

**The Metamodern Moment**

***Post-Postmodernism and its effect on Contemporary, Gothic, and***

***Metafictional Literature***

VOLUME II: ESSAYS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of English Literature

March 2018

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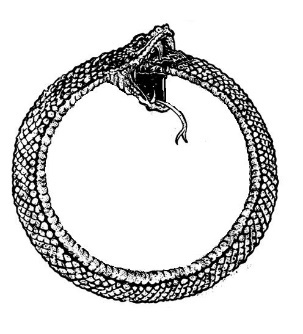
***Critical Collected Edition***

*Edited and Introduced by*

ARCOT CLERVAL OSBEORN

**Volume 2**

**Essays**

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Ouroboros

Dandon and Neo York

Ouroboros Group Limited

Ouroboros House, Burnt Mill,

Scunthorpe, North Lincs, DN15 1PE, England

*And Associated Companies throughout the world*

*Published in the Western Dandom*

*By Ouroboros Publishing, Neo York*

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First Published 2158

ISBN 0 582 21291 X CSDD

ISBN 0 582 212928 PPDR

**Southish Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is

Available from the Southish Library

**Library of Congaress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Applied for.

Set 19K in 12 on 23 Palatino

Produced by Ouroboros Neo York Publishers (Pte) Ltd

Printed in Good Faith.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

The estate of the Southward Preservation Foundation for the articles: Southward, D, ‘The Postmodern Problem’ in *We Need to Get Away,* Vol. 12, Iss. 8, (2010), pp. 01-33; Southward, D, ‘The Metamodern Solution,’ in *Help!*, Vol. 2, Iss. 2/3, (2020), pp. 101-31; Southward, D, ‘21st Century Gothic; Transcendence, Sincerity, & the Sublime’ in *Punter’s Pride*, ed. Tsimmons, Richard (Neo York: *Ouroboros,* 2021), pp. 300-343; Southward, D, ‘The Dark History of the Novel; An Exploration of The Metafictional Imperative in Literature’ in *The Dark Arts Journal,* Vol. 15, Iss. 6, (2022); Southward, D, ‘Defeat is Good for Art: The Metamodern impulse in Gothic Metafiction’ in *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, Vol 4, Iss 1/2, (2015), pp. 30-41; Southward, D, ‘Frame Narratives and the Gothic Subject’ in *The Dark Arts Journal* Vol. 1, Iss. 1, (2015); Southward, D, ‘Dealing with the Creative/Critical Divide: these men as readers cannot know what it is to write,’ in *New Writing,* Vol. 13, Iss. 2, (2016), pp. 273-80.

Also, to my esteemed colleague Arapaima, I can only say thank you for the healthy competition. The best man, it seems won.

EDITOR’S PREFACE

The outlines of contemporary critical theory are now often taught as a standard feature of a degree in literary studies, though the breadth of such studies has been significantly culled following the reign of our late monarch. Daniel Southward (born Arcot O. Southward), first of his name, king of the Engalls, breaker of academic names, is now considered one of the worst literary, if not political, tyrants in human history. To linger too long on the degrading punishments doled out in his long, terrible reign would, at this point in history, be a significant waste of time; there are few who have not been affected in some manner by the reign of the meta-king, and countless studies devoted to analysis of the madman’s methodology and, if you’ll forgive me, meanness.[[1]](#footnote-1) He was a terrible human. Yet, while his influence on society is notorious at best and genocidal at worst, he remains a fascinating figure in the eyes of the few still with a mind to study the greatest monster of our times.

Collected herein please find, for the very first time, a collated collection of the young tyrant’s academic essays – written before, it must be said, his all too late ejection from the scholarly world. One can see in these works a mind obsessed with the word ‘meta,’ a buzzword of the latter century of his reign synonymous with a long death by papercut, alongside forming opinions on the necessity of supplanting the postmodern (opinions which would later be explained by the likes of H.N. Voice as fundamental in explaining Southward’s obsession with feeling *anything* at all, pain or pleasure).

