysis. Secondly, reader response theory, as envisaged by Holland, is explored. The discussion is mainly

concerned with how readers respond and are attracted to literature. Some ideas, however, such as one meaning and Freudian motivation, are deemed limiting here and are reviewed as such. Thirdly, a literary analysis of *At S2B* and *The 3PM* is offered. Note the choice of 'a' rather than 'the' in the previous sentence: this study is perceived of as one of many possible readings or signification processes. Said choice is based on interests of the current literary field as well as on admiration and respect for Flann O'Brien, who himself made clear, via his novels, that both the reader as well as the character are free: "The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. … a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 25).

2. Theoretical Framework: Metafiction

2.1 Meta-Metafiction

> Who killed James Joyce?
> I, said the commentator,
> I killed James Joyce
> For my graduation.
>
> What weapon was used
> To slay mighty Ulysses?
> The weapon that was used
> Was a Harvard thesis.
> – Patrick Kavanagh

Metafiction has been around for more than three decades now. Even before that, metafiction was always latently present, as was meta-art in general. "Art has always been 'illusion,' and as one might surmise, it has often, if not always, been self-consciously aware of that ontological status. This formal narcissism is a broad cultural phenomenon, not limited by art form or oven by period" (Hutcheon, *NN* 17). Awareness, though, is not the same as a clear focus on meta. Waugh says that this awareness "is to some extent present in all fiction," but that "its prominence in the contemporary novel is unique" (6). From the 1960s onwards, metafiction became a prominent feature in fiction (Waugh 5; Hutcheon, *NN* ix). The term itself was probably introduced by American critic and novelist William H. Gass in an essay dating from 1970 (Waugh 2). Since then, a small number of publications have been devoted to metafiction. The book *Metafiction* by Patricia Waugh seems to be one of the first books in English dedicated fully to a theory of metafiction. According to its subtitle – *The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* –, the book should contain a theory and practical examples. However, the practice is definitely where Waugh directed her efforts. This is not surprising given the definition she proposes: "Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (Waugh 6). Said statement is a fairly broad one and, unlike Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative*, further

attempts at narrowing down metafiction into categories are not featured. Consequently, Waugh's book is a good guide that provides plenty of metafictional examples, but lacks a usable methodology. Nevertheless, *Metafiction* has its merits since it constituted a "revaluation of metafictional self-consciousness" (Holmesland 94). Moreover, Waugh does point out some interesting elements of metafiction.

Metafiction merely for the sake of it is pointless and might even be called aloof. It needs to be understood and used as a tool by the reader for it to become cognitively rejuvenating. This is something that Waugh definitely understood:

Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems. … Novelists and critics alike have come to realize that a moment of crisis can also be seen as a moment of recognition. (Waugh 9)

Modernist novels or criticism are commonly associated with scepticism and the idea that existing styles of writing are inadequate in describing 'reality' (Dettmar & Wicke 923-929). Far from the negative view of her modernist contemporaries, Waugh sees metafiction in a more positive light. Self-conscious fiction, to her, is invigorating and provides new frameworks in which to read not only fiction, but also reality: "[M]etafiction operates by exploring fictional rules to discover the role of fictions in life" (Waugh 35). Being a possible cause for thought processes, metafictional novels are capable of altering a reader's mind-set. Self-conscious fiction is possibly better suited to incite mental processes than non-metafictional novels because it constitutes a celebration of imagination and cognition: "[F]or metafictional writers the most fundamental assumption is that composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one's 'reality'" (Waugh 24). Take the social media platform, Facebook where people re-invent themselves by using narrative structures by updating their statuses via a digital interface. By laying bare narrative structures that humans so often unconsciously use to construct their 'reality,' metafiction hopefully enhances readers' awareness of "the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames" (Waugh 29).

Another important feature of gripping and thought-provoking metafiction is the establishment of a communicative bridge. In order to lay bare or subvert conventions, said conventions must most likely be used. The use of frame breaks, then, is a good technique to bridge the intellectual gap between reader and text: "Frames in life operate like conventions in novels: they facilitate action and involvement in a situation" (Waugh 30). Framing techniques point towards the fact that there are always levels of form, governing content. Consequently, the process towards meaningful content – in fiction ánd in life – might be made easier by revealing novelistic frameworks, as metafiction does. Incidentally, frame-breaking is a frequent technique used in *At S2B*. O'Brien starts his novel off by introducing three different genre-bound frames. This is done within a superposed frame, namely that of the extra-, homo- and auto-diegetic narrator, who remains unnamed. Although at first these frames remain fairly separated, they become more and more blurred. Not only *At S2B* exhibits some framing techniques. In *The 3PM*, the theme of the Chinese boxes or nested boxes is used. Chinese boxes, like Russian Matryoshka dolls, are a set in which each box of graduated size fits perfectly into another box. This is a nice metaphor for mentally ploughing through different forms or frameworks before attaining a true content. Interestingly, the boxes in *The 3PM* seem to go on ad infinitum. This is in sync with the postmodernist view that absolute meaning or content is not reachable of course. On a more positive note though, the process towards meaning remains interesting. Policeman MacCruiskeen keeps up his practice of crafting ever smaller boxes. "Six years ago they began to get invisible, glass or no glass. Nobody has ever seen the last five I made …. The one I am making now is nearly as small as nothing" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 76). The abundancy of signifying systems at our disposal since the late 20th century becomes clear in metafictional novels revealing their own signifying systems. Indeed, an abundancy of information, presented via different frameworks, is but one click away. Take Google, the search engine that provides you with a limitless number of sources. In recent years, it has expanded its search range to include Google Scholar, Google Translate, Google Maps etc. Though all of Google products are related to an informative task, they are given a different outlook, icon, domain of knowledge etc. An excess of information can be daunting, but positive literary examples of an attempt at meaning, like the Chinese boxes in *The 3PM*, might give a reading audience hope. After all, in such instances the interest of reading shifts from absolute meaning to thought *processes*.

Metafiction, then, might be seen as instructive rather than as a form of escapism, "a release from 'having to mean'" (Waugh 38).

Metafiction as a provider of useful tools to read both fiction and reality brings me to the title of Linda Hutcheon's book on metafictional practice that was first published in 1980, namely *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Specifically, the use of the adjective *narcissistic* is of interest. Hutcheon points out in the preface of the 2013 reissue of *Narcissistic Narrative* that "[i]t is always *narratives* that are narcissistic here, not narrators, and especially not authors" (*NN* xi). In other words, the title was chosen to draw attention to the text and reader rather than to the author or narratological strategies. This explains why *narrative* was chosen to feature in the title, but the case for *narcissistic* is not so easily made. The latter suggests that metafictional works only reflect upon themselves, as in the Narcissus metamorphosis: "No care for Ceres's gift of bread, or for rest, can draw him away. Stretched on the shadowed grass he gazes at that false image with unsated eyes, and loses himself in his own vision" (Ovid sec. 437-473). As mentioned previously, metafictional endeavours might easily become a literary exercise in introspection. Though the title might be perceived as an indication of a negative view on metafiction, Hutcheon takes a positive, invigorating stand on metafictional practice. Her title, however, is rather ill-chosen since her intentions only become clear by reading the introduction.

Her view on metafiction, but also on the metamorphosis of Narcissus as a metaphor for self-reflective fiction, is positive and postmodernist in nature. Furthermore, she largely uses Gass' term of metafiction rather than *narcissistic fiction* in the remainder of her book, which amends her choice of title. The term *narcissistic* must be read as an attempt at freeing metafiction from its own, sometimes negatively perceived, label: "Labels are always comforting, but often also castrating" (Hutcheon, *NN* 2). Metafictional novels were even considered to herald the death of the novel. The modernist view on the novel's scrutiny of itself is that it meant the end of new genres and formal innovation. Hutcheon, however, clearly states that she "saw the novel genre as alive and thriving", even with the increase of self-reflexive novels in the 1960s and -70s (Hutcheon, *NN* xi). The novel is not dead, but its form has changed and will continue to do so. Hutcheon's reading of the Narcissus metamorphosis makes her intentions clear. The reader is not to be missed in the persona of Echo, a nymph who falls in love with Narcissus. Because of unrequited love, "her body's

strength vanishes into the air. Only her bones and the sound of her voice are left" (Ovid sec. 359-401). Her voice is left, with which she can still repeat the last fragments of spoken words. She cannot, however, speak out of her own accord. "Her destiny is not unlike novelistic language" in that it requires a reader/speaker to attain meaning (Hutcheon, *NN* 10). Echo herself cannot be creative unless spoken to, just like a novel cannot be creative unless read. Moving on to Narcissus, who becomes engrossed with his own reflection, his persona can be read as a metaphor for the novel. The latter's conventions become repeatedly petrified over time, but self-reflection is a way of invigorating existing forms by exposing diegetic and linguistic processes. Although some critics have read this change "as the decline of the novel as a realistic genre", Hutcheon is more positive about the metafictional turn (*NN* 13). Indeed, Narcissus dies, but like the novel, he lives on "in another less traditionally realistic world, ceaselessly regarding at least its formal beauties" (Hutcheon, *NN* 14). In other words, scrutiny of novelistic form does not constitute an omen. Rather, it is a hope that new novelistic forms can still be created. Instead of the death of the novel, as was expected with the coming of the *nouveau roman* in the 1950s (Hutcheon, *NN* 7), comes the birth of the viewer – or reader – of the Narcissus flower. By exposing the novel as a linguistic and diegetic process, readers hopefully become aware of the tools at hand and, as such, become capable of "constructing a new sign-system, a new set of verbal relations" (Hutcheon, *NN* 14). In a new, positive reading of the Narcissus metamorphosis, Hutcheon shows readers the possibilities of self-reflective fiction. In short, *Narcissistic Narrative* must be read as a celebration of the novel as a "process-oriented mode" of meaning-making and of the reader, the largest contributor to the signifying process (Hutcheon, *NN* 7). Rather than viewing metafiction as inwardly turned, it is presented as outwardly bound, reflecting on fiction and reading tools in general. In this next section, a useful apparatus for the analysis of metafictional novels is presented.

2.2 A Metafictional Model

Since its first occurrence in Gass' article, metafiction has become a generally accepted narrative term. However, critical analysis has lagged behind, according to Hutcheon (*NN* 20). Critics have kept largely away from this novelistic form "that washed over the literary shores of Europe and the Americas in the 1960s" (Hutcheon, *NN* ix). Additionally, early analyses were merely descriptive rather than critical (Hutcheon, *NN* 4). Possible models for analysing

were proposed only in the late 70s, following "[t]he cultural impact of the *nouveau roman* in France" (Ibid.). The earliest of these models are mainly focused on the use of *mise en abyme* as a metafictional technique. In painting, this is a miniature version of the image or theme, contained within the canvas (Hutcheon, *NN* 9). The most famous example, possibly, of a *mise en abyme* painting, is *Las Meninas* (1656) by Velazquez. Depicted is the Infanta Margarita accompanied by her ladies in waiting. In the background, however, is where the real attraction lies. In a mirror, the reflection of the child's parents, the then King and Queen of Spain, is visible ("On-line gallery: Las Meninas"). In the novel, *mise en abyme* might be accomplished by framing techniques. An early example of a frame story is *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. Hutcheon herself focuses on the work of two literary theorists in *Narcissistic Narrative*, namely Robert Scholes and Jean Ricardou.

Scholes wrote an article on metafiction, published in *The Iowa Review* in 1970, entitled 'Metafiction'. Said article was reprinted in a collection of essays on metafiction, edited by literary scholar Mark Currie (1995). According to Scholes, a critic might discern four possible categories of metafictional novels. This follows his idea of a more general division of all novels into four possible categories. As such, a scheme of "four subquadrants" is proposed. "Most significant works of fiction attend to all four of these dimensions of fictional form[– i.e. fiction of forms, fiction of existence, fiction of ideas, and fiction of essence –], though they may select an emphasis among them" (Scholes qtd. in Currie 24). Consequently, criticism of any novel can be seen as having four dimensions, i.e. formal, behavioural, structural or philosophical. Since metafictional works carry within themselves their own criticism, "[they] may emphasize structural, formal, behavrial, or philosophical qualities" as well (Scholes qtd. In Currie 29). Suffice it here only to name the categories since practice has proven them to be too rigid to apply (Hutcheon, *NN* 21). The belief that any literary work might be attributed to one of either four categories is essentialist in nature. As it stands, this model is but an early exploration of the metafictional genre that leaves no room for current literary issues (e.g. the thematic exposition of a reader's information-processing strategies). Moreover, in choosing only short pieces for analysis, Scholes limits the metafictional genre profoundly (Hutcheon, *NN* 21). However, there is some merit to Scholes' article, as Currie reminds us in his introduction to it: "The interest of the essay lies mainly in the idea that when a novel assimilates critical perspective it acquires the power … to act as commentary on other fictions" (Currie 21). Again, Hutcheon's unfortunate choice of

title becomes clear, as metafictional novels are indeed more than merely narcissistic, inwardly oriented literary pieces.

The other critic mentioned by Hutcheon, is Jean Ricardou. His model is "a horizontal and vertical auto-representational cross" (Hutcheon, *NN* 21). Although more methodical than Scholes' model, specific textual analysis remains difficult, mainly because of its "*a priori* structuring" (Ibid.). Moreover, certain metafictional modes seem to have no place at all on Ricardou's cross (Hutcheon, *NN* 22). Since earlier models do not suffice for the analysis of metafiction, Hutcheon supplies her own model. She subdivides metafiction into two types, namely diegetic and linguistic metafiction. The former is a displayed consciousness of narrative processes, while the latter is concerned with an awareness of language (Hutcheon, *NN* 23). Within these types, another distinction must be made between overt or covert forms of metafiction. These are explicitly thematised or internalised, structuralised metafictional techniques respectively (Ibid.). The difference between overt and covert metafiction lies also in their demands on the reader. Below therefore follows a deeper exploration of Hutcheon's model, as it is used in the analysis of O'Brien's works in subsequent sections. A discussion of this model presents its merits as well as its possible problems.

Hutcheon's model did not appear from thin air, just like metafiction itself. The metafictional techniques that might be placed within one of the four categories are the result of an evolution rather than a sudden revolution within the literary field. Parody, for example, might be called an overt, diegetic form of metafiction since its "consequence [is] the unmasking of the system or of the creative process whose function has given way to mechanical convention" (Hutcheon, *NN* 24). Parody confronts the reader and invigorates old novelistic forms that have become over-familiar through both recognition and *defamiliarization*. More specifically metafictional, parody is concerned with "recognition of literary codes" (Hutcheon, *NN* 25). This procedure is not, however, completely new. Hutcheon views parodistic play as "the very essence of the novel" (Hutcheon, *NN* 24). To support her argument, a number of exemplary authors are proposed, such as John Barth and John Fowles. The simultaneous application of familiar strategies and a new, shocking twist on these familiarities, however, is not solely inherent to literary art. Any art form has kept its life form in a similar way, i.e. through a form of parody. Weakening her own argument that

the novel is the most parodistic of all art forms, Hutcheon herself gives the example of music (Ibid.). Composers use familiar forms to introduce new elements so as not to shock their audience. Take Claude Debussy, who inherited his peers' classicist and early-romantic inclinations, but added his touch to a tradition with his unique harmonic sequences. Surely, music is meant to be listened to, just like novels are meant to be read, and an abrupt change of style does not benefit any work's popularity or recognition.

Metafictional practices grew from the style of a previous era. According to Hutcheon, subjective realism had an enormous impact on this new novelistic style for two reasons. The "presentation of external reality" became of less importance since the focus was on "the character's inner processes" (Hutcheon, *NN* 25). Additionally, the role of the reader changed and reading became "no longer a comfortable, controlled experience" (Hutcheon, *NN* 26). The reader is made aware of his role in different ways depending on which of the four modes is present. Overt, diegetic metafiction draws the reader's attention towards the narration, i.e. the governing processes of a novel, rather than towards the fiction. Additionally, reading is exposed as "actively creating a fictional universe" (Hutcheon, *NN* 28). As such, the reader is granted a lot of freedom, but also responsibility in co-creating the fictional universe. Techniques such as frame breaking, *mise en abyme* and addressing of the reader might be used (Ibid.). As mentioned before, frame breaking and *mise en abyme* are both techniques that will recur in the discussion of both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. As Hutcheon's model is a fairly open-ended one, an exhaustive list of techniques is not intended. This would not suit anyone's purpose since metafictional novels presumably carry within them their own criticism (Hutcheon, *NN* 15). Overt metafiction is fairly easily spotted, as opposed to covert metafiction.

Overt, linguistic metafiction displays the novel's "building blocks", namely as an instance of language (Hutcheon, *NN* 29). The most overt example one must think of is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The language in both of these novels is a hurdle in itself. Readers are forced to make sense of difficult links, allusions, stream of consciousness style etc. The goal of such literary experiments might largely be "[to bring] out the meaning-maker in man" (Ibid.). To make meaning out of the language used, an active role must be taken up. Hutcheon offers two possibilities of viewing the meaning-making process, i.e. a negative and a positive one. Firstly, metafiction might point out the "inadequacy of language in conveying feeling, in communicating thought, or even fact"

(Ibid.). Secondly, and more positively, it might indicate "the overwhelming power and potency of words, their ability to create a world more real than the empirical one of our experience" (Ibid.). Although these two options seem limited, my idea is that the choice is up to the reader, who either takes up the responsibility or not. Ultimately, the theme of signification remains within the metafictional text (both linguistically and diegetically), regardless of how a reader views it. Objective statements on whether a text is positive or negative seem impossible since it is created by both reader and writer, as Hutcheon herself argues repeatedly in *Narcissistic Narrative*: "[T]he making of fictive worlds and the constructive, creative functioning of language itself are now self-consciously shared by author and reader" (Hutcheon, *NN* 30). Dabbling in intentions of the author, though, is no longer part of this age of criticism. As to the reader, he is discussed in the following section (3) on literary theory.

Covert metafiction is more implicit, it is "structuralized, internalized within the text" (Hutcheon, *NN* 31). Similar to its overt counterpart, it can also be subdivided into diegetic and linguistic modes. The main difference between overt and covert metafiction is that, in the latter, the reader is not addressed or explicitly made aware of self-reflexive elements. For covert, diegetic metafiction, this means the use of a known novelistic paradigm. Hutcheon discerns four, relatively frequently implanted models: (1) the detective story, (2) fantasy, (3) game structure and (4) the erotic (Hutcheon, *NN* 31-34). These four modes follow set literary patterns and structural conventions. These models are covert since a reader might not recognise their use as a metafictional technique because of their overly familiar characteristics. Needless to say, a mere application of a common novel structure is not covertly metafictional. The text needs to go from mere recognisability to subversion in order to start up readers' thought processes. The most common way to establish said subversion, according to Hutcheon, is parody. She provides a number of examples where an author used parody to focus attention on diegetic elements and on fiction in general. The models of detective story and fantasy seem to be the most prevalent (*NN* 31-32). Different models lead to slightly deviating conclusions about fiction on the reader's part. (1) The use of a detective story might point out the reader's own activity as mystery modes contain "hermeneutic gaps" (Hutcheon, *NN* 32). Even whodunits require a minimal amount of guesswork from the reader. (2) Fantasy stories, then, show a reader's capability to create a

new world, though based only on the language of this world. It is a "compromise between the empirically real and the totally imaginary" (Ibid.). As such, the reader's power is put in the limelight. For (3) game structures, the focus is led towards codes and rules that govern not just games, but novels as well. This "places the emphasis on the process being enacted and not the product finally attained" (Hutcheon, *NN* 33). The (4) erotic model, then, also sheds light on the reading process, but here as something seductive and sexual. Reading becomes similar to writing as the novel makes clear that both can be "an erotic activity" (Ibid.).

