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**Makale Bilgisi / Article Information**

# METAFICTIONAL SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: A NOVEL

**Abstract**

Metafiction is the term applied to a certain type of fiction, or tendency in literature, which started with French literary experimentalism in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1970s. Metafiction is used to describe fiction that critically examines the relationship between reality and fiction, highlights its own formal elements, and calls attention to its own status as a work of art. Raymond Federman chooses to call this very unusual style "surfiction," and in his novel, *To Whom It May Concern: A Novel*, he blurs the lines between reality and fiction himself. Federman's novel is a notable postmodern work that exemplifies metafictional self-reflexivity techniques. The novel is particularly characterized by its self-awareness, emphasized through overt references to the storytelling process to such an extent that the narrative itself remains of secondary importance. He defies conventionally accepted and expected narrative forms in the novel by not providing the traditional reader with what they are prepared to receive. By focusing on the process of creating a story rather than the story itself, the novel loudly announces its fictiveness. This article aims to explore how the novel uses metafictional self-reflexivity in order to challenge traditional conventions of fiction. Through close textual analysis, this study takes a close look at

the techniques Federman engages in throughout the novel such as innovative use of typography, direct address to the reader, and non-linear narrative structure, along with many other digressing methods. The findings suggest that the novel, with Federman's self-reflexive techniques, serves as a notable example of self-aware fiction and unconventional storytelling, establishing itself a distinctive seat in metafictional writing. While the study is limited to this particular work, it contributes to broader discussions on metafiction and postmodern narrative strategies.

## İLGİLİ KİŞİYE: BİR ROMAN ESERİNDE ÜSTKURGUSAL KENDİNİ YANSITMA

Öz

Üst kurgu/üst kurmaca, 1950'lerde Fransız edebi deneyselciliğiyle başlayıp 1970'lerde zirveye ulaşan bir kurgu türü veya edebiyat eğilimi için kullanılan bir terimdir. Üstkurmaca, gerçeklik ile kurgu arasındaki ilişkiyi eleştirel bir şekilde inceleyen, kendi biçimsel unsurlarını öne çıkaran ve bir sanat eseri olarak kendi statüsüne dikkat çeken kurgu türünü tanımlamak için kullanılır. Raymond Federman bu alışılmadık tarzı "surfiction (yüzeysel kurgu)" olarak adlandırmakta ve *To Whom It May Concern: A Novel (İlgili Kişiye: Bir Roman)* adlı romanında gerçeklik ile kurgu arasındaki çizgileri bulanıklaştırmaktadır. Federman'ın bu romanı üstkurgusal kendini yansıtma teknikleri örnekleyen dikkat çekici bir postmodern çalışmadır. Romanda sıkça öyküanlatım sürecine doğrudan göndermeler yapılmaktadır. Öyle ki bu durum, anlatının kendisini dahi ikincil bir konuma iter. Roman, net bir şekilde vurgulanan bu öz farkındalıkla karakterize edilir. Yazar, geleneksel okuyucunun alışık olduğu üslubu onlara sunmayarak kabul görmüş anlatı biçimlerine meydan okur. Roman, hikâyeden ziyade hikâye oluşturma sürecine odaklanarak kurmaca olduğunu açıkça ilan eder. Bu makale, romanın üstkurmacaya özgü kendini yansıtma yöntemlerinden faydalanarak geleneksel kurgu normlarına nasıl meydan okuduğunu incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, yakın metin analizi yöntemini kullanarak Federman'ın romanda sergilediği yenilikçi tipografi kullanımı, okuyucuya doğrudan hitap etme ve doğrusal olmayan anlatı yapılandırması gibi teknikleri ile beraber diğer birçok anlatıdan sapma metodlarını ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları göstermektedir ki, Federman'ın kendini yansıtma teknikleri sayesinde roman, özbilinçli bir kurgu örneği teşkil etmektedir. Bu sayede, geleneksel olmayan bir anlatı olarak üstkurmaca yazınında kendine özgü bir yer edinmiştir. Çalışma her ne kadar söz konusu eserle sınırlı olsa da, üstkurmaca ve postmodern anlatı stratejileri üzerine yapılan daha geniş tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.

### Introduction

Since the 1960s, especially as postmodernist theories gained prominence, there has been a growing cultural and social focus on understanding the concept of reality and how man perceives his existence, which has greatly influenced the notion of fiction. The heightened awareness of social, political, and cultural factors has had a significant influence on the writing

of novels, and as a result, contemporary novelists have increasingly become aware of the theoretical considerations involved in creating fiction. The writers of the 1970s worked with avant-garde and experimental forms of writing to represent the "unreality" and lack of consistency in reality. Writers and scholars started questioning the overreliance on meta-narratives, stability of meaning, and exaltedness of traditional storytelling systems. Robert Scholes depicts the major technical innovations, writing modes and themes that emerged in various novel genres, "in the twentieth century it has become increasingly apparent that realism itself, instead of being simply the truest reflection of the world, was simply a formal device like any other, a tool to be put aside when it had lost its cutting edge" (1980: 169).