A monster, surely, but one that it is better to understand as part of the now-decimated literary history which we must repair. I have, for your consideration dear reader, collected this small series of essays in the hope that, in conjunction with Southward’s lost text, we may perchance understand *why*. There is little more to say, I ask you only to open your mind, to see these as the somewhat awkward ramblings of a young academic desperate to prove himself to a community of vastly superior academic peers. Understand, yes, forgive, no – as the new post-southwardian motto goes.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

*The publishers and fellow Series Editor, Wade J. Arapaima, regret to record that Arcot C. Osbeorn vanished in January 2158. While many blame the production of this text, and the associated lingering Southwardian supporters who adamantly requested Dr. Osbeorn desist in his, as they presumed it, defamatory production, we feel that Arcot would only have wished his project to continue regardless. All those he worked with will remember him with the utmost respect and affection, despite his love of Southward. All profits from this text are, in accordance with Arcot’s wishes, to be donated to the Southwardian Preservation Fund.*

CHAPTER I – SOUTHWARD VS SOCIETY

Southward’s first serious published article introduces and expands upon the 21st century issue of ‘post-postmodernism.’ Southward begins with an exploration of the described end of the Postmodern impulse, the dominant cultural mode of the late 20th and early 21st century, which was definitively declining in the eyes of cultural critics around the time that Southward received his PhD. Deconstructive and highly ironical, the surface-only years of postmodern pastiche and parody were beginning to wane and in their place new paradigms vied for the opportunity to claim the title as the true heir to the postmodern throne. Interestingly enough, this essay marks the first use by Southward of the term ‘Dystopian Resignation,’ a newly monikered term that would become all too familiar by the time of his scientifically extended reign. While somewhat inchoate, this initial representation of dystopian reluctance, or acceptance, is unique in showcasing a more human side of the tyrant-to-be, particularly through his analysis of children’s television in his argument, evidencing a potential predilection for the cartoon medium that we have hitherto never thought possible of the man.

The main argument follows an analysis of the end of the postmodern, the series of potential monikers for the new epoch to come that had arisen in the aftermath, and Southward’s own analysis of contemporary culture based on his research into these factors. I offer no remarks on it, and make few additions to it, leaving everyone to judge for himself. We have heard much of the rage of fanaticism in former days, but nothing to this.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

**THE POST-POSTMODERN PROBLEM**

**1. Introduction**

It has been said that postmodernism, the dominant cultural and artistic paradigm of the last half-century, is dead. Linda Hutcheon, one of the great postmodern voices of our time, with her finger firmly on the pulse – or lack thereof – of society claims that ‘the postmodern moment has passed,’[[2]](#footnote-2) and that it is now ‘a thing of the past,’[[3]](#footnote-3) famously inviting us to ‘just say it: It's over.’[[4]](#footnote-4) Postmodernism, it seems, having been in slow decline and very ill-health since the late 1980s, ‘lingering at death’s door, refusing to pass definitively for some time,’[[5]](#footnote-5) died, according to David Ciccoricco, ‘exactly on the morning of September 11th, 2001.’[[6]](#footnote-6) Brian McHale too puts weight behind this last specific date being the direct end of postmodernism, suggesting that ‘on 9/11 history finally caught up with our postmodern imagination of disaster, and we are now living in the aftermath of postmodernism.’[[7]](#footnote-7) We have, it is clear, moved on and left postmodernism for dead, interred in the rubble of the eleventh of September, 2001.[[8]](#footnote-8) The tragic attacks on the World Trade Centre sparked a global debate about the role of postmodernism in the west, with critical commentators crying out for new ‘transcendent ethical perspectives,’[[9]](#footnote-9) along with, naturally, the return of a belief in the grand narrative of evil, and an end to irony in order to properly respond to the tragedy. [[10]](#footnote-10) This last point, in particular, marked a significant change in contemporary culture and the end of the postmodern; irony, so integral to the postmodern agenda, could not possibly explain or examine the attacks of September the 11th. As William Zinsser stated, ‘there was nothing ironic about 9/11. Or about the never-ending wars it ignited in Iraq and Afghanistan. Or about the torture of political prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. It was a new planet and a new age. Post-ironic.’[[11]](#footnote-11) Irony, in the literary (and postmodern) sense that the surface meaning of presented artefacts or actions are definitively dissimilar from the underlying meaning, suddenly appeared an inappropriate tool in answering the charges of contemporary life. September the 11th began to mark a shift away from irony and towards something altogether more ‘authentic’ – ‘encompassing notions of “the original,” “the real”, sincerity and validity’[[12]](#footnote-12) – a shift that has continued to develop until the present day. As other critics have supported, current cultural trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern [[13]](#footnote-13) and the ‘tyranny of irony,’ as described by Wallace as that which left us ‘feeling not only empty but somehow … oppressed,’[[14]](#footnote-14) has seemingly been disrupted, leaving the current cultural zeitgeist in flux.