Even though Hutcheon's category of covert diegetic metafiction features mainly parody, the literary analysis below should show that parody is not the only option. Additionally, "[t]hese four diegetic models are not intended as exclusive and complete … A case, for example, could probably be made for just one general category-of a "system" model" (Ibid.). Indeed, an infinite number of known frameworks might be used by the novelist to draw attention to the proceedings of fiction itself. Hutcheon, in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (referred to as *PP* from here onwards), provides a most relevant additional example with her concept of *historiographic metafiction*. "Historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to what I would call such late modernist radical metafiction, attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (Hutcheon, *PP* 108). As might be deduced from this definition, historiographic metafiction is a covert mode, but it might be focused on either the diegetic or the linguistic. One example provided by Hutcheon is *Shame* (1983) by Salman Rushdie, in which the narrator reflects on his inability to write in earnest about Pakistan from England, in English (Ibid.). Another, more recent example is *The Long Song* (2010) by Andrea Levy. It is a neo-slave narrative set in 19th century Jamaica. Using the known framework of autobiographical slave narratives, this fictional story blurs the lines between imagination and historical fact. The diegetic mode is of interest for this thesis since Flann O'Brien uses the covert, diegetic metafictional technique of subverting a well-known framework in *At S2B* as well. He sets up three clearly identifiable novelistic genres that, in due course, collide. Although the linguistic form of historiographic metafiction is equally thought-provoking, it is not as striking a concern in O'Brien's work. Accordingly, considering it here would lead this discussion of metafiction too far. In any case, "[w]ith metafiction, … the distinction between literary and critical texts begin to fade" (Hutcheon, *NN* 15). Since

self-critical novels contain within themselves their own commentary, this study is limited to those theoretic elements that are merited by O'Brien's two novels, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and *The Third Policeman*.

Historiographic metafiction seeks to bring together two seemingly incompatible modes of writing, i.e. fiction and historiography. Consequently, it might induce cognitive action regarding the historiographic mode and how it uses sign systems not so different from those at work in fiction. According to Hutcheon, there is a "danger [in] separating fiction and history as narrative genres" (*PP* 111). The danger, I believe, is an uncritical reading of historiographic works. Metafiction might illustrate that history, too, is altered to a certain extent due to unavoidable narrativization processes. It is clear that metafictional novels in general refuse one meaning or truth. Accordingly, historiographic metafiction posits the same issue regarding history. It "openly assert[s] that there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths" (Hutcheon, *PP* 109). As such, the novel and historiographic works are revitalised since new "truths" are always to be discovered in works where process rather than product is the focal point. Additionally, originality and reference are problematized. "The issue is no longer "to what empirically real object in the past does the language of history refer?"; it is more "to which discursive context could this language belong? To which prior textualizations must we refer?"" (Hutcheon, *PP* 119). The search for original and true "Meaning", then, has become moot, but the process towards meaning itself, shown to readers in self-conscious fiction, has become a point of excitement. Understanding novelistic procedure has its impact on the reader's real life as well. After all, "the process of narrativization has come to be seen as a central form of human comprehension, of imposition of meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events" (Hutcheon, *PP* 121). Historiographic metafiction shows readers that man applies narrative structures to novels as well as to historical writings. Similarly, covert, diegetic metafiction in general can show the reader the proceedings of narrative frameworks, as he himself unconsciously applies them to his 'reality' experience in general.

Coming back to Hutcheon's model of metafiction, as discussed in *Narcissistic Narrative*, there is one more mode of metafiction left to treat, i.e. covert, linguistic metafiction. It is a particularly hard to spot this type of metafiction since generalisation is extremely difficult. Even though it exposes the novel as an instance of language, like overt linguistic metafiction

does, the covert style is more internalised. Put differently, the governing rules of the linguistic play at hand are not explicitly disclosed in covert linguistic metafiction. As a consequence, it remains a difficult category to describe without textual examples. Nevertheless, some examples of techniques given by Hutcheon are duplicitous wording, puns or anagrams (*NN* 34). More generally, language is foregrounded by "increased demands made on the reader" (Ibid.). Again, the reader is given all the power, where once this was considered the domain of the writer only. Not only is it difficult to generalise any of the existing techniques, there is also the matter of range.

On the one hand, there is under-representation: a few covert metafictional elements probably do not grant a reader the necessary evidence to term a complete novel metafictional. Metafiction, after all, is a matter of "degree, not kind" (Hutcheon, *NN* 13). The difficulty with covert metafiction, then, is to steer clear of over-analysis. Instead of covert metafiction, a researcher might be dealing with no metafiction at all and this issue is most problematic with linguistic metafiction. Luckily, both novels chosen for this thesis contain overt elements as well as covert elements of metafiction. Consequently, the problem of under-representation is not an issue for *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. Consider, in contrast, *Tristram Shandy* (1767), one of the earlier metafictional instances. Though Hutcheon considers Laurence Sterne's novel as a "forerunner of modern metafiction", this is a far cry from calling it metafictional full stop. One swallow does not make a summer. On the other hand, over-representation plays with the outer limits of the novel itself. This is an issue Patricia Waugh also encountered in her book *Metafiction*, where she speaks of "radical metafiction" (136). She divides this phenomenon into two categories. In the first, extreme contradiction becomes paradox and in the second, *objets trouvés* become intertextual overkill (Waugh 137). Hutcheon calls covert metafiction in extremis, the stage of "anti-representation" (*NN* 137). Examples can easily be found in the work of the authors centred round *Tel Quel*, the French literary magazine founded in the 1960s. Its rationale was clear: condemnation of the dominant novelistic mode of representation (Hutcheon, *NN* 128). *Tel Quel*, however, moved completely away from the novel with their avant-garde literary exercises. As mentioned before, a certain recognition is necessary for a book to be at least readable. Therefore, it seems a more productive feat to remain within the boundaries of the novel. Examples of authors on the verge are James Joyce, Gertrude Stein or Raymond Roussel (Hutcheon, *NN* 129). While certainly pushing the limits, these authors have remained within readability and,

more importantly, have stayed in the literary memory. Flann O'Brien, too, definitely keeps a bond with the reader by means of humour inter alia.

Though not near either of the two extremes of the spectrum, one novel of O'Brien is presumed to be more covertly metafictional than the other. Therefore, a possible solution to the pitfalls of under-representation is oeuvre. Although Hutcheon does not seem to take it into consideration, an author's line of work can be of importance. James Joyce, for example, is known for his linguistic experiments as Jane Austen is known for her female characters. An author is not unlikely to incorporate recurring themes throughout his or her work. Take Flann O'Brien's first novel, *At S2B*. It immediately strikes as a metafictional work with some of the first lines:

> I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 9)

Very much on the surface, the several metafictional elements are easily discerned in *At S2B*. Yet, *The 3PM* is less well-known and less mentioned in critical analysis than O'Brien's first novel, possibly due to its publication history. Furthermore, it is not so widely established as a metafictional work. Though there are certainly indications that a metafictional reading of *The 3PM* is granted, the covert elements might still be seen in another literary light, e.g. the absurd. Neill Cornwell, for example mentions O'Brien in his book *The Absurd in Literature* (Wanner 192). This is where oeuvre comes into play, I believe. Metafictional musings are definitely present throughout Flann O'Brien's work and not only in *At S2B*. One striking example is a short story called 'Scenes in a Novel,' first published in 1934 (as compiled in the short story collection edited by Neil Murphy & Keith Hopper). It displays a writer's attempt at a new article that never gets written since he dies before he can finish it. Having found blatant instances of metafiction in both 'Scenes in a Novel' and *At S2B*, it is not unfounded to assume that other works of O'Brien carry the same self-conscious seed. After all, the reoccurrence of a certain theme is common in any given author's work. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that a certain preoccupation with fiction itself is present in *The 3PM* as well.

Although a researcher should stick to the text, a fear of over-analysing covert metafictional items in Flann O'Brien's works – both *At S2B* and *The 3PM* in this case – is wholly unwarranted. Just like an interest in everything Irish, O'Brien seems to have had a keen sense of metafictional proceedings.

Hutcheon's model proves to be an open-ended tool for the literary analyst in search of metafiction. Though there are some problems, e.g. labelling covert metafiction, its merits outweigh possible complications. Moreover, mere identification of metafictional techniques is not the sole goal of this thesis. The implications for reader and the novel in general are interesting aspects to contemplate as well. Hutcheon's ideas regarding the reader and the novel are not to be misunderstood given the subtitle of her book on metafiction: *The Metafictional Paradox*.

> [I]n all fiction, language is representational, but of a fictional "other" world, a complete and coherent "heterocosm" created by the fictive referents of the signs. In metafiction, however, this fact is made explicit, and while he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation. This two-way pull is the paradox of the reader. The text's own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader. (Hutcheon, *NN* 7)

The paradox addresses both text and reader. The former is both inwardly and outwardly directed at the same time. Though Hutcheon does not explicitly mention it here, metafiction not only has its implications on the reader's immediate experience, it also serves to reflect on novels in general. Hopefully, a metafictional novel might serve as a stepping-stone towards more informed future readings. Additionally, an understanding of novelistic processes might alter even the experience of 'reality.' Any metafictional novel "aims at transforming the way his reader reads and thinks-as a first step to transforming the … reality he lives in" (Hutcheon, *NN* 156). The paradox of the reader, then, lies in his being asked both to engage in and to scrutinize the fictional world he is presented with. Norman Holland, who

devoted several books to reader response theory, provides an interesting glance at the reader with his "willing suspension of disbelief" (*DLR* ch. 3). Indeed, as Coleridge had noticed previously, readers adopt a stance of belief; belief in "all kinds of unrealities and improbabilities" (Holland, *DLR* 63). Waugh already shows an interest in reader response in her book on metafiction. Hutcheon does the same thing, as has become clear, and goes one step further in her research by explicitly mentioning Holland's attempts at positioning the reader front and centre in the signification process generated by the novel. Holland's literary response theory is dealt with in section 3.

2.3 Consequences for Mimesis and the Reader

> The good of a book lies in its being read. A book is made up of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts, therefore it is dumb.
>
> – Umberto Eco

Mimesis seems inconceivable in metafictional novels since the revealing of narrative processes undermines any referentiality to 'reality.' Though this may be true for the mimesis of product, which was the goal of all realist fiction, mimesis of process is another matter entirely. The former requires a reader "to identify the products being imitated … and recognize their similarity to those in empirical reality" (Hutcheon, *NN* 38). Metafiction contests this by showing the processes that alter "empirical reality" within the novel. However, by redefining mimesis to contain both product and process, metafictional novels can still be called mimetic: "The novel no longer seeks just to provide an order and meaning to be recognized by the reader. It now demands that he be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking" (Hutcheon, *NN* 39). Metafiction makes clear that narrative structures are not only used in fiction, but in 'reality' as well. A depiction of reality, such as the novel, can also be diegetic without abandoning mimesis. The novel, then, becomes the output of thought processes of writer and reader alike. Instead of a mirror of reality, fiction presents the mirror of perceiving reality. Incidentally, this conception of mimesis was largely accepted in antiquity: "In the *Poetics*, Aristotle underplays Plato's

distinction between drama and narration …, treating both as forms of a general imitation, in a way that corresponds roughly to the suggested use here of the terms product and process" (Hutcheon, *NN* 41). By thematising fictional processes, metafiction restores narrativization as a form of mimesis, namely mimesis of process. Consequently, postmodernist novels have completely moved away from the realist tradition, as Hutcheon regularly mentions. Of course, her goal is to set her model apart from realist criticism. Instead of analysing novels in terms of truth, she proposes "validity" as a "more neutral term" (Hutcheon, *NN* 42). Indeed, for diegesis to be accepted as a part of mimesis, readers must feel a sense of validity to be able to connect with a story. Said term "seems adequate … to account for both the static notion of inner cohesion and ontological autonomy of literature, and the more dynamic one of Aristotelian ordering or mutual motivation of parts of the work of art" (Ibid.). In the fantasy genre, for example, laws of physics might deviate from those of 'reality,' but must remain consistent within the novelistic universe. Otherwise, readers are confused and might discard the novel as 'unbelievable'. Take J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, which is a self-contained heterocosm depicted in several of his books. It is different from the 'real' world, but remains believable since laws of physics are logical and dependable within the novel. The power is in hands of the bearers of rings, for example, and there are no exceptions.

Aristotelean mimesis lays it claims on the reader: more is expected of him, but more is granted as well. Calling metafiction – or any other type of novel for that matter – educational is definitely touching upon an important aspect of fictional practice. In metafiction, readers are forced to consider matters of diegesis and fictional language: "[T]he teaching is done by disruption and discontinuity," in covert metafiction (Hutcheon, *NN* 139). Whereas, in overt metafiction, the reader is practically told to integrate himself in the text. Readers are free to activate and interpret the text, but are also tied to a responsibility to take up that challenge, especially in metafiction: "The reader of fiction is *always* an actively mediating presence … . The writers of narcissistic fiction merely make the reader conscious of this fact of his experience" (Hutcheon, *NN* 141). Being forced to imagine and create the story, readers become aware that they are much like writers, though in actions inverted. Writers create a story from imagination, while readers create imagination from the story. Therefore, the demands on metafictional writers are not minor. They need to create both recognition and disruption. Indeed, the metafictional novel "encourages an active personal response to itself and creates a space for that response within itself" (Hutcheon, *NN* 141).

For a novel to contain both product and process, then, it needs both an attempt at representation and refusal of the myth of representation (Ibid.). As such, readers are free both to connect to and reflect upon fiction. As metafiction contains its own theory, "*[t]he reader, like the writer, becomes the critic*" (Hutcheon, *NN* 144).Though demanding, metafiction is the best way for readers to become critics, not only of fiction, but of life itself.

While reading fiction, we create a fictional world in our mind's eye and make sense of it. We order and make meaning of the world that is presented to us in the novel. Though we might adhere to different paradigms, we order the 'real' world as well as we cannot react to every stimulus that we are presented with. As such, fictional processes are paradigmatic of 'real' mental processes (Hutcheon, *NN* 89). As metafiction instructs readers on how to understand fiction, life lessons might be discovered. In overt fiction, the reader is possibly less active than in covert fiction. With the latter, thoughts are moulded, as it were, in an indirect fashion. The sense of accomplishment, of making sense of a fictional world, is greater in covert metafiction, I believe. As opposed to the covert mode, overt metafiction basically just tells the reader how to read/create. Ideally, though, a novel contains both modes of metafiction so as to direct readers' thoughts, but to leave the credit to themselves. According to Hutcheon, two abstract skills might be taken away from reading self-conscious literature: "The first is the making of ordered fictions, which is not unlike the myth-making impulse in its imaginative freedom that paradoxically creates order and meaning. And the second is the use of language to create those fictional worlds" (Hutcheon, *NN* 140). Linking these skills to life itself, readers might pick up on how they unconsciously order the "real" world in narrative frameworks as well. Additionally, readers experience the creative power that language has. Of course, this is in congruence with the two overt or covert modes of metafiction, i.e. diegetic and linguistic respectively.

Covert metafiction has an almost sneaky way of coaxing readers to teach themselves about fictional processes. Relying on known frameworks or themes, diegetic self-conscious fiction forces readers into cognition because of the inversion of said frameworks or theme: "[T]he reading of these texts-especially covertly narcissistic ones-is often a rereading, a necessary constructing of meaning and system in the mind of the reader. The work is both an object and a performance" (Hutcheon, *NN* 144). Linguistic metafiction sets readers to work in a different way with different realisations as a result. As said before, covert modes are difficult to spot and this is especially true for linguistic, covert metafiction. Writerly

experiments are hard to figure out when the rules of the linguistic play are not communicated (Hutcheon, *NN* 124). However, overt, linguistic metafiction stages linguistic freedom in a more comprehensive way: "[T]he reader works to unite the contradicting referents, to balance them neatly into oppositions" (Hutcheon, *NN* 29). The language of metafiction is dislocating and contains blanks that need to be filled in by the reader. Similar to Wolfgang Iser's concept of *Leerstellen*, readers are led to use language creatively in order to creative a cohesive whole. Consequently, the object of attaining meaning becomes of lesser importance than the thrill of process, of meaning-making itself.

Hutcheon gives the reader his proper place in the novelistic process. Apparently, she only realised she should have done so, after she had attended a graduate course taught by Wolfgang Iser at the University of Toronto. As the next section examines literary response theory, as devised by Norman N. Holland, Hutcheon's own bond with the reader is shared here. It is a passage, taken from the preface of the 2013 reissue of *Narcissistic Narrative*:

Enter the main character in this book's story: the reader. ... I was holed up in the library, trying desperately to complete my dissertation. ... I did *not* want to learn anything new; I simply wanted to finish writing my thesis. But I fatefully decided to attend the opening lecture of Professor Iser's course. After 90 minutes, ... I panicked: with both horror and excitement, I realized I would have to rewrite my entire dissertation. *How could I have thought I could theorize self-reflexive fiction without thinking of the reader-the workings of whose creative imaginative processes were being redefined by metafiction?* (emphasis added, Hutcheon, *NN* xi)
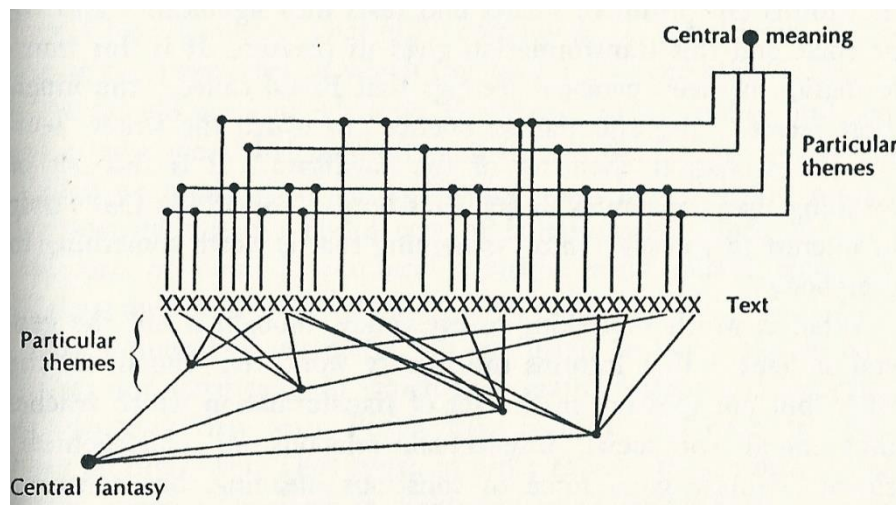
3. Theoretical Framework: Literary Response Theory

The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

…

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows

That the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

…

All art is quite useless.

– Oscar Wilde

3.1 The Pleasure of Meaning-Making

American literary scholar Norman N. Holland has written a number of works dedicated to the relationship between people and art in general. However, his main interest is reader response to literature. The main question he tries to answer is 'why do people read with pleasure?' The answer seems to be quite simple: we read because, paradoxically, meaning gives pleasure (Holland, *DLR* 5). However, the process towards meaning is not so easily described. To explain why meaning unconsciously gives pleasure, Holland mainly adheres to Freudian ideas. Despite the fact that his methods seem slightly outdated and that they cannot be objectively tested for validity, Holland still managed to put the reader on literary theory's radar. For example, in a sporadic disagreement with Freud, Holland posits that meaning is general rather than personal. Indeed, ever since New Criticism and Barthes' essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967) inter alia, the reader has become more and more important. Consequently, texts have become increasingly regarded as co-created by the reader rather than a sole construction of the writer. However, Holland still believes that, had Freud been exposed to the criticism of the mid-20th century, "he would have been all too aware that literature means, … in a general, not a personal way" (Holland, *DLR* 5). If the attaining of meaning is what drives people to read, though, the question remains 'why?'

