

**METAFICTIONAL TECHNIQUES IN LAURENCE STERNE'S
TRISTRAM SHANDY AND JOHN BARTH'S *LOST IN THE
FUNHOUSE***

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ABSTRACT

The thesis compares and contrasts the forms and purposes of metafictional modes used in Laurence Sterne's work *Tristram Shandy* and John Barth's short story collection *Lost in the Funhouse*. The goal is accomplished by employing textual analysis and comparative approaches, as well as studying and presenting an overview of metafiction as a literary device, critical reviews of Laurence Sterne's and John Barth's philosophic and aesthetic preferences, and a general historical, philosophical, and literary background of postmodernism and the eighteenth century. Despite the two-century gap, the analytical section of the paper, which consists of two chapters, each presenting various modes and functions of typographic and non-typographic metafictional means, revealed a great deal of similarity between the two works. In terms of the visual play of the text, the concentration on the divergence between art and life, and the portrayal of the roles of narrator and narratee,

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the fictions are strikingly similar. Barth and Sterne talk of current authors' literary stasis, in which they are unable to depict the complexity, fragmentariness, and solitude of a modern illogical human using previously existent conventional literary tools. The approach is to utilise a collage of a number of literary genres, styles, and methods that allow its readers a broad range of interpretation options so that the narratees may impart their own meanings. The metafictional figure Tristram Shandy, on the other hand, differs from *Lost in the Funhouse* in terms of its conversational approach to readers, physical handling of tales, metafictional analogies, and the amount of particular metafictional tactics used in the works..

Key words: metafiction, typographic, non-typographic, exhaustion, replenishment, reality, fictionality, narrative, self-reflexive, meta, collage, digression, overt, narratee, narrator.

INTRODUCTION

Patricia Waugh, an English literature professor and literary critic, has defined metafiction as "fictional work that self-consciously and methodically calls attention to its position as an artefact in order to raise concerns about the link between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984, 2). Metafictional works, she claims, are those that "examine a philosophy of creating fiction via the activity of writing fiction" (Waugh, 1984, 2). Ann Jefferson and other literary critics, on the other hand, disagree with Patricia Waugh's assertion in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (1984), that metafiction primarily pertains to contemporary fiction. Despite their diversity in definitions, most theorists agree that metafiction is neither a genre nor the definitive form of postmodern fiction. They argue that metafiction exhibits "a self-reflexivity inspired by the author's understanding of the theory behind the development of fictional works," without distinguishing modern metafiction from earlier works that use similar self-reflective strategies (Waugh, 1984, 2). Professor of Contemporary Literature Mark Currie stresses modern metafiction's tendency toward self-criticism by characterising it as "a borderline discourse, a sort of writing that sets itself on the boundary between fiction and criticism, and takes the border as its topic" (Currie, 1995, 2). He does, however, include metafictional works, claiming that "to regard the dramatised narrator or author as metanarrative devices is to read a large amount of fiction as metafiction" (Currie, 1995, 4). Regardless of the differences in their definitions, the vast majority

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of theorists agree that metafiction should not be classified as a genre or a separate approach to postmodern fiction. They argue that metafiction demonstrates "a self-reflexivity driven by the author's understanding of the theory behind the development of fictional works" (Waugh, 1984, 2) without distinguishing current metafiction from previous works with comparable self-reflective elements. The first examples of metafiction as a literary style may be found in the works of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, a Spanish writer, and Félix Arturo Lope de Vega y Carpio, a Spanish dramatist.

Methodology

The theoretical and analytical parts of the research are based on the works of authors on metafiction theory, namely (Hutcheon, Scholes, Currie, Waugh, Christensen, McCaffery, Klinkowitz,) and critical essays on John Barth's and Laurence Sterne's philosophic tastes, as well as general historical and literary background of the period of the 18th century and postmodernism related to the realisation of metafictional devices, as well as general historical and literary background Descriptive and comparative methodologies, as well as textual analysis, were used as research methods for the study.