While characterizing the postmodernist novel as a rebirth, Barth suggests in his well-known essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" that the traditional novel form has already been exhausted:

> The simple burden of my essay was that the forms and modes of art live in human history and are therefore subject to usedupness, at least in the minds of significant numbers of artists in particular times and places: in other words, that artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work. (1988: 205).

Barth argues here that artistic forms are historically contingent, so they are not timeless. On the contrary, they become exhausted over time; however, this exhaustion does not entail the end of creativity. Rather it brings the possibility of reinvention and transformation, leading to multiplicity. This concept of exhaustion and renewal aligns with Derrida's idea that true freedom is born from an awareness of death since "Death, an awakening that keeps vigil over death, a conscience that looks death in the face, is another name for freedom." (1995: 15). Derrida implies that confronting finitude opens the way for transformation, just as Barth suggests that literature must acknowledge its own exhaustion to evolve. Postmodern approaches to representation and history, the paradoxes of fictive versus real, the use of ex-centric characters and narrators, the subversion of traditional modes of writing and the challenging of metanarratives are all essentials of this new type of writing. To investigate the narrative innovations of writers like Robert Coover, John Barth, Raymond Federman, Donald Barthelme, or Ronald Sukenick, however, in the 1970s, established categories such as postmodern novel, new novel, or antinovel were insufficient. This was because these writers' experimental writings not only subverted the prevailing conventions of earlier understandings of the novel writing but also openly discussed the process of experimenting while executing it. The works of this group of writers are well aware of their artifacy and they deliberately draw attention to it in varying degrees; some imply it between the lines while others place it in the spotlight for their readers. John Gardner openly reveals the difference by stating, "post-modernism sets up a vague antithesis…seems to mean nothing but unconventional" but "metafiction is a more precise term…it means fiction that, both in style

and theme, investigates fiction" (1985: 86-90). There are many literary methods and theoretical styles utilized for this purpose. In order to gather all of them under an umbrella, the term *"metafiction"* has been adopted by several literary theorists and academics including William H. Gass, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Roland Barthes. William Gass is the first person to have uttered the word metafiction, but the most accepted and comprehensive definition of metafiction has been provided by Patricia Waugh in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, but they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (1984: 2).

The fundamental intention for practicing metafiction, according to Waugh, is "to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality". In order to pose questions "self-consciously and systematically", the novelists who choose to create metafictive works "embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty" (Waugh 1984: 2), targeting everything cliché. In the traditional sense, the reader is preconditioned to expect a complete story that is convincingly true. Traditional readers never remind themselves nor are they reminded by the text of its artificiality or fictionality. This is precisely what practitioners of metafiction aspire to demolish and they do so by creating "fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (Hutcheon 1980: 1). Raymond Federman, the writer of the novel being examined in this article, suggests another word, "surfiction", for metafiction himself, explaining what it aims:

> And so, for me, the only fiction that still means something today is that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination and not in man's distorted vision of reality-that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality. This I call SURFICTION. However, not because it imitates reality, but because it exposes the fictionality of reality. Just as the Surrealists called that level of man's experience that functions in the subconscious SURREALITY, I call that level of man's activity that reveals life as a fiction SURFICTION. (1975: 7).

Federman is not only a practitioner but also a true defender of metafiction, or surfiction as he chooses to address it, and he employs it in many of his works, like in his magnum opus *To Whom It May Concern: A Novel*[1] ,that is also the focus of this article.

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[1]The novel will be addressed as *TWIMC* from now on.

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Self-reflexivity is a method that serves metafictional purposes, specifically by implementing a mechanism through which the narrative can consciously call attention to its narrativeness, encouraging (and sometimes forcing) readers to contemplate on the act of storytelling and the fabrication of it. The focus in self-reflexive texts is on "the imaginative process (of storytelling), instead of on that of the product (the story told)" (Hutcheon 1980: 3) which means that how the story is told is much more important than what is told in it. In some self-reflexive works, as in the one this article regards, storytelling process is so emphasized that there is almost no story to be found throughout the pages, at least not in the conventional sense. Self-reflexive narratives, novels in particular, employ numerous techniques such as addressing directly to the reader, mentioning the phases and struggles of writing process, parodying traditional narrative systems, digressing often, using a non-linear setting, distorting the typography (the facet) and containing multiple genres within. Raymond Federman's novel *TWIMC* is a notable example of a self-reflexive novel embodying several of these techniques; thus, the aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between fiction and reality in a self-reflexive frame through *TWIMC*.