‘How did we get here?’ one might very well ask. There has, by this point, begun to emerge a great number of essays exploring just that topic, including Niamh Coghlan’s *The End of Postmodernism,* Nealon’s *Post-Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, and Andrew Hoberek’s epilogue to *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*. Josh Toth’s *The Passing of Postmodernism* is the most meticulous of these, in which he dates the end of postmodernism back to the breaking down of the Berlin Wall:

Given that postmodernism is typically defined by its opposition to all latent utopian impulses, the fall of the last viable political alternative (i.e., the utopian promise of communism) seemingly speaks to the victory and hegemony of a distinctly postmodern, or late-capitalist, ideology. Not surprisingly, then, it is at the very moment when this victory is imminent, when postmodernism seems to have become the very thing it aimed to destroy, that we begin to see signs of an emergent epistemological configuration.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Postmodernism, then, achieved a somewhat pyrrhic victory – negating its own function as an artistic imperative by becoming the dominant, rather than the radical or undermining, cultural force at the very moment of its own imminent victory.[[16]](#footnote-16) If to be postmodern was to critique the tired practices of contemporary culture, then what has occurred following these practices becoming the dominant cultural mode? As Raoul Eshelman states, the postmodern, once mainstream, lost all significance and impact: ‘What was once a cleverly subversive, ironic mode of dealing with real social and political problems has become a heavily stylized,[[17]](#footnote-17) aesthetically predictable form of social critique that no longer has the power to really move us.’ [[18]](#footnote-18) The supreme example of this postmodern pyrrhic victory is that of metafictional narratives, which have now appeared in almost every aspect of contemporary art and media production in some form or another. The recent Oasis cinema advertisements are one such example of this dominance of the postmodern metafictional mode, in which a cartoon image of the product fills the screen while a voice over actor, affecting a faux-amateurism, describes that the major Hollywood star meant to be performing the narrator’s duties has pulled out of the project, leaving the narrator to perform the task as best he is able. The advert plays with metafictional ideas, highlighting its construction and engaging in self-aware play by asking the audience to ‘enjoy the film’ as it ends, with the commentator seemingly having run out of time.[[19]](#footnote-19) Self-awareness in advertising is a well-acknowledged trope, with YouTube advertisers now actively acknowledging the ‘pre-roll’ five seconds before viewers are allowed to skip and incorporating this into their adverts.[[20]](#footnote-20) Postmodern meta-analysis has leached into all forms, from the aforementioned adverts to video games, in the form of *Portal* and *Portal 2*’s consistent reminders of the tropes of gaming as the games progress.

Postmodernism, ultimately, has become too mainstream to survive, became too ubiquitous to sustain its core ideology, and collapsed under its own ideological weight, and inability to create in us the same reactions that it once produced. Toth further points to certain utopian impulses as contributing to the fall of the postmodern stating that, with the end of the Cold War and the seemingly complete hegemony of postmodernist ideals that coincided with such, postmodernism became utopian in its repudiation of all utopian impulses.[[21]](#footnote-21) A new-utopian desire has emerged out of the ashes of postmodernism, witnessing the ‘the rebirth of utopia after its own death, after its subjection to postmodernism's severe scepticism, relativism and its anti-utopian consciousness.’[[22]](#footnote-22) This neo-utopianism has arisen as an aspect of post-9/11 anxiety, and acted directly against the postmodern agenda – one more knife on the senate-room floor. Postmodernism’s death was not only marked by such a specific seachange in contemporary thinking, but was caused by it. As Adiseshiah and Hildyard describe, the political and social ideologies of the world are changing, and postmodern thought no longer seems useful or applicable in explaining or justifying such changes. They cite the latest nightmares of history – ‘9/11, environmental catastrophe, peak oil, financial collapse, the neo-liberal dismembering of the social democratic settlement’[[23]](#footnote-23) – as just some of the recent historical changes unanswerable in terms of the postmodern,[[24]](#footnote-24) sentiments that align directly with the ‘infernal constellation of unsolvable problems,’ that Yoonsuk Park pronounces: ‘unchecked capitalism, catastrophic climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and a hedonistic society that categorically rejects any limits on individual pleasure.’[[25]](#footnote-25) The dominant cultural mode of the world, the postmodern, seen as proliferating during these seemingly deplorable conditions, thus becomes a foil against the frustrations of the new generation of artists and cultural critics desiring relief from such issues. As Luke Turner writes, ‘in the wake of the myriad crises of the past two decades—of climate change, financial meltdown, and the escalation of global conflicts—we have witnessed the emergence of a palpable collective desire for change, for something beyond the prematurely proclaimed “End of History”.’[[26]](#footnote-26) A shift in societal modes and expression has occurred - from the ironic, the knowing and the playful, with allusions to knowledge, history and ambivalence, to intellectual states of ignorance, fanaticism and anxiety.[[27]](#footnote-27) As Adiseshiah and Hildyard continue:

A growing consensus is critical of [postmodern] paralysing self-reflexivity, knavish use of irony and the ludic, and relativistic approaches to historiography, none of which inspired much confidence in its capacity to usefully address the serious and urgent problems of the late twentieth century.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The project, they argue, has been discredited, and Konstantinou even goes so far as to suggest its utter failure, proposing that ‘it’s hard to argue that [postmodern] artists have done much to change the world,’ suggesting that the postmodern reaction to modernist modes has, in effect, failed to realise very much at all.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The central signifier of the end of the postmodern era is that of a desire to move beyond the ‘knavish irony’ so definitive of the postmodern form. A growing number of critics are beginning to recognise the ‘superannuation of irony,’[[30]](#footnote-30) that ironic responses to the situations and horrors of the twenty-first century are no longer appropriate, and, in fact following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, ‘the detached, sarcastic smartass stance just didn’t seem appropriate.’[[31]](#footnote-31) Instead, an anti-ironic yearning for meaning, ‘for sincere and constructive progression and expression — has come to shape today’s dominant cultural mode.’[[32]](#footnote-32) As one young artist has stated, ‘sincerity [is now] more important than being glib’, an idea that is evidenced by the burgeoning theoretical field of ‘New Sincerity.’[[33]](#footnote-33) ‘Irony is out,’ another columnist declares, ‘sincerity is in. […] It seems a generation of ironists is finally running out of steam.’[[34]](#footnote-34) Ed Sheeran’s ‘authenticity, realness, earnestness, sincerity,’[[35]](#footnote-35) Dave Eggers’[[36]](#footnote-36) heartfelt desire for closure in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius,* and the ‘proliferation of wholesome, though not traditional, family-centered television shows like *Modern Family*,’[[37]](#footnote-37) all evidence the rise of anti-ironic statements in pop-culture and across the arts. There is less room for the detached, ‘sarcastic smartass’ postmodern commentary in today’s culture, and thus, again, no more room for postmodernism. The world shifted, and postmodernism could not shift with it, it deflated under its own pretentions, could not answer the growing questions raised by unchecked capitalism and terror-inspired utopian desires with pure irony and word-play. With this shift, the critical landscape has become a quagmire of new parsed terms – Amerika and Olsen’s *Avant-Pop,* Eshelman’s *Performatism,* Kirby’s *Digimodernism* among a myriad of others *–* each claiming fame as the major moniker for the new age and often including a postmodern post-mortem by way of introduction, and which form a final goodbye to the form

With that in mind, then, shall we just say it? It’s over. It has ‘disappeared,’[[38]](#footnote-38) is ‘dead and buried,’[[39]](#footnote-39) has ‘died peacefully in the night, or violently during the day,’[[40]](#footnote-40) it is, to paraphrase *Monty Python*, an ex-postmodernism. Perhaps not. The postmodern in its purest form, without contest or alternative, is definitively over. The geopolitical, social, and cultural interests of the 21st century no longer align with the proposed paradigms of the postmodern. Yet, while the majority of research into this topic deals with this apparent ‘death’ phrasing it in terms of the grave and having passed from a supposed ‘life,’ we still find a series of theories which include postmodern practice. In much the same way as modernist techniques continued into the postmodern, so too does postmodern appear to continue passed its so-called demise. In the wake, or more appropriately perhaps *at* the wake of postmodernism, (whether dead or pretending within its casket) then, we have to ask: What Happens Now?[[41]](#footnote-41)