Collecting information on metafiction, critical essays on metafictional works, particularly those closely linked to Barth's and Sterne's works, is one of the research techniques. The age of authors has been tracked with extensive historical and philosophical material. The material was gathered from both written and electronic sources. Books, essays, journals, and searches in computerised databases of the Internet that were related to the study were used to ensure that the material was up-to-date, comprehensive, and relevant.

Following the formulation of the thesis and the creation of a draught plan, the obtained research data must be minimised and reviewed according to the sources. The data will next be examined and rearranged. The next phase would be to study the information and divide it into smaller groups according to the research's ultimate strategy.

The Work's Importance

The study has professional value since it contributes to the expanding of the concept and understanding of metafiction as a literary technique that emphasises the writing process and discusses the challenges that authors face when composing fiction. By using metafiction, authors not only highlight the artificial aspect of fiction, but they also investigate the probable fictionality of the reality beyond the fictitious work. As a result, I propose studying

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Tristram Shandy and Lost in the Funhouse closely in order to look for parallels between the fictitious and external authors. This research might lead to a whole new way of looking at literature, which could become a trend.source for exploring biographies of authors or a means illustrating the ways fiction is created. It could also ignite a comparative analysis of meta-art techniques employed in the novel *Tristram Shandy* and the metafictional 2005 British comedy film *The Cock and the Bull Story* directed by Michael Winterbottom. Also, it provides an opportunity to fill the existing knowledge gap in the field of comparative study of metafictional devices in the works of the two writers representing two different epochs. Thus, the paper contributes to understanding of metafictional techniques used in the 18th and 21th century.

THE NOTIONS OF METAFICTION

The self-reflexive writing technique, also known as metafiction, dominated the literary landscape throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The metafictional works of Argentinean writer Jorge Borges, Frenchman Alain Robbe-Grillet, Englishman John Fowles, and Austrian Peter Handke drew a great reaction from both critics and fans, who declared metafictionality to be an invention (Hutcheon, 1980, 2). The primary theoreticians who produced typologies aimed at defining and classifying metafiction as well as explicating its literary significance via the examination of metafictional literature include Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Robert Scholes.

"mise en abyme," a word created in the 18th century by a French writer, Andre Gide, to describe creative works inside works, was perhaps one of the earliest recognised literary expressions of metafiction (Gide, 1973, 441 - 442). • Diegetical self-awareness is writing that is either conscious of its own creational process or is aware of its own creational process.

Hutcheon's classification of metafiction differs significantly from that proposed by Scholes in his book *Metafiction*, in which he distinguishes four types of text, namely the formal, structural, behavioural, and philosophical aspects of the text, all of which are based on the categories of text: form and ideas, essence and existence of fiction, all of which are related to the four categories of fiction: romance, myth, allegory, and novel. 102-105) (Scholes, 1995).

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formal criticism	behavioral criticism	fiction of forms (romance)	fiction of existence (novel)
structural criticism	philosophical criticism	fiction of ideas (myth)	fiction of essence (allegory)

Hutcheon harshly criticizes Scholes’ division explaining that his offered categories have been “roughly paralleled” and his limitation on “the collections of short pieces” is the cause of unsuccessfulness of his investigation (Hutcheon, 1980, 21).

Hutcheon also discusses innovative theory in her work. She claims that the modern book is a representational work. As a consequence, "the traditional categories of novel criticism, particularly mimesis, do not need to be reflected, but rather modified" (Hutcheon, 1980, 46). She also differentiates between mimesis of product and mimesis of process (the narrative told and the storey telling), as well as "conventional realism and metafiction." She says that classic realism exemplifies product mimesis, which is linked to characterisation and which the reader must identify in the narrative. However, she feels that metafiction provides a mimesis of process, in which the reader is expected to "be mindful of labour, the real creation, that he himself is performing, because it is the reader who, in Ingarden's phrase, "concretizes" the work of art and gives it life" (Hutcheon, 1980, 39).