### Self-Reflexive Games in *TWIMC*

Federman is a French-American writer mostly known for his avant-garde novels and his interest in Samuel Beckett's work. He is the only Holocaust survivor of his immediate family and this trauma, which he experienced as a fourteen year-old, is touched on in his novels and characters. There are different stories that he told to different people about how he survived the Holocaust, and he believes that all of them are truer than the other. He often mentions that he has "very little recollection" of his "background, as if it had all been blocked" and he states in one of his interviews "I'm never really sure if I am dealing with true facts or if I am in fact re-inventing what I think happened and who I was" (McCaffery and Federman 1983: 286). Maybe this blurred line between his actual life experiences and what he remembers of them pushes Federman to toy with fiction and reality.

Federman's novel *TWIMC* was first published in 1990. From the title to the ending, the novel is woven with self-reflexive elements in its narrative fabric which make it an exceptional model for studying the concept. Overall, the novel is about a writer (the narrator at the same time) trying to shape his story which is about Sarah and her cousin meeting years after they got separated. Both are the only Holocaust survivors of their families and they lived together for some part of their childhood after the Day of Liberation until the cousin had to leave Sarah to start a life in America. At present time, they are waiting at different airports reminiscing old days and what might happen when they finally meet after thirty-five years. This is the general framework of the narrator's story, but the story (or the stories) is not told as a traditional reader would expect. From the very beginning, the book is as if it is trying to create itself. Readers confront the narrator's effort to decide how to compose the story, where to locate the

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characters and even what to name them or what to name the novel itself. He often calls out to the reader, asking for their opinion for the things he cannot decide which almost feels like a form of collaboration. While mixing several genres together under the label of *A Novel*, the writer digresses by jumping between topics, places, times and tones frequently, suiting the action to his words in his book *Surfiction* where Federman emphasizes that "well-made-plots" and "linear and orderly narrations" (1975: 10) are neither necessary nor possible anymore. Along with the unusual collection of content, the typography (the face form) of the book is quite out of the ordinary where we encounter interesting usage of pages. Federman polishes the metafictional self-reflexive surface of the novel by parodying conventional storytelling systems as well. He embraces a narrative style that defamiliarizes the reader from their traditional reading habits and offers a new, alternative reading experience to them by making multiple sequences and interpretations possible. Utilizing unexpected forms and content in *TWIMC*, Federman aims to liberate fiction from its incumbency as "a mirror being dragged along reality" in order to "be a representation of something exterior to it", and gives fiction the freedom of "self-representation". This liberation of fiction will both function as an "interrogation" of conventional narratives and a "denunciation of its fraudulence, of what it really is: an illusion (a fiction), just as life is an illusion (a fiction)" (1975: 11). Throughout this article, self-reflexive games that enrich *TWIMC* are studied under the headings of Storytelling Process, Digression, Addressing the Reader, Typography and Parodying Conventional Methods.

## 1.    Storytelling process

Linda Hutcheon, in her book Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox, mentions two different types of self-reflexive fiction, one being overt and the other being covert (1980: 7). Overt self-reflexive novels serve as beacons for their own construction process while covert ones are more implicit. Overt self-reflexive novels lay bare their artificiality to the extent of flaunting it. That is why it is easier to categorize these novels as metafictional self-reflexive works. Thus, the most obvious and very important self-reflexive element in *TWIMC* is its nature as a book that is trying to write itself. The novel not only comments on its artificiality, but it also accentuates the craftsmanship of storytelling. From the beginning to the end, the reader accompanies the narrator as he develops stories, imagines and shapes his characters, makes decisions, creates a framework for himself, finds a title for the book and goes through struggles of writing. Federman considers his books as "grow[ing] from the inside" (McCaffery and Federman 1983: 302) which is very accurate considering *TWIMC* is downright the process of growing and becoming. This process is highlighted throughout the book in many aspects such as the ongoing process of constructing stories, character building, creating an outline and writer's struggles along the way.

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The narrator of *TWIMC* is a writer with some very vague ideas about a story in his mind. He has a couple of characters whom he develops over the course of the book. He tries to decide how to start his story on page 18: "I keep searching for a possible beginning" and then he "toy[s] with" (Federman 1990: 18) a few probabilities, immediately after, he decides to postpone it. On page 102, which is beyond half of the book, he ponders again: "It's the opening that I can't get. The where to begin" (Federman 1990: 102). Yet again, he experiments with a couple of possible beginnings and again, he decides that "The best thing to do now is wait, and hope" until he "stumble[s] on the right design" (Federman 1990: 103). Similarly, he thinks about what to name his book for pages, only to leave the decision to another day; he ponders over whether to include a character to the story more and how to do it if he decides to do so, only to postpone the fixing upon it. The narrator's storytelling process is perpetually delayed by a lack of inspiration, confusion, distraction or an excess of options. Federman refers to this type of delay as an attraction: "But perhaps it is this postponing and cancelling of the story which makes my fiction interesting, for it points to the fact that it is not the story that counts but the telling or untelling of the story" (McCaffery and Federman 1983: 296). He is neither interested in nor concerned with the content of the tale. The shaping, forming, moulding process is what excites Federman, no matter if the narrator ends up with a story in the end or not. The narrator tells multiple times in the novel that "this story is still in the speculative stage" and "the beasts are still roaming wild in [his] brain and aren't ready to be locked up in the book cage. Not ready for paper domestication" (Federman 1990: 40, 87).

