Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* Methuen, London, 1984. 153 pp.

Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narratiue: The Metafictional Paradox.* Methuen, London, 1984. 162 pp.

Metafiction is now recognized as the designation of a kind of fiction — beginning to proliferate in the 1960s — that turns its attention on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity. Too often, critics have one-sidedly labeled it as an example of the anti-novel, a reaction against the teleological realistic tradition. Its self-reflectiveness has also been denigrated as a sign of exhaustion for the novel genre: no new fields seem left to develop and therefore it has turned inward upon itself. Some critics would argue that in metafiction the life-art connection has been severed or even denied, that the narcissism is a nihilistic exposure of previous illusions about a correlation between literary language and reality.

Patricia Waugh's and Linda Hutcheon's books represent two recent contributions towards a revaluation of metafictional self-consciousness. Both suggest that there is no basic contradiction betwen auto-representational art and life. Fiction is not an aberration, for reality itself is a "book" circumscribed by culture and ideological concepts. In light of the theories of Derrida and associate poststructuralists, the mind is as much a product of language as a producer of language. Composing a novel becomes little different from construing one's 'reality'. Choosing this point of departure, Patricia Waugh points out the valuable prospects which metafiction opens up. Through parody and inversion of conventional patterns, the novel resists interpretative closure and displays its condition of artifice. It turns the focus on the very processes by which cultural codes of perception induce semblances of reality. In this way, it most fundamentally explores the entangled relationship between life and fiction. If it is true that our knowledge of the world is mediated through language, the study of characters in novels may then elucidate to what extent individuals occupy roles rather than selves, thus increasing our understanding of the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels.

By arguing that metafiction explicitly lays bare formative conventions, Patricia Waugh succeeds in foregrounding the essential characteristics that distinguish metafiction from other trends. It is not a new sub-genre; along with the Derrideans, she notes that the novel has by its very nature been parodic from its infancy, self-consciously aware of its own fictiveness. Her discussion of the various forms and modes of metafictional elements is sustained by ample references to writers. Not only the standard examples are included: Sterne, Beckett, Barth, Borges, Nabokov. Numerous diverse candidates

belong: Barthelme, Brautigan, Vonnegut, Coover, Federman, Pynchon, Grass, Sukenick, Gass, O'Brien, Calvino, Spark, Fowles, Lessing.

Patricia Waugh's clear-cut framework for definition is discriminating and manages to expand our notion of the distribution and significance of metafictional writing on a wide scale. At the same time, her concern with identifying self-conscious works limits a thorough exploration of the ontological status of the novel in a historical perspective. There is an endless listing of writers and titles, connected principally because of the deliberation with which they thematize the artificiality of discourse. Though she suggests that modern metafiction is the culmination of a long development, her criteria exclude the self-consciousness of Fielding and Thackeray as non-metafictional: these narrators intrude to aid the reader in his interpretation of the action instead of stressing its artificiality. Yet one may object that their mediation between reader and novel world implies narrative distance, making the narrating figure the center of internal reference. The modern metafictional novel is undeniably very different in the way it refrains from prescribing the reader's imaginative participation. However, there certainly is a historical progression which may elucidate the ontological implications of metafiction. Apart from pointing out some common features of older and contemporary works, Patricia Waugh does not reveal a deeper understanding of a literary evolution.

The book tends to become too much of a survey of defined criteria. A certain repetitiveness is inevitable since it hovers over a whole range of works, while largely skirting deeper analysis of samples of texts. One is left with the impression that the book, as a whole, moves on a rather abstract plane of brief and sweeping commentary. Despite limitations, however, it offers rewarding insight info the forms and modes of metafiction.

Linda Hutcheon's book, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox,* presents a more original and penetrating analysis of the philosophical and critical implications of metafiction. In contrast to Patricia Waugh's rather narrow conception of the term as a mode of writing within the "broader cultural movement" (p. 21) of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon finds postmodernism "a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction" (p. 2). The two statements reflect different emphases with regard to the historical and ontological perspective of metafiction. Avoiding the term postmodernism for its associations of a reaction to modernism (suggested by the prefix "post"), Linda Hutcheon concentrates on investigating the significance of narcissistic (i.e. self-reflectjve) narrative as a continuous development from the parodic intent of *Don Quixote,* Sterne's critical self-consciousness about novel form, and nineteenth-century self-mirroring.

Linda Hutcheon's study aims at a revaluation of the entire novel tradition as inherently metafictional. To equate novelistic mimesis mainly with mimesis of product, as in the realism of the nineteenth century, is a reductive limitation. The novel genre has always embodied an awareness of the Aristotelian concept of diegesis (the process of narration) as an element in its mimesis. This dialectic may further be discerned in the *Künstlerroman's* preoccupation with the growth of the artist, in the romantic view of the imagination and the creative act, and in the interest in consciousness *as well* as the objects of con-

significant implications for the reader's critical attitude to the whole genre. The "paradox" created by metafiction points to a strengthened awareness of the reader's responsibility: the reader is simultaneously co-creator of the self-referential text and distanced from it because of its very self-reflexiveness. It makes the reader explicitly aware of his active role as co-creator of all fiction, which is, by extension, paradigmatic for all human acts of constructing ordered visions to humanize the facts of reality

If metafiction can thus restore to man what is essentially human in a world dominated by arbitrary versions of reality, the novel has a future. The sense of the diminished significance of the individual in today's highly technological societies, has a lot to do with the individual being manipulated by language. Linda Hutcheon suggests where to begin in order to restore the balance of power. She stresses the power and existential freedom of the reader, and implicitly of the individual as participator in the creation of reality. The best way to subvert manipulation — through rhetoric or through the power of language and the vision it creates — is to acknowledge their arbitrariness.

Linda Hutcheon's major achievement lies in demonstrating that narcissistic narrative is not an introverted gasp of exhaustion, but a vital element which opens possibilities for future development. Her work aims to expand the scope for the novel by abandoning the constricting concepts of "realism" and "naturalism" as defining criteria. It significantly counteracts a reduction of "life" to a mere product level that ignores process. A renewed awareness of the dialectical relationship that must exist between literature and criticism seems crucial to achieve a theory of the novel which can come to terms with new literary forms.

Oddvar Holmesland Agder College