Metafiction, according to Scholes, is the most prevalent topic in postmodern fiction (Scholes, 1995, 110- 115). Self-reflexivity is seen by opponents of postmodern metafiction as the death of the author and the depletion of the novel as a genre, while supporters see it as the novel's rebirth (Waugh, 1985, 5). After being articulated in John Barth's important articles *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967) and *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1968), these ideas formed a postmodern literary credo.

Replenishment (1980) is a film that was released in 1980. (McCaffery, 1984, 196). Traditional literary forms, genres, and structures, according to Barth, were unable to convey the spirit of the current world and, as a result, had to be transformed. The revitalization of old forms that were limited in their possibilities resulted in endless literary solutions, and as a result became a continuation and "contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of

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constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh, 1984, 7). The open use of metafictional approach stems from modernism's questioning of reality and consciousness. Self-conscious, introspective, introverted, narcissistic, or auto-representational writing method are all adjectives used to define contemporary metafiction (Currie, 1995, 14).

Despite the fact that, according to the majority of literary critics such as Hutcheon, Scholes, Waugh, and others, metafiction is both a prominent method and a theme of postmodern literature, its traces may be discovered in a number of earlier literary works. According to Danish literary critic Inger Christensen, the origins of metafiction may be traced back to 17th century Spain, where it was represented by authors such as Lope de Vega and Miguel de Cervantes Savedra, as well as François Rabelais, a French Renaissance writer (Christensen, 1981, 9). According to Lawrence McCaffery, an American literary critic, metafiction frequently reflect biographies of imaginary writers, such as Barth, who appears balding and bespectacled in several of his novels, or as the author of *Tristram Shandy*, who, like his creator, suffers from illnesses and embarks on a tour of France. Furthermore, metafictionists like immersing readers in a setting that is alien to them by presenting and analysing the fictitious work of a fictional character. (1995, 182) (McCaffery, 1995, 182) Metafictional devices force us to see the work as an artefact by "undermining the work's realistic impulses and turning it into a self-reflective production in which it not only takes art as its subject but also claims to be its own subject" (Currie, 1995, 183). "Metafiction comprises examination of the theory of fiction via fiction itself," writes Stanley Fogel, summarising the above-mentioned characteristics and providing an understandable description of a metaphor. Metafiction writers "examine all aspects of the literary construct, including language, narrative and character conventions, and the artist's relationship to his creation and to his reader" (Fogel, 1973, 16). Poioumenon is a word invented by Alastair Fowler to describe a sort of metafiction in which the tale is about the process of creation. Hutcheon coined the phrase "historiographic metafiction," which refers to self-reflexive writing that includes historical events or characters.

LAURENCE STERNE AND THE HISTORICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND OF THE 18TH CENTURY

Since *Tristram Shandy* is loaded with references and allusions to the authors and

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intellectuals of the 17th and 18th centuries, historical and social circumstances of the period play an essential part in understanding the literature of the age. The comic character of the book was shaped by Alexander Pope's and Jonathan Swift's satires, as well as Swift's sermons and John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which established the framework of *Tristram Shandy*. In addition, important inspirations like as Miguel de Cervantes' and Michel de Montaigne's writings, Tom Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Swift's *Battle of the Books* are significant when discussing Sterne's work in terms of historical, philosophical, and literary context.

Emotional Misprints

The parallel to the Locke's social ideology about the impact of mentality on the life of a person questions the genre of Sterne's book. A number genres, such as an extract from a letter (Sterne, 1986, 13-14) a sermon, a story (Sterne, 1986, 4-10; 334 - 342), a speech (Sterne, 1986, 368), a tale (Sterne, 1986, 196-217) weaved into the work is said by the critics to be an intentional step of the author to criticize the conventions of these writings as well as to ridicule narrator as the "truth teller" (Christensen, 1981, 26). In respect to the Lockean ideology on the importance of mentality and Tristram's goal of presenting subjective account of his life based on opinions, and Fanning's critical account of narrator's verbal strain for communication, which Tristram desired to have his volume read aloud, further footnotes may serve as a critical "whispered" gossip that serves as a means of Walter's portrayal in the scene in fifth volume about *Tristopedia* - Tristram's father's book regulating Tristram's education as a compensation of his misfortunes. Tristram ridicules Walter's view of systematizing world through hypothesis and having a great trust in words to grasp the truth of reality (Sterne, 1986, 295) and the footnote below alongside with the comparison of Trim's "empiric approach to reality" (Christensen, 1981, 24) serves as a harsh critical means of metafiction as it makes the reader aware of the differences of art and reality by presenting characters' approaches to interpretation of reality.