Federman highlightes various intricacies a writer should consider over the course of a story's creation such as forging character traits, deciding where to begin or where to end, selecting a title and weighing whether he is giving too many or too little details. He frequently reminds himself and the reader of the story's details that he has determined up until then. There are multiple repetitions of unimportant details such as the color of Sarah's eyes, that they shared a mattress in a basement during the time they lived together after the Day of Liberation and that it has been thirty-five years since the cousins were separated. He highlights the fixed parts of his story several times, creating an outline for himself:

> Once upon a time, after the war, the cousin went away to one place, and Sarah to another. They were separated for many years. Doesn't matter how long, or which war. All wars separate people. All wars make orphans of children and mourners of parents. They suffered. Years later, when they were reunited, they cried". (Federman 1990: 105).

These reiterations and affirmations illustrate how a writer builds a framework during the creation of a story and how it is fluid, ever-changing, expanding and shrinking. The narrator's storytelling process is nonlinear and fragmented throughout the book, but as he shapes the story in his mind, his words become more confident:

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> That's how I see it so far. It's taking shape. I feel like I'm on the verge of a huge
> saga. Lots of problems to solve but I'm beginning to get a sense of the story.
> It's not going to be easy. I can already hear the objections, but remember,
> writing a book is also learning how to write a book. (Federman 1990: 76).

After all the hassle he has had throughout the novel, near the very end, the narrator acknowledges that the rest of the story will express itself effortlessly: "I was no longer the director of the cousins' drama, just one of its spectators" (Federman 1990: 173). It is notable that here, at the end of the novel, Federman specifies that he has written what matters to him, which is the writing process; and he has consciously left the story of cousins in the state of fragments, which can never be told any way different than the other stories that have been told for thousands of years, hence redundant to be finished.

## 2.    Deconstructive Digressions

The reader greets another interesting self-reflexive game Federman chooses to engage in; digression. This technique involves dissecting the novel deliberately by digressing often, jumping between times, places, topics, tones and even genres. The postponing of writer's decisions fore-mentioned under the title of Storytelling Process is a digression technique as well. This type of writing ends up in a fragmented, non-linear flow in the narrative, destructing traditional reading habits. So, why is digression utilized often in metafiction and how does it function as a self-reflexive element? In Surfiction, Federman explains why this technique is embraced by him and many other writers:

> If life and fiction are no longer distinguishable one from the other, nor
> complementary to one another, and if we agree that life is never linear, that,
> in fact, life is chaos because it is never experienced in a straight, chronological
> line, then, similarly, linear and orderly narration is no longer possible. The
> pseudo-realistic novel sought to give a semblance of order to the chaos of life,
> and did so by relying on the well-made-plot (the story line) which, as we now
> realize, has become quite inessential to fiction. The plot having disappeared,
> it is no longer necessary to have the events of fiction follow a logical,
> sequential pattern (in time and in space). (Federman 1975: 10)

Federman remarks that adopting the same linearity and sequentiality as traditional novels do is pointless because a stable and well-made plot does not exist anymore in the new discourse type he offers. Thus, he further explains, "the new fictitious discourse" should resemble a "curve" rather than a line, which enables a potency for various combinations of events/stories (Federman 1975: 11). Other than offering multiple reading experiences for readers, digression lays bare the fictionality of fiction by insistently disrupting the flow. The reading experience is, again, defamiliarized, refreshing the reader's understanding of reality.

The narrator/character in *TWIMC,* tells the story of Sarah and her cousin trying to meet after thirty-five years in the present time, but he also tells about their past, more than the