According to Holland, a psychoanalytic reading has a special status in trying to attain meaning in a text: "[T]he psychoanalytic meaning underlies all the others" because it provides us with the pleasure of reading and thus with the inclination to start reading in the first place (Holland, *DLR* 27). By reading, latent fantasies of the Id are sublimated via

acceptable channels to satisfy said fantasies. As such, reading becomes meaning-as-transformation for the reader: "meaning is a dynamic process: [a literary work] transforms the unconscious fantasy at its heart into intellectual terms" (Holland, *DLR* 12). Consequently, meaning is not just 'there,' in the text. As metafiction points out, texts need to be activated. According to Holland, this happens on a subconscious level, where the main motivation is sublimation of fantasy, but also on a conscious level. These two simultaneous processes towards meaning are presented in the following scheme:

Central ● meaning

Particular themes

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX   Text

Particular themes {

Central fantasy

(Holland, *DLR* 29)

It is clear that the text is subconsciously interpreted as a pleasurable sublimation of a central fantasy. On the conscious level, however, the meaning-making process is more ordered: "Consciously, we arrive at the psychoanalytic reading by a process not unlike our approach to other kinds of meaning" (Holland, *DLR* 29). I can agree with the fact that we deal with fiction in a similar way to dealing with reality. Indeed, metafiction points out that novelistic frameworks are not so different from 'real' frameworks. However, Holland adheres to the psychoanalytic reading, even in conscious meaning-making. In spite of calling any meaning, made by using a range of frameworks, "similar," Holland's preference for the psychoanalytic is clear (Holland, *DLR* 26). Moreover, the diagram, as presented above, leads me to believe that Holland accepts the idea that novels have a central meaning. It seems to me that these conflicting ideas regarding meaning are the result of both objective and subjective inspiration. In other words, Holland's preference for the psychoanalytic is clear, while he mentions that contemporary literary theory has left behind the ideal of 'One Meaning' as

well. My personal goal for this thesis is not so very different. I chose metafiction as a framework to guide my reading. However, while I presume a metafictional unity, I do not claim that it is the only reading or meaning there is to these works. Rather, my interpretation fits into the configuration of different possible *meanings*.

To provide the unconscious reading with more substance, Holland provides a "dictionary of fantasy" (*DLR* ch. 2). The Freudian phases of growing up are linked to literary themes or phenomena. Supposedly, people's varying choices of novels can be linked to different phases of childhood. Similarly, authors use recurring themes, techniques, etc. because of personal fantasies that are rooted in childhood. The drive to fulfil childhood fantasies never really abates. Instead, defences are put up. In a general sense, this means rationalisation or sublimation of unacceptable fantasies. A defence can take on different superficial forms, such as repression, reversal, projection and introjection (Holland, *DLR* 57). This is similar to what books do: "just as literary works embody fantasies familiar from psychoanalytic experience, so they handle these fantasies by techniques that resemble familiar defensive or adaptive strategies" (Holland, *DLR* 58). Fiction strategies, then, are similar to strategies to govern 'reality'; a similarity metafiction tries to bring to the reader's attention, as Hutcheon and Waugh have pointed out. Yet, fantasies and defences are equally complex: "[F]antasies at this level of maturity, and, *a fortiori*, in the adulthood beyond, are for too various to be generalized about. Our dictionary must be confined to oral, anal, urethral, phallic, and oedipal fantasies–beyond them, no dictionary is possible" (Holland, *DLR* 33). Holland here touches upon one of the problems involved in limiting reading to the psychoanalytic. Freudian motivations to read seem plausible, but they only touch upon one possible reason to read. However, Holland artfully breezes over the fact that it cannot be objectively determined what goes on mentally when it comes to emotion, preference or feeling. *De gustibus et coloribus non est disputandum*. Unfortunately, Holland generalises too much by keeping true to the Freudian phases as a means to explain why we read. The same goes for defences since they are "even more numerous, variable and idiosyncratic than the fantasies" (Holland, *DLR* 61). Holland makes up for these idiosyncrasies in a modified diagram:
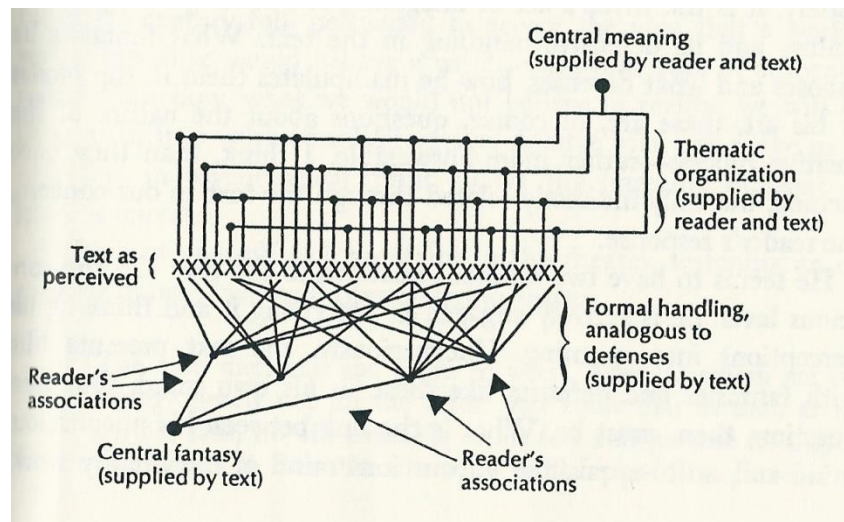
Added to the central fantasy that captivates the reader here are his associations and defences that he brings to the text. Thus, the focal points unfortunately remain the one central fantasy, and the one central meaning.

Nonetheless, an important point that must be retained from reading *The Dynamics of Literary Response* is that people are definitely touched by books. This insight in itself is enough to know that metafiction can have an unconscious and lasting effect on people as well, be it a defence strategy or not. The subject for this thesis, for example, is the result of personal motivations and the pleasure of reading Flann O'Brien. Both framework and primary material are the result of idiosyncrasies: studies in literature, a similarity I found between *The Third Policeman* and *Alice in Wonderland*, preference for humoristic stories etc. Freudian complexes might even come into play. Rather than explaining why I chose Flann O'Brien's books or the frame of metafiction, however, this thesis should be read as one of many possible, similar-but-not-equal interpretations. I just hope that other readers might be persuaded to read *At S2B* and *The 3PM* in light of the metafictional enigma. If not, even an *attempt* at solving O'Brien's riddle of a novel with the help of any framework that feels suitable is rewarding.

Another interesting feature regarding reading is that we can be completely absorbed by a novel; so absorbed even that we do not respond to external stimuli such as sounds. Moreover, we feel for the characters: we might cry when the hero dies, or feel relief when

the maiden in distress is saved. This phenomenon is what Samuel T. Coleridge already called the 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Holland, *DLR* 63). It is a mind-set in which readers accept anything, even those things that cannot happen in reality. For example, readers of the *Harry Potter* series accept that wizards can fly on brooms. Director Tyrone Guthrie noticed a similar phenomenon in a theatre audience. It is not that an audience believes in the staged story as children might, but they are absorbed by the action on stage nonetheless (Holland, *DLR* 64): "But, to judge from the statistics for best-sellers, moviegoing, and television watching, this experience of total absorption is far more typical of entertainments than of masterpieces" (Holland, *DLR* 66). Indeed, high art makes absorption possibly difficult because of its high-brow connotation. However, complete absorption is another extreme perhaps, since it does not incite any cognitive action at all. As previously mentioned, high art preferably maintains a communicative bridge with its audience.

Fiction leaves the reader to accept falsities, which is not so much the case in other genres, e.g. autobiography or history. These latter examples make the reader want to check facts and compare with reality: "The moment some incident cues us to realize it is a fiction, we relax and accept it as such" (Holland, *DLR* 68). Therefore, the consciousness that something is unreal makes readers relax and suspend their disbelief. They do not feel a need for reality-checks, which is similar to Hutcheon's concept of validity. Some novels explicitly state the fact that they are a novel, by adding 'a novel' as a paratext. In the case of *At S2B*, it is clear we are dealing with a novel since the page after the title page reads: "All the characters represented in this book, including the first person singular, are entirely fictitious and bear no relation to any person living or dead" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 5). The fact that novels profess their own identity as such is not particularly metafictional since any novel usually does so and readers usually leaf through the first pages and go straight to the story. In any case, expectations are brought to a text and novels, in their uselessness, create the expectation of 'unreality'. Consequently, the reader can find pleasure because it permits channelling out reality. O'Brien plays with these notions in *The 3PM*, where the main character is conducting a study of a man called de Selby. This unnamed man's endeavours are shared in the novel and have a very academic feel to them. The content, however, is completely implausible:

Hatchjaw remarks (unconfirmed, however, by Bassett) that throughout the whole ten years that went to the writing of *The Country Album* de Selby was obsessed with mirrors and had recourse to them so frequently that he claimed to have two left hands and to be living in a world arbitrarily bounded by a wooden frame. (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 66)

Though it is clear that *The 3PM* is a novel, these instances of mock-academic-writing have an eerie feel to them. Coming back to high literature being less easy to relate to, O'Brien does a good job of maintaining the communicative bridge with his reader. As was mentioned before, humour certainly adds to the readability of both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. As can be deduced from the previous *The 3PM* quote, O'Brien shows readers that even academic writing can be parodied.

To summarise, readers willingly suspend disbelief because they bring two expectations to literature: "first, that it will give us pleasure … ; second, that it will not require us to act on the external world" (Holland, *DLR* 79). Paradoxically, this creates the ability to create meaning, and consider that same meaning in the external world as well. The meaning-making takes place in what Holland considers the conscious level. As such, a minimal of ego-functions persist while reading in order to keep adults from becoming completely childish (Holland, *DLR* 89). Hence, we are able to read coherently and in a minimally ordered way. According to Holland, "[i]f we are dealing with a masterpiece, we are likely to respond more at the conscious level of meaning and significance, less at the primitive level of fusion and introjection" (Holland, *DLR* 92). Deeming O'Brien's work as part of the literary canon, then, it is supposedly read more consciously than introspectively. However, expectation plays a big part here too. People have come to expect a need-to-mean in high literature and therefore approach it with more apprehension. Contrastively, with 'low-brow' novels, such as the romantic stories by Nicholas Sparks or the best-selling detective novels by Michael Connelly, readers do not expect deeper meanings other than the on-the-surface story they are presented with. However, humorous novels such as those by O'Brien – or those of DBC Pierre, to give another example – show a biased audience that 'high' literature can be pleasurable just as much. Even if the metafictional elements are missed by the reader, he might still be laughing out loud at the absurdity of it all. Even with a more superficial reading of the two novels that are analysed here, readers might still engage

in cognitive action, namely the ordering and making sense of the fantastic incidents. Holland indicates a similar phenomenon in "meaning as defense" (ch. 6), a phenomenon discussed in the following section on the two kinds of defences.

3.2 Form and Meaning as Defence

One of the defences at work in literature is form. The environment of a novel is felt to be safe because its form governs possibly unacceptable unconscious content (Holland, *DLR* 105): "Very loosely, then, we can say that form in a literary work corresponds to defense; content, to fantasy or impulse" (Holland, *DLR* 131). Still, form and content are inseparable. Some content needs very little form, as in non-fiction prose, whereas in some genres, like poetry, form seems more important than content (Holland, *DLR* 152). Supposedly, then, there is a spectrum with arts of pure form on the one end, and arts that are pure content on the other. However, both are always present, even if one is but minimally represented. This thesis, for example, is mostly concerned with content, though there is a minimal amount of form as well, e.g. linking words, rhetoric, logic. Moreover, boundaries are easily broken as O'Brien points out by merging academic writing and novelistic writing, both seemingly different in both form and content. In short, we assume certain content to take on a certain form and vice versa. This is true of life as well: unacceptable content or drives are shaped so that they become more acceptable. For example, the drive to swim (content), is controlled by rules (form) set by the swimming pool's owner, e.g. wear a swimsuit, wash feet before swimming, wear a swim cap etc. The less acceptable the content, the more form there is, shaping it into something acceptable. What metafiction hopefully makes clear, is that governing forms of literature are similar to those in life. "[U]nderstanding that form manages fantasy enables us to see art in relation to life itself" (Holland, *DLR* 161). Some forms of literature are very well-known as a result of the criticism dedicated to it. For example, a contemporary reading audience will have no problem with making meaning of a romantic novel because romantic criticism is abundant. As a consequence, cognitive action diminishes – unless a new framework or criticism is actively chosen. Paradoxically, then, criticism, an effort of meaning-making, can make readers more passive if it has been around for too long. Luckily, new criticism emerges every few decades, resulting in new ways to read novels. Someday, though, the same might be said of metafiction: that we, as readers, have

seen it before and that it can teach us nothing new. Metafiction as a form will have become a defence.

Another defence involved in reading is meaning. As previously mentioned, literature is associated with a preconception of difficulty. Holland gives the example of "the puzzling movie", e.g. *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) or *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), where the most common reaction is "what was *that* all about?" (*DLR* 162-163). Put differently, the need-to-mean is thoroughly felt with high-art movies, as with literature, but puzzling art is not a pleasure for everyone. The fact that "it means something" can be a defence because it "bribes our reason to accept the incoherent stream of images or the incoherent narrative of the puzzling movie" (Holland, *DLR* 165). The same accounts for literature: we accept that a form is difficult because we attest it to the need-to-mean. According to Holland, in another adherence to Freudian principles, the feeling that we cannot grasp this meaning brings readers back to their childhood, to a feeling of discomfort. Consequently, some readers give up on literature because they cannot find pleasure in it. Intellectuals, in comparison, see a difficult piece of art as an intellectual problem rather than a moral one and, as such, can find pleasure whilst having their fantasies sublimated (Holland, *DLR* 166). This emphasis on high art being more gratifying to intellectuals, however, seems unmerited. Again, my opinion is that the expectations readers bring to literature constitute a factor of great importance. The threshold to literature might be higher, but reading it might still give pleasure. One does not have to be a literary scholar to make meaning. Moreover, meaning is not only a defence; it can also be a satisfaction of an unconscious drive: "[M]eaning … gratifies us as any sublimation would, with pleasure from the disguised satisfaction of drives. But, evidently, since we seem to need meaning, it must serve defensive as well as pleasurable functions" (Holland, *DLR* 179). Indeed, ordering an interpretation is very enjoyable to anyone and has benefits in life itself. Metafiction might point this life-fiction link out. Looking back on Holland's diagram of text perception, his discussion of meaning remedies his "one central meaning" since he says: "Nor, in this context, need there be only one central meaning. Almost any kind of coherent thought about the work will open up the paths of gratification, so long as it "makes sense" of the text" (*DLR* 185). Nevertheless, the amends made here are limited since they only refer to meaning as pleasure and defence. On a conscious level, Holland still adheres to the idea of 'One Meaning': "the exact, stringent kind of sublimatory meaning" (Ibid.).

O'Brien's work has been called absurdist in the past, e.g. in Neil Cornwell's book *The Absurd in Literature* (Wanner 192). Absurdist works, after all, present a very specific view of meaning-making. Consciously, though, this mode of writing is very exertive and pushes readers to use their own order-making. It is therefore very much suited for the metafictional. In Holland's own words, "[w]e try to make sense out of them; thus the absurdist, like the maker of puzzling movies, makes us take problem-solving intellection as our way of dealing with the conflicts created in us by [the absurdist's] work" (*DLR* 176). Indeed, O'Brien takes the reader on a nonsensical trip that he must make sense of by cognitive action. However, he helps his reader along by constructing communicative bridges in both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. The former involves different narrative frames that run amok throughout the novel, but different parts are always captioned and conspicuously concluded. The adventures depicted in *The 3PM* are more difficult to make sense of, but the ending makes everything fairly clear in a circular movement. The reader of *The 3PM*, then, has to muster up a bit more effort since the ordering principle is only revealed in the end. Following Holland's own example of absurdist "metatheatrist" Ionesco (*DLR* 177), my opinion is that metafiction takes the absurd one step further in pointing out the link to life. After all, ordering principles do come in handy when faced with our fast-moving, digital world.

3.3 Literature and the Brain

Holland's more recent publication, *Literature and the Brain*, is an attempt at fusing neuroscience and psychoanalysis: "[L]iterary theorists from earlier times have faced the limitations of the psychology of those earlier times. Only in the last century have we had a 'scientific' psychology. Only in the last few decades have we had a neurology with which we can observe actual brain systems" (Holland, *L&B* 3). Thus, Holland's goal is to establish more scientific grounds on which to build his ideas about literary response. His insistence on Freudian motivations for the pleasure of reading, however, remains present, though in a more subdued way. For example, Holland speaks of "dual-aspect of monism" (*L&B* 18). The brain is made up of one type of cell material, but perception happens in two different ways, i.e. objectively or subjectively. This is similar to the diagram Holland proposed in *DLR* (61), which can be seen above. Specifically, texts are interpreted on a conscious level, i.e. the level that neuroscientists can map with brain imaging, and on an unconscious level, i.e. the level that must still be explained via psychoanalysis (Holland, *L&B* 18). Nevertheless, the main

merit of *L&B* must be the neuro-scientific approach to psychoanalysis since it remains one of the few books to do so. Though some aspects of reading can be explained by neuroscience, other aspects remain an enigma. For example, emotions, as was already suggested before, receive no consensus among neuroscientists. Apparently, emotions are difficult to chart and "there are many … theories of emotion, none so widely accepted to be "the" theory" (Holland, *L&B* 83). Even though scientists seem to agree that there are a number of basic emotions, generalisations remain difficult. The main reason is that complex emotions are a combination of said basic emotions (Ibid.).

Why do we blush when we feel embarrassed or cry when we feel sad? Indeed, something we cannot deny from a purely physical point of view is that emotion is visible through physical signs. The reason for that is the place in the brain where emotions arise, namely the limbic system:

> Our emotional systems are richly connected back and forth from the homeostatic systems that govern blood pressure, heart rate, and the like, giving rise to the physical signs of emotion and to the cognitive systems in the front brain that make us consciously aware of "feeling" an emotion. (Holland, *L&B* 101)

Although neuroscientists face many challenges concerning emotion in the brain, it is certain that, because of how emotions are connected to other parts in the brain, our intellectual perception of the world is affected by emotion. In other words, no one is ever 'purely' objective. This finding must remind one, of course, of Hutcheon's conception of mimesis, i.e. as a diegetic rendering of reality. Luckily, criticism has left behind its realist readings since the 20th century. Diegesis as a part of mimesis, then, has become widely accepted and has even been theorised about within the confines of the novel itself. I am talking, of course, about metafiction. Though metafiction points out diegetic – as well as linguistic – techniques in the novel, it might also point towards how diegetic we are in our perception of reality, as is shown neuro-psychoanalytically by Holland. This, then, is perhaps an oversight in Hutcheon's model. As she herself says, she included the reader almost last-minute, something which clearly shows in her model of metafiction. Therefore, I would propose an additional category since some metafictional elements of *At S2B* and *The 3PM* were difficult

to place. This category contains renderings of the reader response process or a thematisation of the reader. As always, the metafictional content justifies the model and therefore, other reader-related techniques might yet be discovered. Though not a closed category, I propose to name the category 'readerly metafiction' in this study.

We respond to novels in general in an emotional way, but form has a specific reader response. "[*F*]*orm directs our awareness*. And awareness involves two things: *form directs 1) our attention and 2) our perception*" (Holland, *L&B* 147). As to the first, Holland suggests that our brains are set to notice new things first (Ibid.). When reading, though we know we are safe and will not have to take action, our attention is still grabbed when something new happens in the story, as e.g. with the introduction of a new character. As to the second, perception is also guided by form, as was mentioned before regarding the addition of "a novel" to the title page. The filmic technique of zooming in is a good example of this latter phenomenon. When the camera is focused on a certain character, our perception is involuntarily guided towards said character. In novels, then, metafiction is an eloquent example of form guiding both attention and perception. The fact that self-conscious novels present themselves as novels, which ultimately they still are, sets readers at ease. Their perception is led to a feeling of safety since novels do not require action in the 'real' world. However, the novelty with metafiction is the incorporation of theory. As such, attention is directed towards literary theory, albeit disguised through diegetic and linguistic techniques. This novelty, then, hopefully incites action, even though readers were tricked into a feeling of passiveness that normally accompanies reading fiction.