The further mode which serves as a typographical metafictional technique is the motion like line which was figuratively drawn by Corporal Trim, the manservant to Uncle Toby in the ninth volume during the eager conversation of liberty in relationship with the reference to Widow Wadman and Captain Toby Shandy's

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The flourish, or a graphically presented spiral line, is a further mode which functions as a vivid description of emotionality of Corporal Trim intensifying reader's imagination and encouraging them to repeat the same gesture. In this way, Sterne wants his reader to make a physical bond with the novel and as a result decrease the gap between fictionality and reality. However, the example also functions as a representation of Tristram's autonomy as a narrator. Tristram's writing independence is obvious if sustained with the following extract: "But this is neither here nor there – why do I mention it? - Ask my pen, - it governs me, - I govern not it" (Sterne, 1986, 334) as well as the omitted 24th chapter in the fourth volume, the absence of which Tristram clarifies by condemning standards of writing which he emphasizes by inserting a hand indicator with a comment reinforcing the effect: "A dwarf who brings a standard along with him to measure his own size - take my word, is a dwarf in more articles than one – And so much for tearing out the chapters." (Sterne, 1986, 253) Tristram expresses his right to freedom of writing and by including this explanation into the novel, he realizes that this makes his work unique "nor is the book imperfect, ...but, on the contrary, the book is more perfect and complete by wanting the chapter, than having it" (Sterne, 1986, 251) The similar metafictional technique is the skipping of 18th and 19th chapters that are placed after the 25th part of the ninth volume due to the necessity of leaving the chapters blank and writing them only after the twenty – fifth one is completed. The displacement is again justified by Tristram in the form of his repeating plea to the world "to let people tell their stories in their own way" (Sterne, 1986, 524). The narrator's wish serves a weighty metafictional mode as an author's autonomy in writing and a drawn reader's attention to its process. Moreover, the narrator's further means aims to make the narratee duly consider the shifted chapters by changing their font from "Times New Roman" to "Old English Text Md" or by writing the plea in *italicized* shift.

Questionable Narrative

Traditional novels are often concerned with the bond between art and reality, whereas metafiction aims at conscious presentation of the diversity between these two. Metafictionists believe that art cannot be a pure imitation of reality and, opposite to realists, who aim at imitating the reality by hiding the difference between the outer world

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and fiction, they exhibit this disparity. *Tristram Shandy* reveals the discrepancy between art and reality in four various ways, which are further analyzed in detail:

- 1) by presenting characters' various treatments of reality;
- 2) through mocking traditional literary practices;
- 3) by drawing attention to the fact that fictional time does not match the real clock time.

The Greek motto which is placed under the title of the first volume of the work implies that Sterne realizes that objects can cause a variety of contradictory meanings which may lead to misunderstanding and quarrels among people. *Tristram Shandy* is a subject to misunderstandings due to its characters' misinterpretations of each other's words, such as *bridge*. It is variously understood by Dr. Slop, who had in mind the treatment for Tristram's broken nose, and Toby, who thought it was a construction for his own town. "When *Trim* came in and told my father, that **Dr. Slop** in the kitchen, and busy in making **a bridge**,--my **Uncle Toby**,--...took it instantly for granted that Dr. *Slop* was making **a model of the marquis d'Hopital's bridge.**" (Sterne, 1986, 169) This misunderstanding is caused, according to Lock's theories about the meaning of words, because people impose various meanings onto words that represent reality.