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present-time story actually. Their past is narrated in fragments; there is the past where Sarah is saved by chance from the roundup while all her family is taken away; there is the past where the cousin (who remains nameless for the entirety of the novel) eludes from the roundup while all his family is taken away; there is the past when the cousin works in a ranch; there is the past when Sarah lives and is abused by a reverend; there is the past when the two meet and live together after the Day of Liberation; and there are also multiple other pasts where the characters reminisce about their lives before the roundup. There is no chronological order throughout the book. The narrator tells whichever story he is ready and wants to tell at that moment[2], leaves it unfinished, takes on from another story and then suddenly talks about his emotional state and his real life. He digresses very often when he makes sudden decisions in the middle of a story such as when he suddenly decides (and immediately renounces) to name the cousin: "Hey! maybe I could name the cousin Jacques?" or when he thinks of an action the characters "must" do in the future: "Sarah wonders if her cousin also remembers the poems he had to memorize when he was a boy. She must ask him. It'll be fun to find out how much he remembers" (Federman 1990: 106, 53). The narrator creates and puts together the pieces of his story but he doesn't do it chronologically and step by step; he rather proceeds randomly and downstream. While elaborating the suffering of the cousins on page 108, he ceases the narration and decides to take on from somewhere else: "But enough of that. Instead let's go see what the cousin is doing. By now he must have dozed off in the waiting lounge, the unread book still open on his lap. No. Rather, let's go find Sarah and Elie at the other airport, and leave the cousin" (Federman 1990: 108). These abrupt changes of mind serve as self-reflexive digressions that attract the reader's attention to the fictionality of the story and reality of the storytelling.

Being obliged to be confined in just one period of time while writing, creates a struggle for the narrator. He expresses that he would like to create a "stereophonic" effect by writing "simultaneously in the same sentence different moments of the story" (Federman 1990: 77). This particular desire is another reason behind why Federman utilizes digression. Conventional straightforward writing cannot reach the ultimate omnipresence of mind. Curving, and sometimes breaking the line of conventional sequence allows the writer to wander more freely between times and places. There are some flowing parts in the novel where the narrator tells one of the stories in a conventional way, without curving or breaking the lineup for several pages. The reader dives into the story in these parts only to be poked by the narrator midway: "Well well, how do you like that! Here I am suddenly in the middle of a good old-fashioned melodrama" (Federman 1990: 135). The narrator is very well aware of his digressions, and he often mentions that the book is in the process of shaping in his head, so

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[2]"But we must wait for that, for the rest of their story. I have not yet imagined it as it should be imagined. I have not yet found the words, the correct words to speak that part of the story. Perhaps next time. I am tired now. All this makes me so tired."(Federman, 1990,p.143)

digression is more than welcome. Federman shows both how numb the reader becomes in the linearity and how much motion come along with the digression.

Federman takes the stylistic device of digression a step further by blending several different genres together in *TWIMC.* Although Federman announces the book as *A Novel* on the front page, it is narrated in the form of letters and the closest genre it can belong is the category of epistolary novel. Epistolary novels are already mixtures of two different styles of narratives. Yet Federman adds a few more genres to the blend, turning the book into a potpourri. Like many other books of his, *TWIMC* blurs the line between fiction and Federman's personal life history, which adds the layer of autobiography. His characters bear many similarities to himself and to the people in his personal life. The cousin in the novel is a representation of Federman in many aspects. There are a lot of references to his life story in France, how he survived the Holocaust, his family members and his blurred memories. There is a three-ply parallelism among Federman, his character; the narrator, and the narrator's character; the cousin. The cousin is a sculptor, and his sculptures are unfinished, "barely emerge[d] from the raw material" (Federman 1990: 15-16). The narrator describes them as "either to be struggling to come out and become or else receding into a condition of non-being" (Federman 1990: 16). This description could easily be made for the novel itself since it also is in the state of endeavor to take shape and is in the process of dynamic and evolving creation. Representing the cousin as a sculptor whose sculptures are striving to "come out" while Federman is a writer whose fiction strives for the same is an implicit resemblance between them. However, Federman does not abstain from indicating the resemblance explicitly as the narrator says about the cousin that "he [is] too, like me" (Federman 1990: 41), and mentions that the cousin "also has a daughter about the same age as" his (Federman 1990: 80). Autobiographical elements embedded into narration is not surprising since Federman himself refers to his fiction as "an investigation of the self" (McCaffery and Federman 1983: 290). Other than autobiographical elements, however, Federman adds another layer of reality both by referring to real life[3] and by switching his tone occasionally to a diary:

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> Winter is here, It hit us this morning with uncontrolled fury. We are snowed in. I am settling into the comfort of helplessness wondering if one can debate the correctness or incorrectness of the unforgivable enormity. There was something so bureaucratic about it. It was kept as a dirty grimy secret rather than being acknowledged as the product of a terrible destiny. That really troubles the mind. (Federman 1990: 99)

This excerpt about the narrator's reality, totally irrelevant to his fictional story, is the beginning and ending paragraph of one of the letters. After writing the date, narrator writes this paragraph and without further narration, the novel skips to another letter which is

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[3]"Why not? As good a topic as any and quite fashionable these days" (Federman, 1990, p.17).

intriguing because this short paragraph is hardly a note, let alone an epistle. It does not have any mention of the Sarah story. This type of narration in the novel where the narrator writes solely on his feelings and daily actions can be considered as diary or journal entries. Frequent sharp switches between genres blatantly reminds the reader of the text's fictionality and artificiality. Blending different genres and blurring the line between real life and fiction serves to the self-reflexive aim of digression and are among the experimental techniques used in this novel as well as many other metafictive novels.