Holland specifically expresses his views on metafiction in *L&B* (ch. 8). Unfortunately, this particular chapter offers nothing new about metafiction, which is a pity since metafiction combines reader response and theory so artfully. What Holland mainly observes is that when the metafictional becomes obvious, readers feel unnerved. The safety is broken down since "[s]omehow the story has become a fact" (Holland, *L&B* 75). Indeed, reading metafiction requires an active reader and passivity is probably the reason for its effect of bewilderment. The need for an active reader results in the blurring of fiction and reality given that the novel has an effect on the reader, a real-life person. Novels about authors writing a story thematically also catch this feeling. Readers might even question themselves: "Is the supposed fiction I am reading something I can act on (the physical literary work) or

not (the "content" of the work)?" (Holland, *L&B* 78). Holland resorts to Freud again to name this disconcerting feeling, namely "The Uncanny", or the feeling we get "when something familiar seems suddenly strange and unfamiliar" (Ibid.). As was argued before though, Holland offers nothing new to the metafictional discussion apart from the realisation that an uncanny feeling might help readers realise that fiction can have an impact on life.

4. Diegetic Structure: Framing

Reading *At S2B* for the first time can be bewildering. Luckily, O'Brien is very clear in what struck me as the most conspicuous metafictional element in *At S2B*, i.e. framing devices. Though *At S2B* is not divided into chapters, another division is maintained. Specifically, the different frames are given a proper heading and conclusion, usually indicated by the title of the frame in italics and "conclusion of the foregoing" respectively. The unnamed protagonist, a student of literature who is writing a book, is the main inhabitant of the highest frame. He is also the extra- and auto-diegetic narrator. The lower frames are part of the book he is writing, but are at times mentioned within the highest frame as well. For example, the main character discusses his book with his friends on several occasions. Consequently, the parts called "biographical reminiscence" are sometimes infused with parts of book manuscripts or dialogue containing content from the novel that is being written without their being an obvious title in italics. The main division between frames remains fairly clear, however, until the last pages, where the lower frames begin to merge.

The novel within the novel is the story of an(other) author called Dermot Trellis, as told by an intra- and hetero-diegetic narrator. Trellis creates several characters, who each have their own specific narrated story world. Yet, O'Brien's inner framing does not remain as clean since Trellis' characters leave their frames and even enter into the higher frame of Trellis himself. Indeed, Trellis' decision to have his characters live in his house to keep an eye on them has the strangest of consequences, as might have been expected. Moreover, said frames only come to the reader's attention with a statement of the unnamed student-writer in a "biographical reminiscence":

> [Mr. Trellis] has bought a ream of ruled foolscap and is starting on his story. He is compelling all his characters to live with him in the Red Swan Hotel so that he can keep an eye on them and see that there is no boozing. … Most of them are characters used in other books, chiefly works of another great writer called Tracy. There is a cowboy in Room 13 and Mr McCool, a hero of old Ireland, is on the floor above. The cellar is full of leprechauns. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 35)

Though some of the lowest frames are already revealed in the first page, i.e. Finn McCool, John Furriskey and The Pooka McPhellimey, the hierarchy remains murky until this

revelation. Incidentally, the writer referred to in the fragment, Tracy, is fictional, which is not surprising since he remains part of Dermot Trellis' frame. As discussed below, he too becomes a character, though he is initially referred to as an author that Dermot Trellis plagiarises.

The lowest frames, consisting of the different characters Trellis creates, are on an equal level. I discerned four character frames, though other divisions are possible since the lowest frames soon begin to blur. The following image is a possible division of frames:
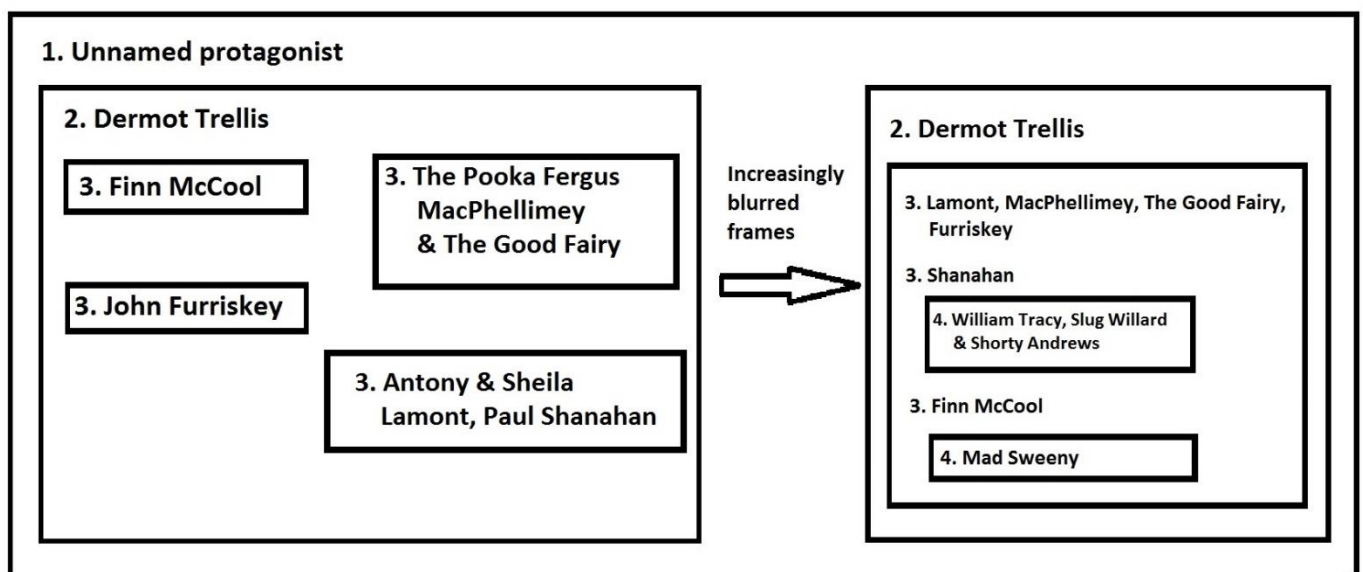
As can be seen from Image 1, the stories that Trellis writes – told by an intra- and hetero-diegetic narrator – are on the same level, but are distinct in a first stage. Finn McCool is a fierce Irish hero, whose life story takes place in the Middle Ages. His character is based on an already existing one from Gaelic legends (Deane 198). John Furriskey's 'character-birth' is actually portrayed in *At S2B*. He is created by Trellis to play the villain and womaniser. Antony and Sheila Lamont are brother and sister and are perceived as minor characters by Trellis: they are "hired so that there will be somebody to demand satisfaction off John Furriskey" as the latter has shamefully betrayed Sheila Lamont (O'Brien, *At S2B* 61). Paul Shanahan is often in conversation with Antony Lamont, though Trellis' goal for Shanahan is "[to perform] various small and unimportant parts in the story, also [to run] messages, &c. &c." (Ibid.). Finally, Fergus MacPhellimey is a Pooka, i.e. a member of the devil kind, who is the antagonist of The Good Fairy, who remains invisible but can be heard. After continued

blurring of frames, however, all of Trellis' characters meet each other, after which follow two more stories as told by Trellis' characters. Paul Shanahan tells his fellow characters the story of William Tracy, a novelist, and his characters, Slug Willard and Shorty Andrews. All three of them – including William Tracy, the character – play their parts in a cowboyesque story. Finn, the Irish legend, tells the story of another Gaelic hero, Mad Sweeny – also based on an existing character from the Middle Ages (Deane 198).

To make matters even more difficult, Trellis has an affair with one of his characters, namely Sheila Lamont, who becomes pregnant with his baby. When she gives birth to Orlick Trellis, born a "stocky young man," she goes back to her state of unimportance to the story (O'Brien, *At S2B* 145). Yet, Orlick, who has no clear vacancy to fill in the story, is able to rise to the same level of Dermot Trellis, his 'biological' father. "Orlick has inherited his father's gift for literary composition" and as such he starts his own book under the advisement of the others characters (O'Brien, *At S2B* 164). Consequently, the blurring of frames is brought to new heights with his appearance.
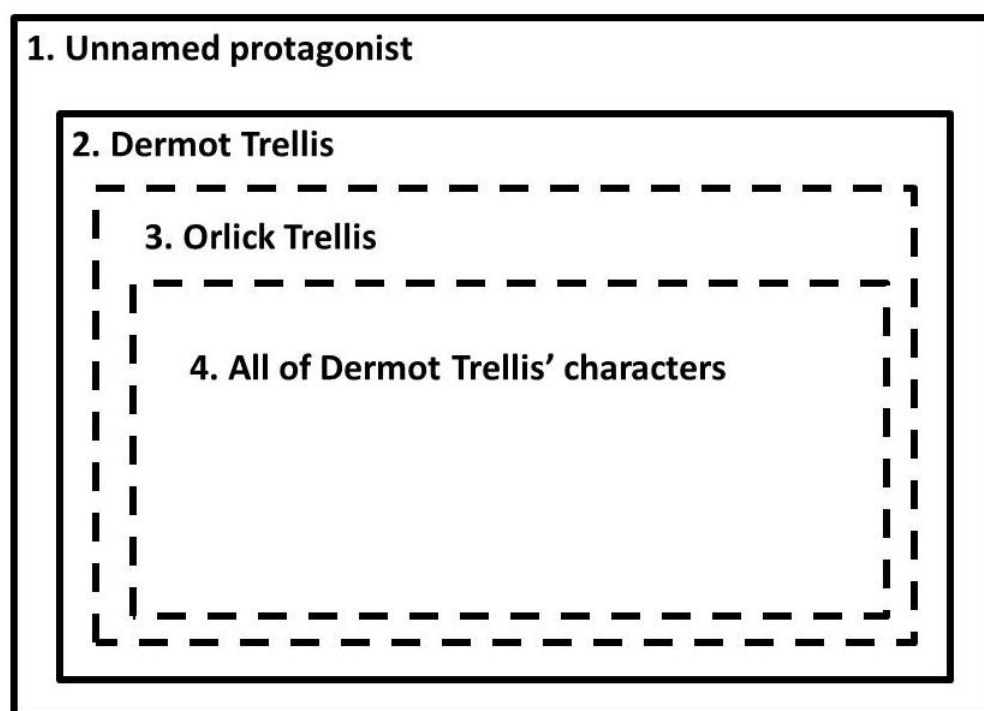
2 Framing in *At S2B* (Stage 3)

Image 2 shows the situation after Orlick is born. The characters have gradually become fed up with Dermot Trellis' despotism and decide to do something about it with the help of Orlick. The two inner frames are represented by dashed lines since the characters from the

third and fourth frames find themselves momentarily in a higher frame (up until the second frame). As it happens, Orlick writes a story about the downfall of Dermot Trellis. As such, Dermot appears in the fourth frame as a character, alongside Orlick and the rest of Dermot's characters. In the fourth frame, a trial takes place in which Dermot is tried for his actions towards his characters. In the third frame, then, the same characters confer with Orlick on how to proceed with the trial story, explaining the dashed line between frames three and four. The dashed line between the second and the third frame is a result of the fact that Dermot Trellis seems to be affected by the goings-on in the lowest frame, where Dermot the character is tortured before being tried: "I am ill, Teresa, [Dermot] murmured. I have done too much work. My nerves are troubling me. I have bad nightmares and queer dreams and I walk when I am very tired" (O'Brien, *AT S2B* 216). The difference between the first two framing stages (as seen in Figure 1) and the third framing stage (as seen in Figure 2) is the non-divide between the second frame and the lower frames. The reason for this is that Dermot Trellis gradually loses his independent state due to his incessant sleeping, i.e. instances when his characters are free to do as they please.

In the final pages of the novel, the situation returns to two frames, i.e. those of the unnamed protagonist and Dermot Trellis. The inner frame is destroyed as Dermot's pages are accidentally thrown in the fire. Needless to say that a reader of this novel is in a constant active state of awareness. The device of framing in itself is not unheard of, e.g. *The Decameron* (1353) by Giovanni Boccaccio or *The Canterbury Tales* (1478). The difficulties the reader must have with O'Brien's intricate frames, however, make the frames of *At S2B* an overtly diegetic metafictional technique. The reader is constantly reminded that he is reading a story in a story in a novel he is physically holding. Nevertheless, difficult as the framing seems, it is humorous and is facilitated by two things the first is the division by means of titles in italics, as was said before. The second is the three synopses, provided by the unnamed character in the highest frame. Some parts of his manuscript are not even disclosed, but replaced by these summaries. Additionally, the first synopsis is once specifically mentioned by the main character to accommodate his reader: "*Note to Reader before proceeding further*: Before proceeding further, the Reader is respectfully advised to refer to the Synopsis or Summary of the Argument on Page 60" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 103). If there is such a thing as super-overt metafiction, then it is definitely applicable here. Not only is the reader directly addressed, he is also made aware of the diegetic structure via synopsis,

a style I have not yet personally encountered in any other novel. Though a synopsis is sometimes used as a novelistic technique to remind readers of certain elements, overtly captioning it is rarely done. The overt framing techniques ring true in Dermot Trellis' last words uttered: "Ars est celare artem, muttered Trellis, doubtful as to whether he had made a pun" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 216). In this case, he did make a pun as this piece of art, i.e. *At S2B*, did not conceal the means by which it was conceived. Quite the contrary, the framing devices that add to the fun of reading and to the literary meaning are very much in sight.

It must be noted that the schematic overviews presented here are generalisations. As was said before, the blurring actually starts from the beginning and different frames are referred to within other frames. Consequently, certain choices were made and other divisions are possible. For example, a character called Peggy is mentioned in the synopsis as "domestic servant" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 61). Additionally, she is mentioned to have fallen in love with Furriskey throughout the manuscript (Ibid.). She remains, however, a minor character and is therefore not included in the main frames. Another example is the first stage of framing, where Antony Lamont and Paul Shanahan might share the same frame as John Furriskey. This would be similar to the first page of O'Brien's novel, where three possible beginnings are presented to the reader. However, Furriskey is considered separately here because he is a newer character, compared to Lamont and Shanahan. Additionally, his conception is an interesting scene that is discussed below.

At S2B is a novel within the novel within the novel, or a *mise en abyme*. The writing process is the main focus of the unnamed protagonist's frame, but also of the frame within the frame, with Dermot Trellis as the author. Thus, readers are presented with a "repeated reduplication" that makes them thoroughly conscious of the writing process (Hutcheon, *NN* 55-56). The term 'repeated reduplication' is based on one of the three types of *myse en abime*, proposed by Lucien Dallenbäch in *Le Récit Speculaire* (1977). In the case of *At S2B*, the writing process of the outer frame is mirrored in two of the inner frames: "the above-mentioned mirroring fragment bears within itself another mirroring fragment, and so on" (Hutcheon, *NN* 56). Additionally, Dermot Trellis shares a number of characteristics with the unnamed author of the upper frame. The latter is lazy and his uncle incessantly accuses him of not even opening his books, even though he is a student of literature. He spends most of his time sleeping in his bedroom or gambling and drinking. Similarly, Dermot Trellis is lazy

and sleeps all day long, which is of course a time for his characters to step out of their roles. As a consequence, both the unnamed author and Trellis lose control over their novels. Trellis' characters roam freely, with their accidental paper-death in the fire being his only rescue. The unnamed main character, though succeeding in his studies without lifting a finger, encounters some problems in the process of writing his novel. For example, he loses some of his pages along the way, resulting in the handy synopsis provided for the reader (O'Brien, *At S2B* 60). Additionally, the main character is very suggestible. When his friend, Brinsley, says that one character is not distinguishable from the other in the manuscript, the main character immediately takes up his pen to adjust his manuscript as follows:

> *Memorandum of the respective diacritical traits or qualities of Messrs Furriskey, Lamont and Shanahan*:
>
> Head: brachycephalic; bullet; prognathic.
>
> Vision: tendencies towards myopia; wall-eye; nyctalopia.
>
> Configuration of nose: roman; snub; mastoid.
>
> Unimportant physical afflictions: palpebral ptosis; indigestion; German itch.
>
> …
>
> Favourite schrub: deutzia; banksia; laurustinus.
>
> Favourite dish: loach; caudle; julienne. Conclusion of memorandum. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 161)

This list of character traits is not like the traditional novel with regard to style. Descriptions of characters are usually presented throughout the novel and in a prose style, rather than in a list. As such, this is another instance of overt diegetic metafiction. O'Brien touches upon a sore point here with regard to reality. Though novels spend several words and descriptions on characterisation, people might not when meeting someone for the first time. O'Brien's list can be seen as a reference to snap judgments, which happen in telegram style rather than prose style. Another possibility is that this list grants readers an insight into the writing process because of its similarities to a writer's note pad. Another of the many renderings of the (aspiring) writer's process is a "*Note on Constructional or Argumentative Difficulty*" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 144). In said note, the unnamed author-student explains his difficulties with conveying Orlick's birth, "the passage being, by general agreement, a piece of undoubted

mediocrity" (Ibid.). Ultimately, the paragraph is omitted since "[i]t will be observed that the omission of several pages at this stage does not materially disturb the continuity of the story" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 145). Paradoxically, the passage was conveyed via a note that said how not to illustrate Orlick's birth, though obviously not in the usual novelistic way, as with Finn's rhetoric (see below).

The 3PM is structurally less demanding, though no less surprising. There are no obvious frames, but one could speak of a circular movement. Reading in terms of plausibility, the first chapter is the only one that is similar to the 'real' world. From the second chapter onwards, the reader is asked to commit to a story world where the physical laws of his own experience no longer apply. For example, people are half bicycle, half human. This is due to the "Atomic Theory", which says that everything is made up of atoms that are interchangeable on hard contact (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 85). For example, someone who often rides his bicycle becomes more and more bicycle in atomic make-up, though not in appearance. "The gross and net result of it is that people … get their personalities mixed up with personalities of their bicycle … and you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who nearly are half people and half bicycles" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 88). As a result, the policemen are mainly preoccupied with thefts of bicycles since they steal them themselves to prevent people from becoming too much bicycle. In other words, the fantastical events require the reader to willingly suspend his disbelief. However, readers can find pleasure and can read passively, i.e. they are not made aware of their acceptance of a fantastical world. That is, up until the end.

It becomes clear that the main character, i.e. the extra- and auto-diegetic narrator, has actually been dead this whole time and has been in hell. In fact, the movement is a circular one since the protagonist takes his accomplice in murder, John Divney – who died of fright seeing his accomplice-thought-dead – to hell with him in the end. Moreover, they both end up at the same police station and are asked the same question as before: "Is it about a bicycle?" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 206). O'Brien himself says: "I think the idea of a man being dead all the time is pretty new. When you are writing about the world of the dead – and the damned – where none of the rules and laws (not even the law of gravity) holds good, there is any amount of scope for back-chat and funny cracks" (O'Brien qtd. in O'Brien, *The 3PM* 207). Indeed, no 'real' rules or laws apply in *The 3PM*, causing readers to unconsciously engage in

the story, while having fun with O'Brien's witty jokes and puns. However, their own suspension of disbelief is made clear to them by the revelation at the end. Being made aware of accepting an 'unreal' world must be unnerving and might even invite readers to a second reading. Referring to the novel itself, this element of *The 3PM* is definitely overtly metafictional. Additionally, it focuses readers' attention on the diegetic workings – i.e. the fantastical elements – of the novel. In short, the circular movement of *The 3PM* can be labelled overt diegetic metafiction.