Christensen infers that Walter's "quasi-scientific reasoning" (which stands for his approach to reality through words and systems) and insertion of authentic text of "Memorandum presented to the Gentlemen Doctors of the *Sorbonne*" about the procedure of baptizing an unborn child while still in the womb through injection, function as criticism of scientists. The misplacement of dedication (it is set in the middle of the third chapter instead of being at the very beginning of the novel) as well as informing the reader of the narrator's conception rather than his actual birth puts literary conventions of writing, the goal of which is usually to give precise details, under the satiric attack. In this way, Sterne's Neoclassical fellow writers' works become a source for his original work *Tristram Shandy*. that in its nature proclaims the idea of postmodern literary replenishment using existing literary resources and remaking them to create something truly valid.

The treatment of time is another means revealing disparity between art and reality. The narrator repeatedly tries to make the reader aware of the discrepancy between the fictional

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time in the novel and the actual time in the external world. The following extract is one of the many evidences of the technique to which almost an entire chapter is devoted in the second volume:

METAFICTIONALITY IN LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE

Lost in the Funhouse (1968) is a collection of short novels which is said to be a major landmark of metafictional fiction (unknown source). Barth investigates self-consciousness of a postmodern author and an individual belonging to the end of the 20th century. Metafiction helps Barth in revealing the ways in which self-consciousness influences the process of writing, author's and his characters' awareness and creation of themselves. Barth illustrates the very essence of metafiction, as Christensen would say, by presenting "the ties between the writer's creative work and his self-creation, art and life, love and art". (Miniotaite, 2007, 31) Metafiction makes his work a postmodern experimental work in which he delineates the condition of postmodern literature. By using old "exhausted" forms, styles and genres that cannot transmit the complexity of the period, he as if revitalizes and makes them "up-to-date". Barth emphasizes the role of the reader and exposes the fictitiousness of the world and literature, and presents the wish of postmodern author to make his life meaningful with the help of writing and creating. The episodes are linked in between by the postmodern theme of human identity and the exhaustion of traditional characterization.

Typographic Oddity**Moebius Strip**

Similarly to Sterne's interest in the typographic play, John Barth entertains his readers with the innovative treatment of the printed text. In this way, reader's attention is drawn to the materiality of fiction. The first short story called Frame-Tale in the collection *Lost in the Funhouse* serves as an experimental step towards unconventional management of books and fiction. Besides author's request to damage the book by cutting off the edge of the page, twisting and fastening it accordingly to the indicated small letters with the capital ones, the reader is invited to realize that language is material, in which a story serves as a material container. Moreover, construction of the Moebius strip implies that a narrative has a form which can be constructed, similarly to the reader's constructive project of the Moebius strip,

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where a reader builds a story out of the material of language. Finally, the *Frame-Tale* story reveals the postmodern treatment of exhausted literary forms, where form is both endless and closed, repetitious and infinitely rich in possibilities as compared to reading the physically constructed endless repetitious story “Once a upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time there was a story...”(Barth, 1982, 1-2). The *Frame-Tale* short story serves as an introduction to a disordered labyrinth-like narrative line with a central character, Ambrose and his telling his life story with comments and reflections in the collection of the short story *Lost in the Funhouse*.

Co-operative Reader

Postmodernism speaks of the birth of a reader, stressing his immensely growing role in the creative process of fiction making through his active participation as an interpreter who bestows the text with meaning.

As it has been mentioned before, *The Frame-Tale* functions as a drastic direct encouragement to physically involve into the co-creation of literary work. The reader not only has to give meaning to the unfinished story and also a shape. In this way, the reader is reminded that a story has a shape, narrative can be built out of the material of language whereas form is endless and close, repetitious and endless in possibilities. In this way, Barth forces to realize the boundary between art reality and practically illustrates how the exhausted forms can be up-to-dated in the manner of craft. *Lost in the Funhouse*, on the other hand, is subjected to a verbal representation of text in which readers are invited to use both visual and hearing senses when processing the tape for a single voiced *Echo*, lively or tape multi-voiced *Glossalalia* and or even recorded *Title* as well as listening to silent but visible author of *Autobiography*.