### 3.     Typography as a challenge

Along with the narrative techniques, *TWIMC* makes use of optical games of typography which intensifies the self-reflexive infrastructure of the novel. In the conventional sense, there are certain limits and unuttered rules for writing a novel. Any physical characteristic related to what the reader *see* when they look at a novel such as spacing, syntax, paginal setting, front and back covers, dates and punctuation seem to have been fashioned with a shared template in the traditionally written novels. Federman not only endeavors but he also prompts to distort these stereotyped forms and embrace a nonrestricted attitude towards typography:

> The very act of reading a book, starting at the top of the first page, and moving from left to right, top to bottom, page after page to the end in a consecutive prearranged manner has become boring and restrictive. […] the whole traditional, conventional, fixed, and boring method of reading a book must be questioned, challenged, demolished. And it is the writer (and not modern printing technology) who must, through innovations in the writing itself—in the typography and topology of his writing—renew our system of reading. (1975: 9)

Federman encourages the writers to overthrow any "fixed" way of reading experience since it has become "*boring* and *restrictive*". He advocates that the writer is responsible for making the traditional reading habits change by applying typographical diversity. It is easy to observe how Federman challenges conventional practices of typography throughout *TWIMC* starting from the front cover. The book's design and length make the reader think that this is a novel, but the title is *To Whom It May Concern:* which is a popular way to start a letter. Immediately after that, the writer adds a detail to the title, making sure that we understand that this is in fact *A Novel.* This preliminary confusion provides a basis for abandonment and parody of literary conventions and hints the upcoming typographical plays.

The entirety of *TWIMC* is a creation process of a story, but the narrator/creator of the story is rather concerned about the form of what he is writing instead of the content. He mentions this several times in the book: "The question before me, however, is not of the story. The story? Always the same. The question is of the tone and of the shape of the story…its geometry. Yes, how to stage the story of Sarah and her cousin?" (Federman 1990: 18). The

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statement about the story being "always the same" is the reason why the narrator is so obsessed with the form which he often refers to as "geometry", "geography" or "the design" of the narration (Federman 1990: 10, 18). Federman breaks the reading routine of reader's eyes by employing renovative and atypical techniques of typography such as over-usage of hyphens and ellipsis, non-existent quotation marks for dialogues, unusual usage of capital letters, abundant spacing in between paragraphs and lack of first-line indents.

Fig. 1 (Federman 1990: 57)  Fig. 2 (Federman 1990: 69)

Further around the square, while the neighbor inspected another truck,
Sa: Further around the square, while the neighbor inspected another truck,
in t Sarah freed her hand and drifted away to talk to the little girl who lived
eve in the building next to hers and with whom she often played. Where is
everybody going? Sarah asked.

Th
kno The other girl shrugged her shoulders in a gesture of ignorance. I don't
sho know. They didn't say. They just said we shouldn't worry, but we
it's should bring warm clothes. Maybe they're taking us to a place where
goi it's cold. To the mountains for a vacation, yes maybe that's where we're
on going. They wouldn't let me take any of my dolls though, not even the
to one your mother made that blue dress for, they said it was not practical
pla to take dolls. So instead I brought my yoyo just to have something to
da play with. And the little girl, perhaps a year younger than Sarah, big
it t dark eyes, pulled her yoyo out of her coat pocket and proudly showed
she it to Sarah. Then she asked, which is your truck? Sarah did not answer,
sai she didn't have a truck. She looked at the yoyo for a moment and then
said, I've got to go, and walked away.

Still crying, but quietly now, Sarah managed to stammer in one long breath, it's my mother and my father ... and my brothers too ... they ... they were taken away ... this morning ... I don't know where they are ... and there were all these people and all these soldiers on the square and trucks ... and this woman ... this woman she lives next to us in the same building ... she ... she wanted to take me ...

In the paragraphs seen in Figure 1, for example, it is never made clear with punctuation where a character starts talking, where they stop, and where the narrator takes over. Familiar one-line space between paragraphs is continuously violated and the paragraph beginnings are never indented. Figure 2 displays one of the several examples of over usage of ellipsis in the novel. Ellipsis is utilized for pauses in conversations, but they are traditionally used sparingly. There are more eye exercises Federman offers in *TWIMC*:

Fig. 3 (Federman 1990: 52)  Fig. 4 (Federman 1990: 167)

Do you know that poem? It's really something. Here, I'll give you the first stanza in a rough translation:

> Those who piously died for the
> country deserve
> That the people come and pray at
> their coffins.
> Among the beautiful names theirs
> is the most beautiful.
> All the glory near them passes and
> falls ephemerally.
> And, just as the sweet voice of a
> mother would,
> The voice of the nation rocks them
> in their tombs.