What could be called a thematic *mise en abyme* of the framing technique are the Chinese boxes, made by sergeant MacCruiskeen in *The 3PM*. The latter spends his free time crafting box within box until the new boxes become so small that they can no longer be seen. This theme even points out the meaninglessness of framework upon framework, though the term 'meaninglessness' is used positively here. Loss of meaning can be frightening, as the reaction of the unnamed protagonist shows: "At this point I became afraid. What he was doing was no longer wonderful but terrible. I shut my eyes and prayed that he would stop while still doing things that were at least possible for a man to do" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 76). However, with the authorial control of the One Meaning no longer being a goal, readers would be left with a freedom to choose not only meaning but also framework. The fact that MacCruiskeen keeps building boxes, even though they have become invisible, shows that finding meaning is not half as important as the meaning-making process, and thus that fear is completely unnecessary. Though freedom of meaning can be daunting, Sergeant Pluck has the gist of it, when he says MacCruiskeen is "very temporary, a menace to the mind" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 78).

A more positive approach to meaning-making, as opposed to the main character's reaction, is depicted in a passage where one of the smallest boxes falls on the ground and the main character and Gilhaney, the half-bike that dropped the chest in the first place, are left to look for it:

Then I caught Gilhaney showing his face to me sideways and giving me a broad private wink. Soon he closed his fingers, got up erect with the assistance of the door-handle and advanced to where MacCruiskeen was, smiling his gappy smile. 'Here you are and here it is,' he said with his closed hand outstretched.

…

'When he said he had the chest he thought he was making me into a prize pup and blinding me by putting his thumb in my eye[,' said MacCruiskeen].

'That is what it looked like[,' I said.]

'But by a rare chance he *did* accidentally close his hand on the chest and it was the chest and nothing else ….' (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 117-118)

Gilhaney pretends he finds the box and leaves the police station, thinking he fooled MacCruiskeen. However, by applying an idiosyncratic framework – i.e. finding an unusual solution to the problem of not finding the box – he attains a certain sense of meaning without being aware of it. Indeed, he "accidentally" found a meaning by applying a framework known to him (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 118). The meaning is not presented as absolute, however, since within the chest fits another chest infinitesimally.

5. Overt Diegetic Metafiction

There are many instances of overt metafiction in both *The 3PM* and *At S2B* that point out to the reader that he is reading a novel. Possibly the most obvious technique is referencing other authors, as is frequently done in *At S2B*. Among those mentioned are Aldous Huxley, James Joyce (O'Brien, *At S2B* 11) and Heinrich Heine, whose novel *Die Hartzreise* (1826) is directly mentioned (33) and improperly translated as "Heartrise" (38). Additionally, several poets are mentioned, such as Catullus, Lesbia (O'Brien, *At S2B* 38), Ezra Pound (45) and William Falconer, whose poem 'The Shipwreck' is explicitly named (210). Other references are more indirect, such as to Virgil's *Aenid*. The author or his work are not mentioned, but during one of the character's trips during Trellis' nap-time, he meets two Greek man called "Timothy Danaos and Dona Ferentes" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 101). The allusion to "timeo Danaos et dona ferentis," a popular line from the *Aenid* that can hardly be missed (Virgil v.49). As opposed to direct references, the reader is activated to think about who the author is, for Kerrigan, one of the main character's friends, says "The Greeks were employed, of course, … as panders by an eminent Belgian author who was writing a sage on the white slave question" (Ibid.). As students of literature, they joke about the reference since it is almost banal. Still, the reader is left to his own memory since Virgil is never explicitly mentioned. Except for this latter reference, allusions to other authors are not particularly motivating for readers. Nevertheless, they are a good indication of the metafictional, making it clear that other, more internalised instances of metafiction might be expected.

Techniques of the novel are overtly named in several instances. For example, the reader is notified of the fact that characters need descriptions in the following instances:

Description of my uncle: Red-faced, bead-eyed, ball-bellied. Fleshy about the shoulders with long swinging arms giving ape-like effect to gait. Large moustache. Holder of Guinness clerkship the third class. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 10)

Description of my friend: Thin, dark-haired, hesitant; an intellectual Meath-man; given to close-knit epigrammatic talk; weak-chested, pale. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 23)

> *Description of my uncle*: Bluff, abounding in external good nature; concerned-
>
> that-he-should-be-well-thought-of; holder of Guinness clerkship the third class.
>
> (O'Brien, *At S2B* 92)

Rather than an unnoticeable description of the characters, as is the custom, characteristics are divulged in this specific style. By going against the habitual practice, O'Brien draws attention to readers' assumption that all novels are descriptive in nature. O'Brien makes his readers aware of this via metafiction and not only with the description of characters. Utterances such as "*Nature of denial*: Inarticulate, of gesture" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 11), "*Nature of his tone*: Without intent, tired, formal" (35), "*Nature of Smile*: satisfied, complacent" (186) or "*Symbolism of the foregoing*: annoyance" (195) show the descriptive nature of novels. At first, these stylistic features are only part of the main character's frame. However, like the blurring frames, styles are mixed as well, as can be deduced from the last example, which is part of Dermot Trellis' frame rather than the protagonist's. In other words, the student-writer obviously uses similar governing structures in both his 'reality' and his fiction. Readers that notice said infusion might make the link with their own lives, in which novelistic techniques are often unconsciously used.

The way that novels convey a story, i.e. via diegesis, is accentuated in many 'biographical reminiscences.' For example: "It happens that a portion of my manuscript containing an account (*in the direct style*) of the words that passed between Furriskey and the voice is lost beyond retrieval" (emphasis added, O'Brien, *At S2B* 50). The reference to the direct style, a way of presenting words without narratorial interference, points out the fact that one is reading a novel. Another example where novelistic technique is displayed, is a distressing finding of the main character: "An unaccountable omission of one of the four improper assaults required by *the ramification of the plot or argument*, together with an absence of *structural cohesion* and a general *feebleness of literary style*" (emphasis added, O'Brien, *At S2B* 60). The given examples above are somewhat limited to focussing the reader's attention on the novel proper. Like the references to other novels, this kind of overt diegetic metafiction is not as invigorating as others might be. Moreover, it can be called self-conscious in the rigid sense, i.e. referring to itself only rather than to fiction in general. Nevertheless, it is an indication that metafiction as a metafictional framework is not a bad choice. Therefore, what follows are examples of more activating diegetic metafiction.

A salient metafictional feature in *At S2B* is obvious literary criticism. Trellis' characters often ponder the nature of art, literature, writing and other related issues. When Orlick starts his manuscript, the characters give their opinions on how he should write Dermot's downfall. Lamont, for example, says "That sounds very well, gentlemen …, very well indeed in my humble opinion. It's the sort of queer stuff they look for in a story these days. Do you know?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 170). This might be a reference to the innovative modernist authors of O'Brien's own time like e.g. James Joyce. However, O'Brien points towards their standoffishness since Lamont's tone is rather mocking. James Joyce, in particular was respected and admired by O'Brien. However, with Joyce's popularity in America, his affections changed and he found Joyce a rather "monomaniac author," according to Deane (198). Regardless of how O'Brien saw his contemporaries, reading Joyce is comparatively more difficult than reading O'Brien. Indeed, the latter has an easy-going writing style and his attempt at reviving Irish legends is very accomplished. According to Deane, some authors of the Irish Literary Revival did not succeed in fusing old myths with contemporary issues. With O'Brien, however, "[t]he commonplace and the fantastic become two aspects of the one thing" (Deane 198). Another communicative bridge O'Brien puts in place is humour. He advertises the commonplace, in favour of the elitist and despotic in his novels as well, via overt diegetic metafiction: "As long as the fancy stuff is kept down, said Shanahan, well and good" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 183). Since O'Brien keeps a broader communicative bridge with the audience, "[i]t would … be insulting to see O'Brien as nothing more than a Joycean disciple, even though he became as obsessed by Joyce as the most throughgoing (sic) de Selbian commentator ever did with de Selby" (Deane 199).

The main character himself also has a specific view on what the novel needs to be. When Brinsley says that nobody will read his book, the main character retorts:

> Yes they will …. Trellis wants this salutary book to be read by all. He realizes that purely a moralizing tract would not reach the public. Therefore he is putting plenty of smut into his book. There will be no less than seven indecent assaults on young girls and any amount of bad language. There will be whisky and porter for further orders. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 35)

Once again, the link to the reader is deemed important. To grasp an audience's attention, then, a minimum of "smut" is necessary for the reader to connect. Afterwards, readers might be pushed towards a cognitively more demanding read, e.g. on the subject of "sin and the wages attaching thereto," as in Dermot Trellis' book (O'Brien, *At S2B* 35).

The writing process itself is often highlighted as well. Obvious statements, such as "Shanahan at this point inserted a brown tobacco finger in the texture of the story and in this manner caused a lacuna in the palimpsest" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 185), are reminders of the writing process as well as of the fact that one is reading a novel. References to manuscripts and synopses are another such example. However, the reader might still remain passive, for the meaning of said allusions does not go deeper than surface level. Still, other references to the writing process, somewhat disguised but nevertheless overt, amount in a greater pleasure of finding them. The reader is cognitively provoked rather than given all the answers. For example, the protagonist has some issues regarding the introduction of new characters, culminating in the passage on the birth of Orlick, who has an author for a biological father, i.e. Dermot Trellis: "The task of rendering and describing the birth of Mr Trellis's illegitimate offspring I found one fraught with obstacles and difficulties … – so much so, in fact, that I found it entirely beyond my powers" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 144). Furriskey and Orlick Trellis are both characters that explicitly 'see the light' in *At S2B*. However, rather than using more generic techniques, said characters are conceived via "aestho-autogamy," a "very familiar phenomenon in literature" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 40). The affix 'auto,' originates from Greek, and means 'self,' as in autobiography or automobile (DeForest). The affix 'gam,' which constitutes the latter part of the word, means marriage, as in polygamy (Ibid.). 'Aestho' is probably a derivative of aestheticism, which also has a Greek origin, meaning to perceive with the senses. In short, aestho-autogamy involves a character's possibility to be conceived without the need for a biological father or mother, as he or she is created via imagination. Consequently, characters are born, not necessarily as babies, but as fully-grown adults. For example, Furriskey "was born at the age of twenty-five and entered the world with a memory but without a personal experience to account for it" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 9). The fact that a character can create itself is a bit peculiar since the author is his creator, after all. However, O'Brien might be indicating the reader by incorporating 'auto.' Indeed, the author

is the creator of the character on paper, but the reader activates it. As such, the text-character certainly creates itself, i.e. in the mind of the reader.

That the reader activates the text is undisputable. Certain things he need not be told, as he already assumes them, e.g. characters drink, eat and sleep to stay alive. Indeed, Ernest Hemingway showed that readers fill in the blanks with his 'Iceberg Theory,' i.e. a minimalistic style with implicit meanings under the surface. Readers unconsciously complement the novel, but this phenomenon is brought to the surface via O'Brien's metafiction. A most obvious example is the overturning of the assumption that Lamont has met his sister, as they are related. Indeed, it is not written anywhere that the two of them meet, so Antony Lamont says "I never saw her. I never had the pleasure of her acquaintance" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 205). Similarly, readers assume that basic needs to keep alive are met by characters, but not necessarily directly related in a novel. Though, when the character Furriskey is born, he relates said basic needs overtly: "he experienced an unpleasant sensation embracing blindness, hysteria and a desire to vomit …, for in the course of his life he had never eaten" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 49). Another example arises in the trial of Dermot Trellis, where several characters take the stand to explain how they were employed. A female character, originally belonging to William Tracy, the fictional author, is employed by Trellis, but afterwards reinstated in one of Tracy's stories. However, because she was returned in a pregnant state, Tracy was forced to create another character to be her husband; a character that "was superfluous and impaired the artistic integrity of [Tracy's] story" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 200). Trellis then retorts that the female character still was given an important function, namely that of "[p]eeling potatoes for the household" (Ibid.). The girl is obviously a minor character since she only features briefly in Trellis' trial. Her function, namely that of food-provider, is considered important with regard to 'real' needs, but she need not be featured in the main storyline as readers take for granted that characters eat. Indeed, "[t]he task is necessary and useful. It is the character who carried it out who is stated to be unnecessary" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 201).

Next to focussing on minor and major characters, O'Brien reminds the reader of the fact that a character might fit within a role or function as well. A character is different from a role in that the former is specific to a novel, while a role has general, established characteristics. For example, the hero is a role that might be fulfilled by different characters, e.g. Harry Potter, Robin Hood or Finn McCool. Dermot Trellis, in *At S2B*, is frequently accused of being

a despotic author because his characters have specific functions and are not allowed any freedom: "[Furriskey] married the girl. … lived there happily for about twenty hours out of twenty-four. They had to dash back to their respective stations, of course, when the great man was due to be stirring in his sleep" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 101). In other words, characters step out of their roles, focussing the reader's attention on his own assumptions concerning role distribution. Additionally, it points out that *At S2B* quite denies the traditional roles as there is no clear hero, antagonist or sidekick. Moreover, the main characters are two unaccomplished authors, which is quite unconventional in itself.

The 3PM is more internally metafictional, though some interesting overt elements are definitely present. Some of those direct attention towards how characters are portrayed. Specifically, it points out the naming of characters as a helpful writing technique. Indeed, it would have been easier for this thesis, had the protagonists of both *At S2B* and *The 3PM* been given names, as I would not be required to repeatedly refer to 'the main character' or 'the protagonist.' For the novel, though, this does not pose a problem since both are auto-diegetic narrators. As such, the distinction between them and others remains clear. When the main character of *At S2B* starts hearing his own soul from within, however, the soul is given a name: "For convenience I called him Joe" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 26). Indeed, the convenience of naming is brought to the reader's attention. Additionally, the distinction between the two is enforced by the use of italics for Joe's utterances. Next to raising the issue of naming, the splitting of soul and body also conveys an identity crisis, a theme also present in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The similarities between *The 3PM* and Lewis Carroll's novel are discussed in the section on covert diegetic metafiction below. The theme of identity in *The 3PM*, then, might pertain to the horrors of committing murder and already gives an indication that the main character finds himself in hell.

A more obvious example of naming, perhaps, is the following passage:

'Are you completely doubtless that you are nameless?' [Sergeant Pluck] asked.

'Positively certain' [I said].

'Would it be Mick Barry?'

'No.'

'Charlemagne O'Keeffe?'

'No.'

'Sir Justin Spens?'

'Not that.'

'Kimberley?'

'No.'

…

'Not Conroy?'

'No.'

'Not O'Conroy?'

'Not O'Conroy.' (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 103-104)

Though the main character has no name, the police men assume that he is Irish, as can be deduced from the guesswork by Pluck. Readers might notice, then, that names in novels might not be arbitrarily chosen. In this case, the names guessed by Sergeant Pluck point out the main character's Irishness. Pluck even adds that "[t]here are very few more names that [the main character] could have" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 104). Similarly, Sergeant MacCruiskeen's name reveals his Irish identity and Fox's name is indicative of his sly nature, for he only makes his appearance at the end of the novel. Incidentally, the name de Selby gives an indication of O'Brien's idea of academic writing. Indeed, it bears similarities to *das selbst*, which means 'the self' in German (Deane 195). Considering O'Brien's parodistic treatment of academic writing, it is clear that O'Brien is not a fan of self-absorbed writers. In the case of the main character, the fact that he is nameless points towards his identity crisis. Incidentally, the fact that he has no name strips him of all his legal responsibilities, but also his rights. Therefore, his anonymity is convenient to Sergeant Pluck, who needs a culprit for the theft of a bike. Though the main character is innocent, he will be hanged since his namelessness makes everything he does "a lie" and unreal (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 105). Consequently, "[t]he particular death [he dies] is not even a death" (Ibid.). Characters that

have no name, then, are 'fictional' even in the fictional world, pointing out to the reader that names of characters – or lack thereof – have several connotations – i.e. signifieds – on a different level than the denotative level of signs.

Not only are names an indication of character traits in some novels, some names also incite unconscious assumptions on the reader's behalf. When the protagonist suggests he is free to choose his name now that he cannot remember his original name, Joe hands him some suggestions: "*The name is Bari. Signor Bari, the eminent tenor. Five hundred thousand people crowded the great piazza when the great artist appeared on the balcony of St Peter's Rome*" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 33). Though spontaneous assumptions might not be so detailed, the reader is still made aware that he links certain traits to certain names. Moreover, O'Brien makes fun of too sweeping assumptions as 'bari' sounds like baritone, a voice lower than the tenor of course.

6. Covert Diegetic Metafiction: Parody

Another salient metafictional element of both *At S2B* and *The 3PM* is the parodistic treatment of different genres. Mainly discussed here are three genres parodied in *At S2B* and two in *The 3PM*. The former novel contains parodistic treatments of Irish legends, academic writing, and fantasy. The latter also parodies fantasy, next to academic writing. Additionally, *The 3PM* contains a form of covert diegetic metafiction that is unrelated to parody. But note that this is a selection. As both novels are generically hybrid, other parodied genres might be found too, e.g. Dantean travel, western romance, poetry, autobiography, memoire, *bildungsroman* or press writings. Moreover, O'Brien's works have been analysed before in terms of similarities with a certain genre – i.e. absurdist literature – in a book by Neil Cornwell. The choice for the literary genres here is made in light of Holland's literary response theory. The main reasons for reading are pleasure and presumed passivity. Therefore, I believe the most striking examples of covert diegetic metafiction are fitting for this discussion since they are most likely to be considered mentally by any reader.

6.1 Irish Legends

It should have become clear that three frameworks are set up at the beginning of *At S2B*. One of those is the story of Finn McCool, who is a character based on actual Irish legends. Said legends were part of the Gaelic oral tradition, but were written down in Irish by Christian monastic scribes. As such, they "[blend] the old pagan and the new Christian worlds" (Deane 11). Fιnn MacCumhaιll is part of the Fenian Cycle, while Mad Sweeny (or Sweeney), whose story is told by Finn in *At S2B*, is part of the Cycle of Kings. These legends were written down and copied from the sixth and seventh centuries onwards (Ibid.). Originally, Irish heroic narrative was sombre as a consequence of the warrior culture of the Middle Ages. Truces were fragile and war frequently broke out between clans and tribes (Baswell & Schotter 6). With the coming of the Christian influence, however, themes of violence became mixed with "Christian values of forgiveness" (Baswell & Schotter 7). Though fictional, Finn McCool is still part of the Irish tradition and cultural heritage. He became popular due to *Colloquy of the Ancient Men*, "the work of an unknown thirteenth-century genius" (Deane 12). The earliest text of Finn is largely prose, but contains some metrical insets. Finn McCool stories were further elaborated in several literary periods, resulting in his popularity as an Irish hero in the Romantic period specifically. As O'Brien's novel shows,

the Irish heroes are still part of the Irish imagination and certain modern novels (Ibid.). Additionally, Irish heroes were more popular than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts ever were. In the Middle Ages, this was largely due to the position of Irish poets, who were "honored servants of noblemen and kings" (Baswell & Schotter 9). Nowadays, the Irish still identify with these fictional heroes as a part of cultural history. Even though the characters' actual existence is unconfirmed, Irish legends constitute an "explanation and commentary" on an existing historical situation (Ó Corráin 34). Similar to Berlin choosing a bear as its city emblem, it is not surprising that Ireland chose traditional heroes as a part of their historic identity. Incidentally, when googling Finn McCool, the search engine came up with a lot of pubs named after the Irish hero.