The narrator of *Life-Story* makes the reader's attentive reading responsible for the existence of the narrator. The narrator directly asks, insists and even dares the reader to stop reading and to silence him throughout the short story: “*But as he longs to die he and can't without your help you force him on, force him on. Will you deny you've read this sentence? This? To get away with the murder doesn't appeal to you, is that it? As if you hands weren't inky with other dyings! As if he'd know you'd kill him! Come on. He dares you.*” (Barth, 1982, 128)

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The reader is even scolded at the end for their interest in reading: “*The reader! You, dogged, unisultable, print-orientated bastard, it’s you I’m addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction. You’ve read me this far, then? Even this far? For what discreditable motive? How is it you don’t go to a movie, watch TV, stare at a wall, play tennis with a friend, make amorous advances to the person who comes to your mind when I speak of amorous advances? Can nothing surfeit, saturate you, turn you off? Where’s your shame?*” (Barth, 1982, 127) Sterne offers readers to take up a variety of other kinds of leisure activity, implying that literary exhaustion, especially the one of metafictional nature, is boring. However, at the same time, through irritating his readers by pointing out dreariness of the parodied conventional literary tradition, Barth creates a “heroic deed” and maintains their attention and even succeed in greatly entertaining his readers.

CONCLUSIONS

The undertaken research of the paper has achieved its aims of comparing and contrasting the nature and functions of metafictional techniques used in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* and illustrating the similarity and difference of metafictional experience in the two literary works. The hypothesis of the thesis has been fully confirmed by the analysis of the fictions in the analytic part. The examination of metafictional techniques in the two works has been carried out according to the classifications of literary critics Mark Currie and Ingrid Christensen that deal with graphic and non-graphic metafiction. The latter has been divided into the analysis of the narrator’s conception of his role, study of the narrative and the significance of the narratee (or the external reader). The results of the study have shown that:

□ Despite being a product of 18th century, *Tristram Shandy*, due to its metafictional similarity related to expression of writer’s world outlook and aesthetic preferences in comparison to postmodern collection of short stories *Lost in the Funhouse*, can be ascribed as a forerunner of postmodernism. Both Sterne and Barth having faced profoundly changeable eras, that were prone to social and political shifts as well as scientific and literary inventions, created extremely metafictional sarcastic works that served to critically assess the social and literary conditions of their eras. The amplitude of a variety of typographic metafiction and non-typographic metafictional devices helped Sterne illustrate the subjective nature of a human consciousness which is not linear but rather illogical one

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with a tendency to digress and repeat itself. Sterne's presented conception of a man's thinking and individuality is extremely different to the one that is nurtured by the philosophers and writers of Neoclassicism who view an individual's objective conception of the world as a continuous progress based logics and cognition. Sterne's individual is very alike to the condition of a postmodern individual illustrated in *Lost in the Funhouse*. The postmodern human in Barth's short stories is seen as creatively powerless, faceless, deconstructed, lonely and lost in continuous digressions. Both Sterne's and Barth's narrators experience difficulty in creational process of writing which is extremely postmodern.

□ The resemblance between *Tristram Shandy* and *Lost in the Funhouse* is clearly visible from the overt reference or employment of a vast variety of literary and non-literary sources which serve as collages representing complexity and fragmentation of postmodern human consciousness.

□ Moreover, Sterne in the same way as Barth tried to incorporate the existing literary forms with the latest possibilities of print inventions. This innovative writing feature can be viewed not only as a wish to break from conventions but a postmodern literary theory in practice that confirms the key idea of postmodern theory of literary exhaustion and replenishment where literary means are seen as incapable of conveying the complexity of present world and as result have to be revitalized.

□ Despite the varied approach to their audience, both the narrators of *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Tristram Shandy* invite their readers to experience the voiced and constructed text. Tristram wishes to have his text read aloud, while Barth wants to have some of the episodes recorded. The readers in *Tristram Shandy* are asked to draw, whereas the narratees in *Lost in the Funhouse* are challenged with the construction of the story. Consequently, the narrators of the works encourage their readers to become the co-authors of the text by not only imparting their meanings to the text but also by sharing an individual physical bond with it.

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