Can you imagine all the school children in their national costumes going around reciting such things? One really understands why The

So here I am. Without a title again, unable to proceed in any direction I could go back to the unpromising SARAH, or even SARAH & HER COUSIN, and leave it at that, but that would be a form of regression. And so this morning, as I continue searching for the right combination of words on which to hang this story, I suddenly remember how you once questioned the vagueness I decided to impose on the cousins' lives, vagueness of time and place, and it occurs to me that perhaps their story should be called HERE & ELSEWHERE. The HERE being the place where you and I have been united with words, and the ELSEWHERE the site where Sarah and her cousin have been separated by events. HERE where the story is trying to be told. ELSEWHERE where it happened.

There is also the temptation of FURTHER ABANDONMENT since the story, and what nourishes it are constantly being abandoned. But finally, having to face the fact that the whole thing may never reach coherence and forever remain the epistolary fragments you have before you, why not simply say that it is addressed, in its indecision and formlessness, TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, and get on with it.

A poem interrupts the customary eye movement in figure 3; while in figure 4, the reader encounters with many majuscular words, some of which are divided by an ampersand, very unconventional to see in between the lines of a novel. Şule Okuroğlu Özün comments on the typography's contribution to self-reflexivity as "a new type of paginal syntax" that "wipes out the conventional elements associated with the book form, displays typographical plays and visual illustrations, and also changes the way words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters and punctuation appear on the page to expose the possibilities of narrative to create an interactive experience that would attract attention to the status of the book as an artefact" (2012: 83-84). These small but effective visual changes not only confront the readers with the artifacy of fiction but also make them ask 'who made the conventional orthographic rules and why did we all obey them as if they were sacred?' which is another motive of Federman as a self-reflexive novelist; to break the invisible code of typography to create space for what he calls "the new writing" (Federman 1975: 10).

### 4.     Addressing Directly to the Reader

Another metafictional self-reflexive game Federman systematically engages in *TWIMC* is addressing consciously to the reader. This technique undermines the illusion of reality by crossing the traditional barrier between the fictional universe and the real world. Deliberately calling out to the reader is at the same time acknowledging the presence of the reader as well. *TWIMC* is written in the form of letters; letters from the writer/narrator to whoever chooses to read it, hence *To Whom It May Concern.* The first words in the novel are "Listen…suppose the story were to begin with […]" (Federman 1990: 9). The narrator addresses directly to the reader from the very beginning of the book, asking them to "listen". How revolutionary it is to ask someone who reads, to "listen". Then the narrator makes it clear that he just "suppose[s]" the

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beginning of a story which is outrageous to traditional expectations because a narrator is presumed to be either omnipotent or self-confident while telling a story. The narrator in this book, on the other hand, is admittedly ambivalent. He has a cue on his mind, but it has not taken any shape yet. The novel progresses as he writes the things on his mind and tries to decide how to construct a story with what he has. He is even open to suggestions since he asks the reader's opinion many times throughout the novel: "Make suggestions. Object. What's the use having a buddy like you if one cannot rely on him", "Look, I am not asking for kindness and civility, […] Give me honest brutality", "I need a push. I need your crutches until I am able to walk alone. So I'll keep bugging you" (Federman 1990: 78, 86). The narrator is friendly towards the reader while communicating and sincere as he values the reader's counsel. But he feels frustrated when he receives mundane answers that do not contribute to his writing. This reaction is in fact a criticism towards traditional reader's passivity. The narrator bluntly reveals his intentions to collaborate with the reader to build his story: "A book for us to do or undo together. A joint enterprise. And why not. Then I will lean on you. Use you. Abuse your patience and friendship" (Federman 1990: 37). In postmodern literary universe, both the reader and the writer are equally responsible for the outcome because the text, after all, is a hybrid of both what the writer writes and what the reader reads. Federman is building an imaginary bridge between the writer and the reader via the narrator of the novel who also constantly checks if he is understood well by asking the reader "Do you understand what I'm trying to stage here?" or "You see what I have before me?" (Federman 1990: 14). He yearns confirmation from his readers: "What do you think of what I told you of Sarah & her Cousin? Is there a book here? […] I need words from you" (Federman 1990: 34) or "So you think there are possibilities here. The book of Sarah & her Cousin?" (Federman 1990: 37). These attempts are made for communication purposes and they push the reader to be actively engaged in the storytelling process.