Finn is depicted as a fierce warrior hero with larger-than-life proportions in *At S2B*:

> Finn Mac Cool was a legendary hero of old Ireland. Though not mentally robust, he was a man of superb physique and development. Each of his thighs was as thick as a horse's belly, narrowing to a calf as thick as the belly of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was large enough to halt the march of men through a mountain-pass. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 9)

Readers bring their expectations to the text and even without a knowledge of the McCool legends this introduction should trigger an uncanny feeling. Any predisposition towards Finn in *At S2B* is immediately overturned, however, by O'Brien's parodistic intentions. Physically daunting as Finn is, he never shows his strengths in an actual battle. On the contrary, he seems to do nothing but speak – in verse, as does Sweeney, the other Irish hero of *At S2B*. Finn's actions are but sporadically related to the reader. Moreover, Finn does not feel the need to recount his war stories even though he is asked by several of his peers. Questions that he does answer, pertain to his preferences or characteristics rather than his heroic deeds. It must become obvious how a novel uses rhetoric techniques to disclose such stories in this passage:

> Oh then, said Conán, the story of Churl in the Puce Greatcoat. Evil story for
> telling, that, said Finn, and though itself I can make it, it is surely true that I will
> not recount it. It is a crooked and dishonourable story that tells how Finn spoke
> honey-words and peace-words to a stranger who came seeking the high-rule and
> the high-rent of this kingdom. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 18)

Finn denounces the story about himself because it does not correspond with his macho image. In saying that he will not recount the story, however, Finn actually does just that. In other words, diegetic processes are unveiled in this passage. In short, O'Brien's parodistic treatment of Irish legends – made clear also by the caption "*Extract from my typescript descriptive of Finn Mac Cool and his people, being humorous or quasi-humorous incursion into ancient mythology*" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 13) – is an instance of covert diegetic metafiction.

Incidentally, the parody of Irish legend offers a reflection on its specific use of language as well as its diegetic techniques. When Finn explains what one needs to do to become a part of Finn's people, a host of challenges is related, good for at least a page of requirements. Funnily enough, the first of the whole list of to-dos is the following: "Till a man has accomplished twelve books of poetry, the same is not taken for want of poetry but is forced away" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 16). Next to showing a contradiction in Finn's character, this might be a reference to the use of metrics in the original Irish legends. Similarly, Mad Sweeney cannot utter a word without constructing two lines of verse. It points out to readers that, though they find nothing weird about Sweeney talking in verse in the novel, it would be very off-putting to hear someone do so in real life. Additionally, the language of the Irish legends is somewhat revived because of O'Brien's humorous intent.

Indeed, the reader is compelled to think of the genre of the Irish legend and is required to think of his own preconceptions accompanying said genre. "The act of reading becomes one of actualizing textual structures" (Hutcheon, *NN* 71). The humour and pleasure that the reader might have, lies in Finn's persistence. Even when frames start to blur he remains his 'typical' self, though he has clearly stumbled into a discussion between more recently developed characters, i.e. Lamont, Shanahan and Furriskey. When asked a question by non-peers, Finn responds in the same, grand style, making the legend genre appear lengthy and outdated. Finn is teased somewhat by the other characters when they call him "Mr

Storybook" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 72), reminding Finn of his non-originality compared to them. Shanahan hits the nail on the head, though, with this utterance: "It's the stuff that put our country where she stands today, Mr Furriskey, and I'd have my tongue out of my head by the bloody roots before I'd be heard saying a word against it" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 75). Though the party is not particularly enjoying listening to Finn telling the story of Mad Sweeny, Shanahan would not think of badmouthing the Irish legends because of respect towards Irish identity. Indeed, this kind of covert diegetic metafiction might induce readers to think about historiographic writing as well. Specifically, Irish identity, based on fictional characters, is the target here.

The basis of Irish historical identity, i.e. the Irish legends, are known to be fiction. Thus, O'Brien points to the similarities between historiographic and fictional writing. As Irish historian Donnchadh Ó Corráin says, "[c]ommunities … define their present identity and political awareness by choosing their past, for the constituents of the past and the past itself are not 'found' or 'uncovered', but constructed" (25). Irish heroes, then, were chosen as a part of constructed history rather than actually part of history, for everyone realises that the characters are fictional. Much like Hendrik Conscience's novel *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* was responsible for the romantic, adapted image the Flemings still have of a historical fact – i.e. the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302) – the Irish legends are responsible for a feeling of Irish identity and nationality. According to Ó Corráin, though, some elements from fiction might be retained for historical analysis. Rather than objectively written down, "the past is 'understood' … not simply as paradigm of the present, but as a complex and subtle critical and imaginative commentary on life" (Ó Corráin 37). Taking up the Irish legend as a form of covert diegetic metafiction, O'Brien's novel hopefully calls attention to "the need to separate and to the danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres" (Hutcheon, *PP* 111). Indeed, there is a need since checking facts is crucial to historiography, but diminishes the pleasure of reading fiction. Otherwise, the danger of separating fiction from historiography constructs the illusion that both genres are completely independent. According to Hutcheon, both genres are "porous" and, as such, it is not surprising that they have overlapping interests and have even influenced each other (Hutcheon, *PP* 106). Historiographic writings, then, might at times use novelistic techniques and frameworks, though their main goal is factual mimesis. As was suggested though, mimesis always contains a minimum of diegesis, which is an important realisation as regards historiography.

6.2 Academic Writing

Another genre under scrutiny in *At S2B* is academic writing. Indeed, the unnamed character seems to incorporate complete chunks of academic texts into his novel, in an attempt to make it more believable or even similar to 'reality'. In the words of the main character: "Opening [*A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences*], I read a passage which I subsequently embodied in my manuscripts as being suitable for my purpose. The passage had in fact reference to Doctor Beatty (now with God) but boldly I took it for my own" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 30). Subsequently, the actual passage that is mentioned is provided as a character sketch of Dermot Trellis. Bordering on plagiarism, the effect for the main character's novel is more comical than accomplished. This humorous effect is enhanced by the fact that all the references are of course fictional. None of the mentioned books, such as *A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences*, actually exist. O'Brien does a good job of mimicking any style, though, and thereby possibly fools readers into thinking he is actually a plagiarist, when it is only the main fictional character that is guilty of fictional plagiarism. The so-called novel of Trellis contains momentary academic-like passages as well since his novel is a product, by proxy, of the main character.

Next to the obvious blurring of frames, then, styles also persist and are mixed throughout *At S2B*. Take the following passage, supposedly taken from an unpublished collection of 'Questions and Answers' sections from *The Athenian Oracle*:

> *Extract from Book referred* to: 1. Whether it be poſſible for a woman ſo carnally to know a Man in her ſleep as to conceive, for I am ſure that this and no way other was I got with Child. … To the firſt Question, Madam, we are very poſitive, that you are luckily miſtaken, for the thing is abſolutely impoſſible if you know nothing of it; … (O'Brien, *At S2B* 102)

Incidentally, the periodical 'The Athenian Oracle' actually existed. It was a London "coffee-house periodical" published between 1690 and 1697 (Bhowmik 345). Though not academic writing – the periodical was mostly concerned with the moral education of women – O'Brien shows that he can parody any style. Even the use of the grapheme 'double s' (ſ), as was the custom in 17th-century writing, is included. Thus, readers of O'Brien are easily fooled. When the governing principle of parody becomes clear, though, pleasure can be found.

Academic articles are read by the character in his own frame, i.e. his 'reality.' Not only are his writings littered with obvious academic references, his own experience of 'reality' is sometimes governed by a piece of academia. In a 'biographical reminiscence,' the main character describes an average day of his life. However, this is immediately followed by a "*Comparable description of how a day may be spent, being an extract from 'A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences,' from the hand of Mr Cowper. Serial volume the seventeenth*" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 149). Subsequently, a day spent by Finn McCool is given as another example. This is an indication of how writings in general might shape a person's experience of 'reality'. Generally, knowledge is gained from more academic or scientific writings, as illustrated by the quote above. The description of Finn's daily habits, however, points out how knowledge might also be got from reading a fictional experience in a novel. As such, the reader is confronted with Holland's suggestion that we read because it is safe and because we believe fiction will have no consequence on reality. O'Brien makes clear that our lives are certainly shaped by novelistic experience, however fictional said experience seems at first sight.

In addition to his actions, the unnamed protagonist's language is shaped by his readings of, for example, *A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences*, as well. For example, in dealings with his friends, he adopts a very specific style of talking, possibly in an attempt to seem learned. While having a beer and a laugh, the main character says things such as "If that conclusion is the result of a mental syllogism, it is fallacious, being based on licensed premises" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 47). Moreover, the autobiographic parts of O'Brien's novel are written in a pompous style, attributed to the unnamed author of the first frame. The latter even admits it: "I continued in this strain in an idle perfunctory manner, searching in the odd corners of my mind where I was accustomed to keep words which I rarely used" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 161). As such, the reader is made aware that even autobiographies are diegetically transferred to text. Moreover, even academic writings are exposed as a construction. As Holland suggests, though there is a scale of form governing content, a minimum of form (or diegesis) is necessary.

Next to his experience of 'reality,' the main character's manuscripts are inconspicuously or blatantly (see O'Brien, *At S2B* 102) infused with an academic, slightly pompous style as well. A reference to the writing process, then, this points towards the fact that no text is original because there is always a human, with idiosyncratic experiences and

associations, in between text and reality. Even in academic writings, supposedly highly impartial on the scale of objectivity, a certain diegesis is present within mimesis, e.g. interpretation of data or choice of test. Additionally, the reader is made aware that anyone can write in an academic style regardless of the veracity of the content. Take this passage from the main character's manuscript, describing a conversation between Furriskey, Shanahan and Lamont:

> It is not generally known, observed Mr Furriskey, that the coefficient of expansion of all gases is the same. A gas expands to the extent of a hundred and seventy-third part of its own volume in respect of each degree of increased temperature centigrade. The specific gravity of ice 0.92, marble 2.70, iron (cast) 7.20 and iron (wrought) 7.79. One mile is equal to 1.6093 kilometres reckoned to the nearest ten-thousandth part of a whole number. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 189)

The passage above is actually part of Orlick's manuscript, but bears a lot of similarities with Trellis' manuscript and the style in which the first frame of autobiography is presented. In other words, the blurring of stories does not only happen by means of frame interferences, but by mixing writing styles as well. The conversation of Furriskey, Shanahan and Lamont goes on for about three pages, completely in the same academic style as the example. The words might come directly from an encyclopaedic dictionary or from the fictional *A Conspectus of Arts and Natural Sciences*. The use of a supposedly objective style in a work of fiction exposes full objectivity as a fallacy.

Similarly, the autobiography genre is exposed as subjective by means of the main character's academic style. The character of the first frame is an unreliable author, exposed in many ways. For one, his style is questionable as he uses difficult words that would not fit in his 'real' life. The following is part of a 'biographical reminiscence': "the visiting chairman … opened [a parcel] *coram populo* (in the presence of the assembly)" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 49). Using Latin expressions in itself is not surprising, but the addition of their meaning is interesting. It is obvious that the main character had to look these up rather than their usage constituting part of his daily talking style.

Another instance of untrustworthy narration is the repetition of an encounter with Brinsley, one of the main character's friends. "Brinsley turned from the window and asked me for a cigarette. I took out my 'butt' or half-spent cigarette and showed it in the hollow of my hand. That is all I have, I said, affecting a pathos in my voice. By God you're the queer bloody man, he said" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 24). A similar, if not equal conversation is described as follows: "He came forward at my invitation and asked me to give him a cigarette. I took out my 'butt' and showed it to him in the hollow of my hand. That is all I have, affecting a pathos in my voice. By God you're the queer bloody man, he said" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 34). The repetition of word-use, though it might remain unnoticed by most readers, brings about doubt as to the actuality of the unnamed protagonist's words. The autobiography as a style is presented as a construction of arbitrary rules, e.g. I-narrator and factuality. Incidentally, arbitrariness of knowledge is also mirrored in Trellis' choice to read only books with a green cover. Consequently, Trellis' book-knowledge is limited to Irish publications "for the green colour was not favoured by the publishers of London … The publishers of Dublin, however, deemed the colour a fitting one" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 100). In short, seemingly objective text styles, such as academic writing, autobiography and periodicals, are exposed as a construction. Thus, the reader is covertly motivated to activate the text, resulting in the theme of mindlessly reading any text, which also found its way into *The 3PM*.

The 3PM's unnamed narrator mainly commits murder because he needs enough money to fund his research of a man called de Selby. "Perhaps it is important in the *story* I am going to tell to remember that it was for de Selby I committed my first serious sin" (emphasis added, O'Brien, *The 3PM* 9). More often than not, pieces of the protagonist's research appear at the beginning of a chapter or as a footnote to something he encounters during his fantastic adventures. What follows is an excerpt from such a footnote:

It is interesting to note that the otherwise reliable Hatchjaw has put forward the suggestion that the entire *Atlas* [a book by de Selby] is spurious and the work of 'another hand', raising issues of no less piquancy that (sic) those of the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy. … The theory is, however, not one which will commend itself to the serious student. (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 96)

Complete with references and personal comments, this piece has a very academic feel to it. Moreover, the reference to "the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy" pertains to an actual issue in the 'real' world (Ibid.). According to Clarke, "[t]his theory was first publicly maintained by Miss Delia Bacon in 1857" and was taken up by several more scholars (163). Additionally, the issue remained the subject of literary scholarship, especially in the late 19th century. Thus, O'Brien blurs fiction and academic reality, causing readers to question the academic style in se. Far from resulting in paranoia, however, readers are merely activated, not made to doubt every single piece of text. The same might be said of William Carlos Williams, who mixed poetry and everyday language, as e.g. in his poem 'This is Just to Say' (1934). In doing so, daily language is exposed as non-objective at all and brings to the attention the structuralist issue of sign and signified. This latter theme recurs in the section below on O'Brien's language as well. Incidentally, Williams' contemporary, Ezra Pound, is mentioned explicitly in *At S2B* and is praised by Brinsley for his "high-class work" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 45). Similarly to William Carlos Williams, Pound refreshingly took banal subjects for his poems, e.g. 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913). What these three authors – i.e. O'Brien, Pound and William – have in common is a covert activation of the reader by means of style. As Hutcheon would have it, they "*assume* that [the] reader already knows the story-making rules" (71). In Williams and Pound's cases, the reader is expected to recognize the banal, daily language in the form of a poem. In O'Brien's novels, even more is expected since several styles and genres are put to the test.

Some footnotes of *The 3PM* are several pages long, e.g. a footnote of five pages following the observation that de Selby "frequently fell asleep for no apparent reason in the middle of everyday life, often even in the middle of a sentence" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 172). Though funny in nature, I can imagine that some readers might skip the footnotes if they are too long or that some might read them at a later point in time, e.g. when the novel is finished. As such, the reader might be made aware that he shapes his own reading. Generic

or earlier novels follow a pattern that allows readers to read in a regular fashion, i.e. from beginning to end. With the addition of long footnotes, however, O'Brien makes readers choose between either reading from beginning to end, or interrupting the reading process with footnotes. Thus, the reader is similar and not inferior to the writer since the reader, too, makes up his own creative process.

The content of de Selby's research is very nonsensical as can be deduced from the following quote:

> [de Selby] held (a) that darkness was simply an accretion of 'black air', i.e., a staining of the atmosphere due to volcanic eruptions too fine to be seen with the naked eye and also to certain 'regrettable' industrial activities involving coal-tar by-products and vegetable dyes; and (b) that sleep was simply a succession of fainting-fits brought on by semi-asphyxiation due to (a). (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 120)

The same goes for the "Atomic Theory" that governs the fantasy world of *The 3PM*. The idea that atoms can become interchanged by mere contact is as absurd as its consequence, i.e. that people become half bicycle, half human. However, absurd content is governed by two different forms in *The 3PM*. The atom theory is contained within the fiction and is uttered by one of the characters, i.e. Sergeant Pluck, whereas the theories of de Selby are explained in footnotes and sporadically mentioned by the main character. As such, a reader might notice that similar content can be understood quite differently if the applied framework is different. Footnotes of de Selby have a true ring to it, while the atom theory is obviously fictional. Both contents, however, are equally untrue. Consequently, the suspension of disbelief of readers is put to the test. Reading an absurd theory, contained in a fantastical story world, is not so difficult to believe as reading it in the form of academic research.

6.3 Fantasy

Comparing *At S2B* and *The 3PM*, it is clear that the latter is written largely in the fantastic genre, while the former is only partly fantastical, namely in the passages about the Pooka MacPhellimey and the Good Fairy. Though both novels treat fantasy in the form of covert diegetic metafiction, they do so in a different way. *At S2B* is possibly less covert in its parodistic endeavours since the frames are obvious from the start due to the captions.

Additionally, frame-breaking – present so early in the novel – makes it even clearer that metafiction is happening. The fantastic is more internalised in *The 3PM* and thus more covert and possibly less easily spotted as a parody. However, there are some indications, like the Atom Theory mentioned above, indicating a parodistic play with fantasy in *The 3PM* as well. However, the covert diegetic metafictional technique of *The 3PM* discussed below has little to do with parody and as such, must be read as an addition to the gap in Hutcheon's model, as mentioned in the introduction to this section.

More obviously parodistic than *The 3PM*, one of the stories in *At S2B* is that of the Pooka Fergus MacPhellimey, a kind of devil with sharp nails, long hair, several tails and a clubfoot. The Good Fairy comes to his house because someone is about to be born, i.e. Orlick Trellis, who must be claimed for evil by the Pooka, or for good by the Good Fairy. Evocative of many fantastic stories, they embody the division between good and evil. As such, it is only polite that the Good Fairy warn the Pooka of someone's birth. He is following novelistic etiquette since "[t]o go there alone … without informing you of the happy event, that would be a deplorable breach of etiquette" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 111). However, O'Brien plays with these antagonists so as to make them more ostensibly grey than a clear-cut black and white. For example, according to Fergus the Pooka, "truth is an odd number" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 106). His superior is Number One, "which is the First Good and the Primal Truth and necessarily an odd number" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 107). Consequently, MacPhellimey is Number Two. If truth is an odd number, and the Pooka is an even number, the division must be clear: odd is good, even is evil. This arbitrary set of rules goes to show that the opposition between good and evil is equally arbitrary. What is associated with good for one person is associated with evil for another person, e.g. white lies or stealing because of poverty. Ethics are shown to be dependent of the context, which, in this case, is the novel.

Subsequently to separating good from bad, the two become increasingly mixed up. The Good Fairy shows some signs of bad character. For example, when asked where the Good Fairy keeps his pipe – the Pooka wonders since the Good Fairy is invisible – he answers "It is cigarettes I smoke" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 105). Expectations are already ruffled since fairies do not match with cigarettes, but the evilness of it is enhanced by another excerpt from *A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences* on tobacco in the last pages of *At S2B*: "There can be no question but that tobacco has a seriously deteriorating effect upon the character

… There can be no question but that the use of tobacco is a stepping-stone to vices of the worst character" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 209). Another example is the card game, played by the Pooka and the cowboys while they are waiting for Orlick to be born. The Good Fairy is not expected to indulge in gambling. However, he takes a place at the table even though his companions do not believe him to own any money. Assuring everyone that he does, he needs to own up to the fact that he lied later on. Again, expectations are not met, judging from the Pooka's reaction to the Good Fairy lying: "The others allowed you to play on my recommendation and you have callously dishonoured me" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 143). The Good Fairy does not want to be exposed, so the two strike a deal, i.e. the Pooka gets Orlick and the Good Fairy can keep his reputation. The Good Fairy poignantly says: "All right, you win. But by God I'll get even with you yet" (Ibid.). Since truth is an odd number and evil is even, the Good Fairy exposes his evil side with said statement. Similarly, the Pooka displays some goodness, e.g. when discovering Sweeny, who has fallen from a tree. One of the cowboys suggests they shoot Sweeney, at which point the Pooka says, "I wish to Goodness … that you would replace that shooting-iron and repress this craving or bloodshed" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 127). Additionally, the Good Fairy points out his own inconstancy regarding circulating ideas of what a fairy is. "The idea that all spirits are accomplished instrumentalists is a popular fallacy, … just as it is wrong to assume that they all have golden tempers" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 116). The attribution of evils to the persona of a fairy and good character traits to the Pooka has the blurring of good and evil as a consequence. The antonyms are exposed as a construction that can only be found in novels, like e.g. the fantasy genre. Indeed, as says the Pooka to the Good Fairy: "[a]re you aware of this, that your own existence was provoked by the vitality of my own evil, just as my own being is a reaction to the rampant goodness of Number One" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 109).