Jacques Derrida's concept of "différance" offers the idea that meaning is always in a state of deferral, constantly shifting and never fully present. As Derrida states, "the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" (1982: 11). In other words, meaning is never self-contained. It always relies on other signs, contexts and interpretations to take shape, and it changes from person to person. Even multiple meanings and understandings within the mind of one person are considered possible. Complying with Derrida's notion, Federman's effort to integrate each reader in the story welcomes and celebrates multiple meanings and understandings. The narrator interacts with the reader not only for their reflection on his story-to-be, but he also asks about their personal opinions or knowledge with questions such as "Hey buddy, aren't you tired of playing the same song over and over again?"(Federman 1990: 17), "What do you think of Josette?" (77) or "Do you know that poem?" (52). Keeping the reader in the process of storytelling the whole time is important to the narrator. Instead of imposing what he wants to

write, he creates room for the reader to contemplate not only on the novel but also on themselves. Exhaustion of dictated, directed, one-sided story telling traditions lead Federman to include his readers in the system, to encourage them to join the writer through his journey of assembling his story. All the excerpts above and such from the novel progressively strengthen the connection between the co-creators of it. This self-reflexive technique serves the purpose of showing appreciation to the reader and their role in both the writing process and the outcome, as well as providing space for individual and unique experience of reading for each reader.

## 5. Parodying Conventional Methods

Changing environment, politics, wars, famines, laws or prosperity that bring individual psychological upheavals and collective impulses to speak up against social distress through fiction have brought many changes in the content and style of writing. However, the writing system has somehow remained unchanged. A great majority of the traditional novels share a system of creating an unquestionable reality within fiction that is told in linear, chronological sequence. This system, which is referred to as "the cozy realm of conventional practices" (1990: 136) by Federman in the novel, is thoroughly challenged by metafictional writers in order to draw attention to its monotony. Federman manages to do so by parodying the conventional system distinctively in *TWIMC*. On the first page of the novel, for instance, the date "Sunday, November 20" (Federman 1990: 9) is noted without the indication of any year. Throughout the novel, the dates are always ambiguous. As for the locations, instead of their names as we know them, Federman chooses to use phrases that give hints about them. He refers to France as "the country where the two cousins were born", to America as "a land of misrepresentation" and to Israel as "a land of false promises" or the "desert" (Federman 1990: 10). Federman makes a commentary on this ambiguous setting he adopts in the novel itself:

> What difference does it make when and where it happened, since none of it is verifiable. We're not dealing with credibility here, but with the truth. That's not the same. Certain truths do not need the specificity of time and place to be asserted. A war is a war, doesn't matter where and when it happened. And suffering is timeless. We all suffer a form of exile the moment we are born, what difference does it make when or where it begins. […] even if I were to give exact dates, these would have to be manipulated as the story progresses. (Federman 1990: 39-40)

Traditionally, readers are preconditioned to believe a story to be true and prepared to immerse themselves completely in it. Exact dates and precise locations provided by assertive narrators intend to construct this so-called reality and prevent any inconvenience from shattering that reality. Postmodern writers on the other hand, metafictive ones in particular, question the reality itself and the dictated belief in the reality of fiction is somewhat sarcastic

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to them. Federman reveals his awareness of the traditional expectations by saying that the characters "need to be situated in the proper frame--a place of perfect certainty where something fundamental can be said about them" (Federman 1990: 39) yet he chooses to mock conventional ways by utilizing them himself, in his own way. He indicates a date but makes sure that it does not try to achieve what the dates in traditional novels do. His story happens in well-known countries, but he refuses to mention their names and by doing so, he draws attention to traditional writer's manipulation to hide the fakeness of the story by grounding it in real places. He underlines that this (and any other fictional novel) is just a story and there is no need to act like it is real:

> The grim story of Sarah and her cousin should be told without any mention of time and place. It should happen on a timeless vacant stage without scenery. No names of places. No decor. Nothing. It simply happened, sometime and somewhere. (Federman 1990: 104)

Parodying conventional storytelling methods, Federman underlines the fact that he is not concerned with making his stories sound realistic. On the contrary, he deals with the unraveling of conventional stories' "fraudulence" (1975: 11).

### Conclusion

Metafiction is the term applied to a certain type of fiction, or tendency in literature which started with French literary experimentalism in the 1950s and reached its peak in 1970s. Federman chooses to call this very unusual style "surfiction" as he refers to a motive for embracing this style other than deconstructing the concept of reality. For him, "We have come so far in the long journey of literature that all stories whisper the same old thing to us in the same cracked voice. And so we must dig in to see where raw words and fundamental sounds are buried" (Federman 1990: 86). He refers to the issue of exhaustion in both stories and storytelling methods. Self-reflexivity takes metafictional purposes one step further and allows the novel to consciously and openly refer to its own creation process. Federman utilizes many metafictional self-reflexive techniques in his novel *To Whom It May Concern* that make it one of the most remarkable self-reflexive works such as portraying the novel as an entity that writes itself, frequently digressing in the process of creating a novel, addressing directly and consciously to the reader, crafting a unique and unconventional typography, and parodying stereotypical writing traditions. All these self-reflexive techniques in their core serve the objective of undermining the longstanding indisputability of reality by exceeding conventional limits attributed to fiction. This metafictional work defamiliarizes the reader in order to allow them to explore both the fictional and the real world anew.

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