Even more internalised, then, one of the instances of covert metafiction in *The 3PM* is a subtle reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). While on his way to the police station, the protagonist meets Martin Finnucane alongside the road. He seems to be a criminal so he is approached with some caution.

'More luck to you,' I said.

'More power to yourself,' he answered.

…

'I do not desire to be inquisitive, sir,' I said, 'but would it be true to mention that you are a bird-catcher?'

'Not a bird-catcher,' he answered.

'A tinker?'

'Not that.'

'A man on a journey?'

'No, not that.'

'A fiddler?'

'Not that one.'

…

He blew little bags of smoke at me and looked at me closely from behind the bushes of hair which were growing about his eyes. (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 46)

This encounter reminded me of Alice's chance meeting with the caterpillar. The resemblance of Finnucane, the uninterested smoker, with the caterpillar, "quietly smoking a long hookah" (Carroll 47) is quite uncanny. Having grown up in the Disney age, this generation of readers should have the same feeling. The caterpillar scene of Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), which is fairly popular, is very similar to the chapter in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Consequently, a lot of readers should notice the reference to Alice in *The 3PM*. Moreover, other references in *The 3PM* are not to be misunderstood. Still guessing at Finnucane's occupation, the main character asks whether he is not "a man out after rabbits", evocative of Carroll's White Rabbit with the watch of course. Incidentally, an American golden watch is a recurring motif that is discussed in section 8. Another reminder of the caterpillar is the colour of the smoke coming out of Finnucane's smoking pipe: "blue smoke" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 49). A last example of a covert reference to Carroll is the remark that Fox is "as mad as a hare" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 79). Though this last example does not take place in the Finnucane passage, it shows that the references are not limited to the one chapter.

The reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* obviously established, readers might notice a general similarity to Carroll's writing style. In any case, *The 3PM* made other

critics think of Alice before, judging from the afterword of the Harper Perennial 2013 edition. Titles such as "A Curious Tale" (Shephard 5) and "Hats Off" (Shephard 7) are very telling, next to a reference to a review by Howard Moss, who "compared [*The 3PM*] to the work of James Joyce and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" (Ibid.). Though not necessarily a parody, the reference to Carroll belongs in the category of covert diegetic metafiction. Nowhere is Alice overtly mentioned and, as such, the reference is mainly to a style of writing, namely humorous fantasy. If readers notice the reference, they have unconsciously or consciously activated the text. Additionally, the reference to Carroll shows readers the diegetic interferences in a novel, namely the author's own (unconscious) influences and associations, all of which cannot be cancelled out. Though Hutcheon seems to limit covert diegetic metafiction to parody, O'Brien shows that other possibilities are practicable. One could argue that Hutcheon must not have read all metafictional novels, including *The 3PM*, thus resulting in an incomplete model – as she has confessed herself. However, missing O'Brien's metafictional techniques is quite a gap since she refers to *At S2B* directly. Moreover, *At S2B* is reduced to an early novel about the novel (Hutcheon, *NN* 45), while the metafictional is present on more than just the surface level, as will have become clear at the end of this discussion.

Returning to Carroll and O'Brien, it is clear that the language of both novelists is similar, leading me to believe that O'Brien was genuinely inspired by Carroll. Language is exposed as creative and ambiguous, though more obviously so in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* perhaps. Take MacCruiskeen's question, "Can you notify me of the meaning of a bulbul?" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 67). Seemingly a silly word, a discussion ensues guessing the meaning of the word-sign. Apparently, bulbul is an existing word – though my initial reflex was to think of Carroll's nonsensical poem 'The Jabberwocky,' the first verse of which was included in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) – and it is used to denominate a certain type of bird, i.e. "a Persian nightingale" according to MacCruiskeen (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 68). Such discussions are frequently initiated by the sergeants, focussing the reader's attention on the power of language as well as the arbitrariness of signs, an issue discussed in section 7. Additionally, he is covertly coaxed into activating because of the ambiguity of text, as a reader of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* would be as well.

In general, the fantastical events of *The 3PM* force the reader to make sense, to order. When the third policeman Fox, who remains out of sight for the whole novel except the end, makes his appearance, an ordering principle is offered to the reader. The black box, supposedly containing the money stolen from old Mathers, is found to have been in Fox's possession all along. However, instead of money, it contains omnium, "the ultimate and the inexorable pancake" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 114). Omnium – Latin for 'everything' – is a governing force that allows its owner to make reality of his imagination. In the hands of Fox, omnium was used to keep Sergeants MacCruiskeen and Pluck busy with problems such as the Atom Theory and "the entrance to eternity," a set of chambers where time stands still (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 132). When readers have accepted this governing principle, the communicative bridge is left unhinged again. As mentioned before, the last chapter unravels *The 3PM* as a journey through hell that is infinitely repetitive. The upturning of the governing structure makes readers weary of ordering principles, leaving them to apply their own. Readers might possibly even be induced to re-read and re-interpret *The 3PM* after reading the closing paragraphs.

7. The Language of Flann O'Brien

Hutcheon suggests that covert linguistic metafiction plays with the outer limits of novelistic languages. Since O'Brien expressed his aversion to extreme literary experiment, novels can hardly be expected to contain covert linguistic metafiction. His writing style is very clear and forms a communicative bridge with his audience. Indeed, Deane says, "the plain style is ultimately more shocking in its effect than any virtuoso display could be" (196). As was said before, O'Brien, compared to the likes of James Joyce, celebrates the commonplace rather than literary experiment. Indeed, the latter's novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939) was given as an example of overt diegetic metafiction in section 2 on metafiction since its language immediately strikes the reader. However, when the language of said novel is regarded as a puzzle of which the rules are not communicated, then it should be termed covert metafiction rather than overt. In short, covert linguistic metafiction is ambiguous and, if taken to the extreme, anti-novelistic. Both *At S2B* and *The 3PM* do not strike me as containing covert linguistic metafiction. Even when allusions, covertly drawing attention to language, are made, the rules are systematically explained, as in this instance: "I was compelled to secrete my suit beneath the mattress because it was offensive to at least two of the senses …. *The two senses referred to*: Vision, smell." (O'Brien, *At S2B* 23). Moreover, it would be surprising to find any covert linguistic metafiction as he sought to withstand despotic authorial behaviour, judging from his later reactions on James Joyce. After all, Joyce is a character in O'Brien's last novel *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), in which the former stars as a religious curate alongside de Selby, an idiotic savant transferred from *The 3PM*. Still, overt linguistic metafiction is definitely present in both novels and will thus be discussed.

A number of qualifications that fit novelistic language are overtly accentuated. In *At S2B*, for example, the embellishment of the language of fiction, as opposed to the functionality of daily language, is expressed in the following dialogue between the grand jury and Dermot Trellis:

His sensations?

Bewilderment, perplexity.

Are not these terms synonymous and one as a consequence redundant?

(O'Brien, *At S2B* 42)

The specific length and complexity of novelistic language is expressed in the following comment by the Good Fairy: "I do not understand two words of what you have said and I do not know what you are talking about. Do you know how many subordinate clauses you used in that last oration of yours, Sir?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 110). Indeed, sentences in novelistic language can be fairly long and complex, as opposed to daily language. A last example of a reference to the specificity of novelistic language in *At S2B* is the main character's tendency to name the figures of speech he uses. For example, "*Name of figure of speech*: Litotes (or Meiosis)" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 20), "*Name of figure of speech*: Anadipolsis (sic) (or Epanastrophe)" (94) or "*Name of figure of speech*: Anaphora (or Epibole)" (213). Incidentally, the latter example occurs when the unnamed protagonist names a figure of speech "unwittingly" uttered by his uncle (O'Brien, *At S2B* 213). O'Brien here shows that, though figures of speech can be used in daily language, they are more purposefully added in the novel. Otherwise, the unnamed protagonist shows off his cockiness again as he cannot know whether his uncle unconsciously said something of a supposedly literary nature. He merely presumes his uncle does not know the workings of novelistic language.

As in *At S2B*, Latin is used in *The 3PM*, though in quite a different way. In *At S2B*, it is mainly an indication of the unnamed student's pedantry. The use of Latin, combined with that of words of romance origin in *The 3PM* is more indicative of 'officialese' since it is mostly used by the police men and not solely linked to one character. After all, O'Brien was very much acquainted with official language as he was a public servant. Indeed, Deane also notes the police men's use of "malaprop jargon" (197). Two examples of such utterances are the following:

> "What way will you bring it about or mature its mutandum and bring it ultimately
> to passable factivity?" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 50).
> "In case we do not come up with the bicycle before it is high dinner-time …, I
> have left an official memorandum for the personal information of Policeman Fox
> so that he will be acutely conversant with the *res ipsa*." (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 79)

Though it is also a critique of "the world of officialdom – of government and its uniformed minions," a favourite theme of O'Brien's, it is also an indication of the fact that certain

situations or environments ask for a specific language style (Deane 197). The novel, for instance, is expected to be written in a prose style. The application of offialese, then, might be called overt linguistic metafiction. However, in keeping with Hutcheon's other category of covert diegetic metafiction, this phenomenon might also be called covert linguistic metafiction since it concerns a parody of a style of language. Still, Hutcheon's idea of the latter category is envisaged in a somewhat more experimental sense, as e.g. the *nouveau roman*. Accordingly I take the use of officialese as an example of the overt category, though it must be noted that, in this instance, the difference between overt and covert is considerably murky. After all, Hutcheon did not see her categories as absolute either.

Expressions used in poetically functional language are at times explained or a dictionary entry is provided by the protagonist of *At S2B*. The following serves as an example of the word "kiss": "*Extract from Concise Oxford Dictionary*: Kiss, n. Caress given with lips; (Billiards) impact between moving balls; kind of sugar plum" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 51). Not only is the ambiguity of poetic language shown here, but the issue of sign and signified is brought to the surface. Most readers associate with the first meaning of kiss proposed by O'Brien. However, as the characters are playing billiards, it is revealed that one sign can have different signifiers. This revelation is enhanced by the addition of a third meaning that is of no consequence to the situation at hand, i.e. a kiss can also be a kind of candy. Another instance of the sign-signifier issue is the conversation between the Pooka MacPhellimey and Jem Casey, a poet. The former cannot find the proper term for his wife, as she is insufficiently described. Previously, the Good Fairy called her a kangaroo, resulting in the following passage:

Can you tell me, Mr Casey, said the Pooka interposing quickly, whether my wife

is a kangaroo?

The poet stared in his surprise.

…

A kangaroo? She might be a lump of a carrot for all I know. Do you mean a

marsupial?

…

Pray what is a marsupial? asked the Pooka.

[The Good Fairy said:] A marsupial is another name for an animal that is fitted

with a built-in sack the way it can carry its young ones about. (O'Brien, *At S2B*

123)

Jem Casey has never seen the Pooka's wife, so he plays it safe and calls her a 'marsupial'. The latter sign is not altogether wrongly applied, as the signifier, provided by the Good Fairy, bears similarities to the sign of 'kangaroo.' The reverse of the previous example is shown here, namely that one signifier can have different signs. Incidentally, the conversation goes on for a page more, where the wife is considered a 'bird' because she has the ability to fly on a broomstick. However, "Who in the name of God … ever heard of a bird flying on a broomstick?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 123).

The sign-signifier theme recurs in *The 3PM*, as was already suggested in the section on covert diegetic metafiction. Specifically, the namelessness of the hell-traveller is a stepping-stone for the reader to engage in musings regarding the difference between signifier and signified. As mentioned before in section 5, the reader is overtly made aware that he brings his own assumptions with regard to characters' names, e.g. MacCruiskeen is Irish. The fact that the protagonist of *The 3PM* has no name, however, nullifies any possible association on the reader's part. He is overtly made aware of that in the following passage: "'I can always get a name,' I replied. 'Doyle or Spaldman is a good name and so is O'Sweeney and Hardiman and O'Gara. I can take my choice. I am not tied down for life to one word like most people.'" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 33). In other words, the auto-diegetic narrator has no sign that readers might cling to. As a consequence, no possible signifieds can be conjured, except maybe for the possibility of Irishness since, again, the names the protagonist suggests for himself have an Irish ring to them. Nevertheless, the reader is free to connect with the main

character as presumptions are not so easily made. The same goes for the aspiring writer of *The S2B* since he, too, has no name, though that fact is not so overtly featured. Indeed, the first person of *The 3PM* sees all the consequences of having no sign:

> I was reflecting about my name and how tantalizing it was to have forgotten it. All people have names of one kind or another. Some are arbitrary labels related to the appearance of the person, some represent purely genealogical associations …. Even a dog has a name which dissociates him from other dogs and indeed, my own soul, whom nobody has ever seen on the road or standing at the counter of a public house, had apparently no difficulty in assuming a name which distinguished him from other people's souls. (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 42)

The reader is free to create coherence, together with the main character of *The 3PM*, and the latter's lack of sign helps readers identify themselves with the searching protagonist. Thus, the reader is coaxed into taking the language and recognising its creative power. As such, he becomes much like the writer. Indeed, "[the reader] *expects* a fictive world and because of the accumulated weight of fictive referents, he gradually comes to create a world" (Hutcheon, *NN* 95).

The creative power of language in general is another issue that overt linguistic metafiction uncovers. In *At S2B*, for example, the evocative nature of language is referred to when Jem Casey is found coming "out of the foliage" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 118). When asked what he was doing there, he says "What does any man be doing in that clump? What would *you* be doing?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 119). This ambiguous utterance is then taken to mean that he was doing something "dirty," until Casey angrily retorts: "Well I will tell you what I was doing, [Casey] said gravely, I will tell you what I was at. I was reciting a pome (sic) to a selection of my friends. That's what I was doing. It is only your dirty minds" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 120). Jem Casey, the poet, might not have intended his words to evoke a "dirty" subject, though his audience took up its responsibility of activating the words. Thus, even if an author has different intentions, the power of language allows the reader to take a text and make it his own. Consequently, Casey's reaction might be read as another stab at authors, or poets in particular, high up in their ivory towers. Another example of language's creative power is an

utterance by Orlick: "The tense of the body is the present indicative …. I will pierce him with a pluperfect" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 168). Grammar, an issue related to language, is embodied here in the shape of Dermot Trellis, whom the characters are trying to kill off on this occasion. The murder weapon in this case is a pluperfect. The author, in other words, is killed by his own creation, namely language. As such, the reader is raised to the same level as the writer. Ironically, though, Shanahan finds Orlick's murder plan too far-fetched: "this tack of yours is too high up in the blooming clouds. It's all right for you, you know, but the rest of us will want a ladder. Eh, Mr. Furriskey?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 168). The difference between Orlick, who, as an author, knows the inner workings of the novel, and his readers, Furriskey and Shanahan, is highlighted. The communicative bridge between the two takes the form of a ladder. Could this, then, be another reference to ivory-tower-writing and even, specifically, to Joyce? Indeed, O'Brien's respect and admiration for Joyce turned into animosity as Joyce's works became more and more "egotistical" (Deane 199). Moreover, the allusion to difficult language hits home since James Joyce is known for his linguistic experiments, e.g. *Finnegans Wake* (1939). In conclusion, O'Brien conveys the creative possibility of language, but in such a way that a communicative bridge with the reader is maintained.

The 3PM, too, contains the theme of language as a creative tool of the reader and writer. Before the main character reaches the police station, he meets a deformed Mathers, who by now should have been dead. A figment of the protagonist's imagination, the latter character can only answer questions in negation: "*Do you not see that every reply is in the negative? No matter what you ask him he says No*" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 29). Though the main character needs a little nudge, – "*Use your imagination*" (Ibid.) – he succeeds in getting what he wants, i.e. the whereabouts of the black box, by using creative language. In the process, he even activates Old Mathers, who by now "seemed to speak eagerly, his words coming out as if they had been imprisoned in his mouth for a thousand years" (Ibid.). The focus on the ordering power of language is another example taken from *The 3PM*. Police man Fox is revealed to be the one – or one of the elements at least – to order the story universe. He writes down what he thinks as well: "He now looked so innocent and good-natured and so troubled by the writing down of simple words" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 191). Indeed, simple words; it was mentioned before that the protagonist looks down on Fox's imagination.

Poetic language can be creatively empowering, though it has its limitations as well. The incapability of language is emphasised as well, though not so frequently as its power is. As was frequently shown, the protagonist of *At S2B* overtly names diegetic techniques, figures of speech etc. The limits of mimetic language are expressed in the character's naming of sounds, e.g. "*Nature of exclamation*: Inarticulate, of surprise, recollection" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 26) or "*Title of noise, the Greek version*: πορδή" (38). Incidentally, the Greek word referred to in the latter citation means 'fart,' making it another instance of the main character's self-professed savvy. In any case, the fact that certain sounds, such as an intake of breath for surprise or blowing a raspberry as a consequence of annoyance, cannot be expressed via language is certain. However, the fact that O'Brien still tries to do so, reveals his belief in the power of language.

The *3PM* shows a number of examples where language comes out as powerless as well. When the main character is about to be hanged, Sergeant Pluck keeps him entertained by talking to him. In the hour of one's death, though, words seem of little use: "The sounds he put on these words were startling and too strange. Each word seemed to rest on a tiny cushion and was soft and far away from every other word" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 162). The fact that the protagonist is ultimately not hanged, though, constitutes a glimmer of hope regarding language. Another unutterable phenomenon, of course, is the nature of 'omnium.' Still, this is not surprising and might be linked to the Chinese boxes. The meaning of any language is relative to the applied framework, though the merit lies in the signification process rather than with signification itself. This brings me to the 'significator' himself – i.e. the reader.

8. Authorial Control

Though the title of this section may be misleading, its subject is the freedom of the reader. Indeed, O'Brien leaves nothing under his own control, as many of the metafictional elements, inviting the reader in, must have shown. In fact, O'Brien's work has been analysed in terms of Menippean satire, i.e. in Keith Booker's book *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire* (1995). Menippean satire is a genre that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, presents the world as a carnival or "joyful relativity" (qtd. in del Río 1). Constanza del Río is not so positive about O'Brien and posits that the latter is, indeed, a "narcissistic author" (10). It is true that *At S2B*'s "satirical tendencies, coupled with its multiple stylistic and literary parodies and the ironic discourse" can be rather off-putting at first (del Río 10). However, even if the more 'high-brow' instances of metafiction are missed, I find it unlikely that any reader can miss O'Brien's humorous and metafictional intent of freeing the reader. In any case, a lot of very overt examples of metafiction are presented in this thesis and should make up for the more difficult or covert metafictional elements. Deane also mentions that the reason for O'Brien's relative obscurity – compared to James Joyce, for example – is not necessarily due to his narcissism, as del Río suggests: "[H]is failure can be attributed to the demands of his thrice-weekly column, to the misfortunes of the war, to the lack of a wider audience for his novels and to his excessive drinking" (Deane 199). It must be noted, however, that the late novels of O'Brien did give way to the despotism he so arduously tried to conquer, as can be seen e.g. with *The Dalkey Archive* (Ibid.). Still, *At S2B* and *The 3PM* have already been uncovered as novels that provide their readers with communicative bridges in previous sections. Thus, this section is a discussion of how O'Brien frees the reader by making him the subject of metafictional focus.

Indeed, the relativity of making sense of the world – and the novel – is a recurrent theme in O'Brien's works. Moreover, he shows the theme via metafiction, in both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. Relativizing meaning also entails taking a step back as author to clear the field for the reader. Otherwise, the authorial meaning might be perceived of as superior. As Hutcheon points out, the different categories of metafiction point towards the reader's capacity and obligation. Overt metafiction addresses the reader directly, while he is coaxed rather than pushed into cognition in covert metafiction. However, a category that denotes metafiction, indicating the reader himself, is missing from Hutcheon's model. Indeed, he is only part of the model via metafiction that concerns either diegesis or language. Still, some

elements from *At S2B* and *The 3PM* do not fit entirely into one of the four categories suggested by Hutcheon. As such, a new category is proposed here, namely that of 'readerly metafiction.' It pertains to elements that explicitly point out the reader and his signification process, rather than elements that activate the reader via the other four kinds of metafiction.

At S2B overtly draws attention to the role of the reader. The uncle of the unnamed student, though looked down upon by the latter, sees the importance of the reader: "So long as the book is used, well and good. So long as it is read and studied, well and good" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 33). True, he is mostly scared that the money he gave his nephew to buy *Die Hartzreise* will prove to be wasted. Still, he never objects to his nephew's literary studies and is genuinely glad when the latter graduates. Readers are expected to take up an active role, but O'Brien also points out the need for a communicative bridge, e.g. humour or a plain writing style. He even points that out in *At S2B*, during one of the characters' conversation about the arts: "that one poet was a man … by the name … of Jem Casey. No 'Sir', no 'Mister', no nothing. Jem Casey, Poet of the Pick, that's all. A labouring man" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 74). One of Shanahan's favourite poets, then, is a working man, who is consequently able to meet his audience's interests, namely 'real' issues. The same is said about Irish legends, i.e. that they lack a persona that mirrors "the man in the street" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 75). Indeed, the most famous poem of Casey's contains the recurring verse "A PINT OF PLAIN IS YOUR ONLY MAN" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 77).

In other passages, the reader's willing suspension of disbelief is overtly brought to his attention. Finn McCool tells the unbelievable story of Sweeny, but Antony Lamont, himself a fictional character, has difficulties with engaging in the story: "Come here, … what's this about jumps?" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 85). As such, Shanahan helps him suspend his disbelief, for he will not do it willingly:

> The story, said learned Shanahan in a learned explanatory manner, is about this fellow Sweeny that argued the toss with the clergy and came off second-best at the wind-up. There was a curse – a malediction – put down in the book against him. The upshot is that your man becomes a bloody bird. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 85)

Shanahan, then, is Lamont's inverse since he has no trouble suspending disbelief. In fact, he internalises Finn's story so profoundly that he adopts an "explanatory" style describing the story, as if it happened in 'real' life. Another instance where the reader is made aware that he is unconsciously engaging in a fantastical storyline, is a comment of Jem Casey, the poet: "I believe you, … I believe all that I hear in this place. I thought I heard a maggot talking to me a while ago from under a stone. Good morning, Sir or something he said. This is a very queer place certainly" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 119). As mentioned before, Jem Casey is a man of the people. As such, it is unexpected that he so easily accepts the fantastic story world. Nevertheless, he shows that even 'real' people can suspend their disbelief towards something 'unreal,' and that they usually do so unwittingly.

Another process associated with reading is featured in *At S2B*, namely that of gaining experience or meaning by reading fiction. Indeed, the unnamed student-writer frequently tries to control new experiences by reverting to books. Going out on beer brawls, for example, is something that the main character contemplates by referring to an old schoolbook of his, "*Literary Reader, the Higher Class, by the Irish Christian Brothers*" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 21). Incidentally, even though schoolbooks are presumed to be objective, the fact that this schoolbook was composed by 'the Christian Brothers,' shows there is always a form of diegesis contained in mimesis. The unnamed literary scholar then returns to the idea that "[p]ersonal experience appeared … to be the only satisfactory means to the resolution of my doubts" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 22). However, when another issue regarding drinking come to his mind, his thoughts are as follows:

> *Nature of interrogation*: Who are my future cronies, where our mad carousals? What neat repast shall feast us light and choice of Attic taste with wine whence we may rise to hear the lute well touched or artful voice warble immortal notes or Tuscan air? What mad pursuit? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (O'Brien, *At S2B* 22)

This fragment is particularly reminiscent of John Milton's sonnet 'XX. To Mr. Lawrence,' e.g. "What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice, / Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise" (Milton 359). In fact, returning to his habit of plagiarism, the main character

obviously took the experience of reading about drinking as his own and applied it to his 'reality'.

That reading fiction might have an influence on reality is thematically portrayed in the lower-frame-characters' quest to kill Dermot Trellis. Indeed, the atrocities they write down have their effect on the body of Trellis in his own, superior frame. In fact, the characters are constantly pressed for time: "Trellis will get us before we get him. … Get the Pooka and let him go to work right away. God, if he catches us at this game" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 172). The murky boundaries of *At S2B*, where all characters run rampant, then, are paradigmatic of the boundaries between fiction and reality. Not only does the 'real' reader bring himself to the text, the text also has its influence on the 'reality' of the reader. Another example of the blurring of fiction and reality is the realisation that knowledge need not solely be gained from supposedly objective texts. Take a comment by Shanahan: "a man who confines knowledge to formulae necessary for the resolution of an algebraic or other similar perplexity, the same deserves to be shot with a fusil …. True knowledge is unpractised or abstract usefulness" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 189). Indeed, mere knowledge alone is not useful, far from it. It needs to be applied and subsequently, experience adds a different kind of knowledge. Fictional texts, though not necessarily carriers of abstract knowledge, then, are definitely helpful in gaining the latter kind of knowledge.

Indeed, we use arbitrary ordering principles, or referential frameworks, both in 'real' life and in fiction. This is brought to the reader's attention in the following passage, describing a meeting of a committee in which the main character's uncle resides: "Order, Mr Corcoran, he said in reprimand, order if you please. Mr Connors has the floor. This is a Committee Meeting. … After all there is such a thing as Procedure, there is such a thing as Order, there is such a thing as doing things in the right way" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 133). Indeed, certain traditions or procedures are unmasked here as consisting of rules not unlike those of the novel. Each participant of the committee meeting is given a specific role that fits into a hierarchy. As such, everyone takes their turn speaking rather than the meeting resulting in total cacophony. Moreover, each role is given a distinctive name, e.g. the Chair or Mr Secretary teller. Additionally, the setting of the committee meeting is defined: "[my uncle] was situated in a central position in the midst of four others" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 132). In short, the ordered feeling of a contained novelistic world is useful to govern real life as well.

The reader is made aware of his role in *The 3PM* as well, though not as overtly as in *At S2B*. Indeed, overt metafiction, both diegetic and linguistic, is more abundantly present in the latter, while the former is more covertly metafictional. The result is that *The 3PM*, more demanding with regard to metafiction, is probably more rewarding in the end. Indeed, the feel of accomplishment is greater if the general gist of a novel is found rather than explicitly handed to you. I am not judging the value of either novel here. O'Brien does the metafictional elements justice in both books. However, several fictional issues are explored and the difference in structure and metafictional techniques befits the difference in metafictional focus. In other words, the metafictional ideas that are explicitly conveyed in *At S2B* recur more internalised in *The 3PM*, which, as Murphy & Hopper have it, "is increasingly regarded as O'Brien's masterpiece" (xi).

The need for a reader to order the fiction he is reading, is highlighted in the conversations between the main character of *The 3PM* and the police men. They frequently say the weirdest things, resulting in the following thought of the main character: "I decided without any hesitation that it was a waste of time trying to understand the half of what he said" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 63). Indeed, the protagonist frequently shows his surprise with regard to the fantastic events happening to him in general, e.g. "There was much that I did not understand and possibly could never understand to my dying day" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 191). When the solution is given to the protagonist – i.e. that Fox imagines the story world – another solution is posited immediately afterwards, i.e. the main character is travelling through hell. Similar to what the theme of Chinese boxes conveys, meaning is shown to be never absolute, but the signification process is an interesting one. Though the protagonist might seem reluctant to make meaning at first, he soon tries to make sense anyway. Reminiscent of the use of different frameworks to attain meaning, then, is Fox's personal police station: "a nice station, … but why is it inside the walls of another house?" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 190).

The idiosyncrasy of not only meaning, but of imagination (of both reader and writer) is overtly featured as well. Imagination or the mind is at times referred to as a box, as in this instance: "you cannot think of it or try to make it the subject of a little idea because you will hurt your box with the excruciation of it" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 70). Another example: "I stopped thinking, closing up my mind with a snap as if it were a box or a book" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 184). This, of course, harks back to the black box, containing omnium, the power

behind all imagination. That different people imagine different things is reflected in the difference between the protagonist and Fox regarding omnium. The former thinks of the most formidable things and, in terms of imagination, goes several steps further than Fox, whose "underground invention was the product of a mind which fed upon adventure books of small boys, books in which every extravagance was … concerned with bringing about somebody's death in the most elaborate way imaginable" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 196). As can be deduced, the protagonist thinks of Fox's creation as inferior to what his might become. Ironically, the superior structuring principle is revealed to be a travel through hell, and not Fox's imagination. Moreover, several clues give away the fact that this hell is a part of the unnamed protagonist's unconscious making, after all. For example, the "fat man with a red face" that informs the younger protagonist of his mother's death, can be found in the features of Sergeant Pluck (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 8). Other examples of traumas that find their way into the main character's hell are Old Mathers (the man that Divney and he killed), his unfinished research on de Selby, his wooden leg or the quest for the black box. Even the preoccupation with bicycles might be explained by traumas of his previous life. He and Divney rode to the Mathers' house on their bicycles. Additionally, they killed Mathers off with a bicycle pump (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 16). As imagination goes, then, one person's ideas are not superior to another's. Consequently, the reader is overtly made aware that his meaning-making is not inferior to that of the writer. Indeed, the omnium, the ultimate meaning that contains everything, cannot possibly be attained as it is dependent of its owner, be it Fox, the unnamed protagonist, or the reader himself.

The governing principles, however, are only revealed at the end. While reading *The 3PM* for the first time, the reader is constantly invited to order the novel by himself. Similar to the main character, then, the fact that the hellish world is ordered is probably clear to the reader, though he cannot be sure of the specifics. As the unnamed protagonist is walking through the unfamiliar landscape, he observes: "I found it hard to think of a time when there was no road there because the trees and the tall hills and the fine views of bogland had been *arranged by wise hands* for the pleasing picture they made when looked at from the road (emphasis added, O'Brien, *The 3PM* 39). The reference is an ambiguous one since it seems to relate to the author himself. Only a second read, however, reveals a second reference, namely to Fox, who created the landscape from imagination. Another reference to Fox's imagination is Joe's reaction to the 'Atom Theory': "*Apparently there is no limit …. Anything*

can be said in this place and it will be true and will have to be believed" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 88). Incidentally, with this last quote, the reader is also made aware of his willing suspension of disbelief. The reader is constantly forced to make sense of the story world, together with the equally uninformed main character. Indeed, the reader can easily identify with the protagonist, as he has no name or sign for the reader to cling to – something which was already mentioned in section 7 on the language of O'Brien.

The former examples of how O'Brien draws the reader's attention to his own signification process are fairly obvious compared to the following, which can be called 'covert' as a consequence. Consider the following description of the police station:

> I had never seen with my eyes ever in my life before anything so unnatural and appalling and my gaze faltered about the thing uncomprehendingly as if at least one of the customary dimensions was missing, leaving no meaning in the remainder. … As I approached, the house seemed to change its appearance. … I saw that it began to have some back to it, some small space for rooms behind the frontage. (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 55)

Though covertly thematised, this passage might be read as a metaphor for the reader's signification process. Indeed, at first the text is two-dimensional – i.e. the novel as an object. When it is not being read, the novel remains just that: a flat object. As the reading progresses, though, meanings and ordering principles begin to take shape resulting in a more three-dimensional text – i.e. in the reader's mind. The 'frontage,' or the novel, then, permits the reader to create a 'small space for rooms,' i.e. any possible meaning the reader infers from reading. A similar metaphor for the novel and the subsequent reading is the open ending of *At S2B*. Dermot Trellis' characters should have all died since his manuscript was thrown in the fire. However, one character prevails, namely Mad Sweeney. Since he is such a well-known character, not even unique to O'Brien's novel, it is not surprising that he is still alive. Still, he is described in quite a specific way: "The eyes of the mad king upon the branch are upturned, whiter eyeballs in a white face, upturned in fear and supplication. His mind is but a shell" (O'Brien, *At S2B* 215). The character-on-paper Sweeny is presented as an empty shell that can be filled with meanings, provided by the reader as he transforms Sweeny from his paper-self to a fully three-dimensional character in his mind.

That fiction might have a lingering effect on reality is an issue also pursued in *The 3PM*. The epigraph, for one, reads: "Since the affairs of men rest still uncertain. Let's reason with the worst that may befall. – Shakespeare" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 5). Uttered by Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599), this line pertains to the possibility of imagining worst-case-scenarios to prepare for what will actually happen. In other words, entertaining fictions in our minds can help in dealing with reality. What follows the epigraph, of course, is *The 3PM*, an imagined experience of hell that might help readers to imagine the worst and, subsequently, prepare for it. Another literary rendering of the link between life and fiction is the fact that Fox governs his 'reality' according to the novels he has read, as was mentioned before. As such, his experience of life is made easier: "Like everything that is hard to believe and difficult to comprehend, … it is very simple and a neighbour's child could work it all without being trained" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 193). The choice of a framework, then, simplifies the signification process. Indeed, reading a novel might provide any number of frameworks. The main character, for example, feels invigorated after surviving the fantastical events, as they can only be imagined in a novel, and is positively looking forward to the future: "The perils and wonders of the last few days seemed magnificent and epic now that I had survived them. I felt enormous, important and full of power. I felt happy and fulfilled" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 201). This is exactly how Holland describes the experience of reading: a meaning is attained and the reader feels pleasure.

Indeed, frameworks are chosen to govern life, as in the novel, but they must not be rigidly applied as they will have a limiting effect rather than increase the number of meanings. The silly savant, de Selby, for example, applies closed frameworks and ends up with the most preposterous 'scientific' findings. Taking movie-making techniques as a framework, de Selby concludes the following: "Human existence de Selby has defined as 'a succession of static experiences each infinitely brief' …. From this premise he discounts the reality or truth of any progression or serialism in life" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 52). To take the movie or the novel as a mimesis, in the strict sense, of life, then, is taking the power of fiction too far. Denying their effects on reality completely, on the other side of the spectrum, however, is also beside the point.

Indeed, the power of the reader's imagination, incited by reading, is another theme of *The 3PM*. The protagonist's namelessness, for example, allows him to create an entire

fictional biography. For example, he professes to have come to the police station to report the theft of his "American gold watch" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 63). Though the main character does not own a watch, he starts believing he does because he has told the lie so many times. Even in his mind, the protagonist has fooled himself that he owns it for real: "If that watch of mine were found you would be welcome to it I you could find some means of taking it. *But you have no watch*. I forgot that" (O'Brien, *The 3PM* 167). The watch, then, becomes a metaphor for the power of fiction.

To conclude, readers of O'Brien are given a very central point in the signification process of the novel. Not only that, the reader is overtly and covertly contained in O'Brien's novels, as has become clear from this particular section. Let me conclude, then, with O'Brien's own view of the reader, in the words of his character, the student from *At S2B*:

> The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. In reply to an inquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. It was undemocratic to compel characters to be uniformly good or bad or poor or rich. … Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, … A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimbleriggers and persons of inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature. (O'Brien, *At S2B* 25)

9. Conclusion

> These, dear reader, are my last words. Keep them and cherish them. Never again can you read my deathless prose, for my day that has been a good day is past. Remember me and pray for me. Adieu!
>
> – Flann O'Brien

The metafictional model, as proposed by Linda Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative*, has proven to be a useful tool for the analysis of Flann O'Brien's work. Her insistence on it being intended as an open, heuristic tool leaves room for the researcher to add techniques to the suggested categories. Indeed, the covert diegetic metafiction, specifically, was exposed as a very broad category even though Hutcheon herself only suggests four novel paradigms. Among those explored in this study, then, were Irish legends, academic writing and fantasy. Overt diegetic metafiction was abundantly present in O'Brien. Easily spotted metafictional elements were also the incitement to choose metafiction as a framework. Thus, a prevalence of overt metafictional elements led the way to the discovery of more covert elements. Moreover, the overt elements in *At S2B* were an indication of how another work by O'Brien – i.e. *The 3PM* – could also be read in terms of metafiction. It was suggested that the recurrence of a specific theme is not uncommon in novels by the same author. *The 3PM* proved to be a more internalised novel with regard to metafictional techniques. For example, *The 3PM* often thematises self-consciousness, while *At S2B* is more explicit in showing that *it is about a novel*. Covert metafiction with language as its focus was not particularly present in either of the novels because Hutcheon envisages this category very specifically – i.e. as literary experiment such as the *nouveau roman*. Overt linguistic metafiction in O'Brien points towards both the creative power and the limits of language.

Norman N. Holland provided some interesting ideas to incorporate in the metafictional discussion of O'Brien. Metafiction highlights the role of the reader as well and Holland's findings in literary response theory were a good addition to Hutcheon's own understanding of the reader. We read because we gain pleasure from creating meaning. Additionally, reading is an easy way of making meaning as no 'real' perils are expected. In contrast, metafiction pushes the reader towards an active role and, in the process, points

out to the reader that fiction can have an influence on reality. Thus, metafictional elements were studied in terms of how readers might respond to them and how readers make meaning of the metafictional novel. Present analysis of O'Brien, then, fits into a wider range of readings and was clearly presented as one of any number of meanings. Indeed, Holland's work was criticised for its adherence to a Freudian reading of novels. Additionally, it was pointed out that Holland's idea of there being only one possible meaning to a novel is outdated. Nevertheless, another category of metafiction was added to Hutcheon's model as a consequence of Holland's findings, namely that of 'readerly metafiction.' It pertains to metafictional passages where the reader himself is the object of self-consciousness rather than the novel.

At S2B was shown to be full of overt references to the novel in general. The theme of metafiction was given a more internalised shape in *The 3PM* as most of the latter's metafictional elements seem to be of the covert kind. Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper have the gist of it, then, by suggesting that *The 3PM* was the culmination point of O'Brien's metafictional endeavours. Flann O'Brien was presented as an author who keeps his distance from his text. Indeed, the reader is granted a lot of freedom in both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*. Not only are the metafictional elements a testimony of that fact, but the communicative bridges that O'Brien constructs for his reader are also a good indication of how O'Brien himself regards the reader. Humour, plain style and *At S2B*'s captions are good examples of how the reader is aided during his signification process. Unfortunately, O'Brien seems to have given way to authorial despotism in his later novels, such as *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), despite his efforts to keep away from the ivory tower. Both *At S2B* and *The 3PM*, however, are hopefully given new life by present study. Indeed, there remain some issues for another reader to scrutinize.

Holland's exploration of metafiction in *Literature and the Brain* contains many examples of meta in art forms other than literature, specifically film. O'Brien also conveys an opinion on other art forms, such as film and music, via several of his characters. Indeed, it would be interesting to compare metafictional practice to how meta works in other art forms. For example, does listening to programmatic music reveal similar things about music as metafiction does about the novel? As regards Flann O'Brien, it was mentioned that only a number of parodistically treated genres were analysed in this thesis. As such, ample room is

left for other studies to completely focus on covert diegetic metafiction in O'Brien, especially in *At S2B*. The press genre of A*t S2B*, in particular, might even be compared to O'Brien's own 'real' press releases as they were often intended as satire. Additionally, several overt references to texts, real or unreal, were left unanalysed. More covert instances of text reference, such as the one to Milton's poem, might be found as well.

All that is left here for me to do, is to end this thesis with *At S2B*'s last words: "good-bye, good-bye, good-bye."

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