**2. Contenders to the Throne**

‘Pure’ Postmodernism is dead, and in its wake the war for nomenclature rages; from Alec Abercrombie to Slavoj Žižek, a wide range of literary critics, contemporary philosophers, and cultural critics seek to title the epoch – to definitively conceptualize the current (admittedly inchoate, or, rather, very varied) cultural climate of western society. The main loci of these new cultural modes vary greatly, including ‘the violent and irrevocable impact that digitisation has had on all forms of the text’[[42]](#footnote-42) (Digimodernism), the rebirth of the avant-garde (Altermodernism,[[43]](#footnote-43) Avant-Pop), or the revisionist view of modernism never having entered the ‘post’ condition in the first place (Re-Modernism, Second Modernism, Hypermodernism, Light Modernism, Neo-Modernism, amongst others). While a swift summary of these new modes would suffice for the sake of argument, it may be prudent here to highlight and briefly detail some of the more mainstream theories that have emerged following the death of postmodernism.

***Avant-Pop*** was a movement that began in the early 1990s and centred around the idea of a hyper-extension of postmodern goals; a fusion of the avant-garde desire and pop-culture representation, the Avant-Pop aimed to rapidly transform the sick and commodity infested culture of the time into a more sensual, erotic, and networked experience[[44]](#footnote-44) via the use of mass-market techniques to destabilise and critique the mass-market.[[45]](#footnote-45) The paradoxical nature of these goals has led Brian McHale to condemn the Avant-Pop as ‘manifestly a postmodern practice,’ though continuing to state that such a practice does ‘reflect an early nineties impatience with postmodernism, a desire to break free of it.’[[46]](#footnote-46) Ultimately, this practice would attest more to a certain emerging postmodern fatigue than any true ‘death’, becoming more of what Stephen Burn describes as one of many ‘second generation postmoderns’; the second generation of postmoderns are ‘alive "with the excitement of periodization," of dramatizing (if not always enacting) a coherent generation's movement away from their ancestors.’[[47]](#footnote-47) Avant-Pop, as a theory, did not enact the break from the postmodern, but certainly emphasized the growing desire to move away from it. Similarly, the somewhat awkwardly titled ***Post-Postmodernism***[[48]](#footnote-48) is described by Jeffrey Nealon as not quite ‘an outright overcoming of postmodernism’, but rather as a mutation of the goals of the predecessor.[[49]](#footnote-49) As opposed to the nihilism and solipsism (according to some) of the postmodern, Post-Postmodern thought ‘additionally and importantly’ engages in a more positive, utopian view of the world, looking ‘positively towards the intensifications and transformations of the present that might offer escape lines in the future.’[[50]](#footnote-50) Nealon’s view is ultimately almost naïve in terms of declaring an entirely positive post-postmodern zeitgeist, especially in light of Ulrich Beck’s notions of the contemporary risk society. Ulrich Beck, in his argument for a ***Second Modernism****,*states outright that ‘modernity has not vanished, we are not post it. [...] What is new is that modernity has begun to modernize its own foundations [...] it has become directed at itself.’[[51]](#footnote-51) Second Modernity suggests that we have entered a late modernism, rather than a post-modernism, one which is characterised by risk management and a lack of faith in the ‘growing number of global organizations and transnational institutions’ that are increasingly unable to address the global terrors and challenges that they were created to meet.[[52]](#footnote-52) Second modernity suggests a societal paranoia that governs our actions and instigates a desire to return to defensive insularity, linking to both Eshelman’s concept of Performatism and the current nostalgia drive observable across culture. In later developments with Johannes Wiilms, Beck also developed a theory of cultural plurality in which the effects of globalization force the individual to either completely isolate, again speaking to Eshelman’s Performatism, or can allow ‘local culture [to] open up and [let] more of the world in.’[[53]](#footnote-53) The former is taken up by Timo Harrikari, Pirkko-Liisa Rauhala, and Elina Virokannas and described as the ultimate ‘social utopia’ of this risk society.[[54]](#footnote-54) The driving force of the second modernity, it seems, is the desire for a safe, holistic self, an idea taken up by the Hypermodern, as proposed by Giles Lipovetsky. Lipovetsky offers a similar view of the modernist era continuing through to today, offering up ***Hypermodernism*** to define the current climate. ‘Far from modernity having passed away,’ Lipovetsky writes, ‘what we are seeing is its consummation, which takes the concrete form of a globalized liberalism, the quasi-general commercialization of lifestyles, the exploitation 'to death' of instrumental reason, and rampant individualism.’[[55]](#footnote-55) Hypermodernism describes a modernism taken to excess, to the nth power,[[56]](#footnote-56) with an emphasis on the individual and the construction of self that resonates with the aims of both Liquid and Second modernity. Lipovetsky’s version of a neo-modernism, however, relies entirely on the already described rampant individualism, and argues that all current progress, in terms of the technological, digital and social, without any distinct purpose or goal. Hypermodernity is another in the growing list of theories that suggest the contemporary culture is dominated by the narcissism of individuals, whose interests and cultural outputs focuses primarily on representations, though it is difficult to think of a period when ontological questions were not dominant – think of the truism about creative writing, that all narratives are driven by the single question of ‘who am I?’ In hypermodernity, an attempt is made to resolve this question via attempts at hyper-individuation and excess of self.[[57]](#footnote-57) As another theory in line with the ideals of a second modernity, ***Remodernism***, masterminded by Childish and Thomson, is a return to the original principles of Modernism, after, according to them, it has ‘progressively lost its way, until finally toppling into the pit of postmodern balderdash.’[[58]](#footnote-58) Remodernism describes its aim as to reapply the original principles of modernism, highlighting ‘vision as opposed to formalism,’ [[59]](#footnote-59) observable in the works of Mark D, whose self-proclaimed ‘naïve style,’ inspired more by ‘some low budget production record full of life and energy with lots of good ideas […] than some over-produced bland pomp,’[[60]](#footnote-60) foregrounds artistic message and expression over formal elements, as in *Charles Saatchi: King Charles and the Economics of Art.* Matt Bray highlights one of the core principles of the Remodern, namely the return of a certain ‘deep seated belief in and desire for […] existential truth.’[[61]](#footnote-61) As he states:

“I think Post-Modernism has abandoned the idea of subjective truth, believing instead there are no truths. It is a cynical view that, as you practice it, can slowly eat away at your sense of power and purpose. Remodernism seemed to me to be addressing this problem and allowing artists to again claim some kind of belief, and to begin creating from the heart, allowing self-expression back into the fray.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

According the Childish and Thomson, Remodernism upholds modernist values in a search for existential, psychological depth and meaning, discarding and replacing postmodernism out of necessity as the latter failed ‘to answer or address any [of the] important issues of being a human being’. The Remodern is defined by a desire for new depth and spiritual meaning, bringing an end to an age of scientific materialism, nihilism, and spiritual bankruptcy. [[63]](#footnote-63) While Remodernism suggests that the postmodern turn was a mistake, Zygmunt Bauman’s ***Liquid Modernity*** posits that the solid ‘centralization of institutional power’ of modernity has shifted into a more liquid, or flexible state, having never truly becoming postmodern.[[64]](#footnote-64) Change, he suggests, is now the only permanence, uncertainty the only certainty. Globalization is ‘strictly negative’ and based on the breaking down of barriers to ‘allow for the globalization of capital, the movement of goods, information, crime, and terrorism, but not of the political and judicial institutions whose basis is national sovereignty.’[[65]](#footnote-65) One critic’s reaction to the idea of Liquid Modernity was to suggest that Bauman’s theses are applicable only to his own creative work, writing that ‘the liquidity of which Bauman writes is nowhere more evident than in his own writing,’[[66]](#footnote-66) a criticism also levied against Nicolas Bourriaud’s ***Altermodern*** following it’s unveiling at the third Tate Triennial.[[67]](#footnote-67) Bourriaud’s neologism for the era following the postmodern, Altermodernity, is arguably the most commonly known, or at least has garnered the most media attention, of the current alternatives given the public nature of the term’s launch. Altermodernity describes a movement in which current cultural art goes ‘beyond nationalities, immersed in global dialogues of creolization,’[[68]](#footnote-68) resulting in hybrid or creole art which finds unity through networks. Altermodernity is dominated by the idea of a nomadic artist or individual, who moves over cultural barriers, interacting with other cultures and adapting the self in reaction to these. Bourriaud suggests that multiculturalism is the dominating and defining force of western culture at present, with a sense of singular identity being overtaken by this creolisation process.[[69]](#footnote-69) Bourriaud also suggests that an essential part of the Altermodern mode is that it alludes to the local struggles against standardization, such as the recent ‘Brexit’ vote outcome, calling back to Liquid Modernity’s strictly negative view of the effects of globalization. Altermodernism, as a movement, hamstrings itself by a seeming reliance on application purely through visual art, lessening potential culture-wide impact through the difficulty of translation into other mediums, alongside, as one critic attests, ‘the precise meaning of altermodernism [being] as slippery and evasive as the structure of the argument is unclear.’[[70]](#footnote-70) Bourriaud’s Altermodern description is evasive and loose, an element that may actually have worked to the theory’s credit in that it invites critics to fill in the gaps, as it were, working to further theory by instigating the conversation rather than outright answering the question of the contemporary moment. While Bourriaud’s Altermodernity lauds the artistic potential of multiculturalism, ***Cosmodernism*** centres on the negative aspects of a capitalism-centric globalization, both participating in and critiquing late globalization’s highly networked environment.[[71]](#footnote-71) Theorized from a somewhat U.S-centric standpoint,[[72]](#footnote-72) Cosmodernism nonetheless ‘claims that postmodernism cannot handle and therefore does not respond to global crisis, primarily because of its tendency to "universalize" and "westernize" non-U.S. cultural spaces.’[[73]](#footnote-73) Cosmodernism also re-assess our relationship to those othered by society, suggesting a current practice of accommodating and re-uniting with these individuals, societies or groups: ‘discourse, history, culture, community, patrimony, and tradition. The cosmoderns complicate all these issues by rewriting them as paragraphs in a worldly phenomenology of self-other mutuality.’[[74]](#footnote-74) ‘Cosmodernism, [Moraru posits], complicates our thinking about discourse, history, culture, and tradition by always incorporating experiences and cultures of the other, and therefore reducing our self-centrism;’[[75]](#footnote-75) Moraru’s theory focuses on the ways in which we construct the self, aiming for a new postcolonial discourse that defies current globalized opinions of what it means to be an ‘othered’ individual. Similarly, Raoul Eshelman’s ***Performatism*** suggests that the current cultural climate is defined by questions of ontology and a fatigue with postmodern irony that finds expression via sincerity. Performatism’s basic goal, according to Eshelman, is to ‘choke off irony’, whereby the reader/viewer/recipient is tricked or coerced ‘into a position of believing in something unified,’ rather than reacting with instant deconstructive scepticism. As he argues, ‘aesthetically mediated belief, and not endlessly receding ironic scepticism, is the basis of the new epoch.’ [[76]](#footnote-76) Performatism, too, describes a desperate contemporary desire for the preservation of the self. The subject in the performatist age presents itself as a ‘holistic, irreducible unit that makes a binding impression on a reader or observer’, reducing the idea of the self to an outer perception of simple-minded or reduced version, in order to preserve the inner complexities from the slings and impetuous arrows of the world. Eshelman describes this system as a double-framing, whereby a simple self is presented as an opaque, outer, idiotic barrier (outer frame) against the questions that might threaten subjectivity and the true self (the inner frame) all in order to ‘resist outside influence and act autonomously, against the logic of prevailing discourse.’[[77]](#footnote-77) As Audrey Seah clarifies, ‘the inner frame provides the originating context, while the outer frame imposes some sort of unequivocal resolution to the problems raised in the work on the reader or the viewer.’[[78]](#footnote-78) Performatism, as a cultural concept, describes a current desire for both control and safety of the self, following a sincere desire to re-establish forms of belief against ‘passé’ postmodern irony.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Finally, ***Automodernism*** and ***Digimodernism*** complete this list.[[80]](#footnote-80) Like Performatism and Remodernism, both the Automodern and Digimodern discourses focus on the new role of the self and individual in society, though the stance taken in each case is very different from the safety of Eshelman’s theory and positivism of Childish and Thomson. Both focus on the relation of audience-media participation in an increasingly digitized world, and how this can affect the production of self. First, then, ***Automodernism.*** The automodern age, as defined by Robert Samuels, is an era characterised by the ‘paradoxical combination of social automation and individual autonomy’.[[81]](#footnote-81) It sees the rise of search engines, automatic forms on browsers, auto-correct and other such automated services as provoking a need to demonstrate the self as individual, as unique. Unlike the creole, accepting humanity depicted in the Alter, the Automodern perceives only the negative, denying help to minority and oppressed groups as a means of expressing one’s self.[[82]](#footnote-82) The ‘great ideological trick of automodernity,’ Samuels writes, ‘is to automate the social order of knowledge and material relations and to then *use this simplification of the Other* to clear a space for the illusion of individual freedom.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Samuels argues that current capitalist society forces the individual to the conclusion that they are merely an unheard voice amongst many, and that there is a growing reaction against this that attempts to use automated services and technology, oddly, in order to register personal autonomy.[[84]](#footnote-84) Automodernism is a rejection of postmodern politics, describing a dominance of global cultural nihilism in response to the unchecked growth of global capitalism. [[85]](#footnote-85) Far from the more positive views of breaking free of the postmodern expressed in the theories above, Samuels depicts Automodern society as characterized by self-contradiction, a reversal of willingness for a global community, ‘a backlash against the public realm and progressive moments, and the use of automation to affirm acts of self-centredness.’[[86]](#footnote-86) The Automodern world is one of attempts to define the self against the growing sentiment of standardisation that is also implied in theories of the Altermodern. Alan Kirby’s ***Digimodernism*** also relies on an analysis of the impact that cultural forms of computerization have had on 21st century society, suggesting that the growing prevalence of digital media forms (meaning both technological and produced by fingers, ‘digits’) has instigated a cultural shift away from the postmodern,[[87]](#footnote-87) though this too produces a less than favourable account of contemporary post-postmodern society in the form of what has been seen as mass infantilisation. Digimodernism traces ‘the violent and irrevocable impact that digitisation has had on all forms of the text’, citing the suppression of physical music albums in favour of digital downloads, the revolutions in the publishing industry associated with the ebook, and the new digital ‘golden age’ of radio. While technologically progressive, these advancements also seem, to Kirby, to be instigating an increasing textual infantilisation.[[88]](#footnote-88) Kirby argues that contemporary pop-culture increasingly presents children’s stories as material for the entertainment of young adults,[[89]](#footnote-89) that news programmes are drained of information and filled, instead, with pseudo-drama,[[90]](#footnote-90) and that ‘popular music has become the semisublimated packaging of adult sexuality for young children.’[[91]](#footnote-91) The new sincerity identified by so many other theoreticians is here presented as part of the infantilization process, a result of the dominant cultural disjuncture between adult material and childish consumers.[[92]](#footnote-92) In summary, as Catriona Bonfiglioli encapsulates, ‘Digimodern' texts [are] characterized by onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, redefined textual roles, evolving authorship, fluid textual boundaries, electronic digitality and evincing aesthetics of earnestness, apparent realness and infantilism.’[[93]](#footnote-93) In describing the Digimodern impulse, though, Kirby makes a significant assessment of his own critical theory as part of an emerging range of new cultural criticism:

I see the […] digimodernist text solely as the easily recognizable tip of a cultural iceberg, and not necessarily its most interesting element.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Indeed, he later continues that the various and differing theories that have begun to emerge, ‘hoping to inherit postmodernism's estate before the body is even cold’, feel less ‘like ambitious rivals’ than ‘pieces of a jigsaw whose final picture is still unclear.’[[95]](#footnote-95)

A comparison across the range of these neologisms, and the theories to which they refer, reveals a startling amount of overlap in descriptions of societal issues and responses. Understandably, for a series of ideas attempting to describe the impetus and mannerisms of new cultural shifts, there are convergences and divergences between each of the coined ‘-isms’ which ‘complement each other as much as they compete.’[[96]](#footnote-96) Far from being the distinct cultural mode that each contends to be, however, a cross-examination of the majority of contenders to the post-postmodern throne reveals five distinct ideological archetypes of these efforts to critique the contemporary epoch:

1. A belief in a dystopian future fathered by a lack of faith in governing cultural forces.
2. Constant expansion of society or technology without any significant end-goal.
3. Anti-standardization sentiments that instigate a drive towards sincerity.
4. The dominance of the nostalgia drive in pop-culture.
5. Widespread infantilization.

These five patterns, referenced individually throughout the post-postmodern discussions, define the era and none more so than the first: dystopian resignation. This idea, evidenced throughout culture and the arts, necessitates the majority of the others as responses, and so naturally it is to a discussion of this that we must first turn.

**2.1 Dystopian Resignation and Anti-Establishmentarianism**

The world cannot be saved.[[97]](#footnote-97) The apocalypse is inevitable, dystopia a certainty. With the shift from postmodernism into the contemporary epoch, regardless of title, this message has become increasingly prevalent in mass-media and popular culture. Brian McHale analyses this pessimistic trend, stating that for the entire second half of the twentieth century ‘we have been living in the ruins of our own civilisation, if only in our imaginations,’[[98]](#footnote-98) and this finds the clearest expression, surprisingly, in the narratives of contemporary young adult TV, film, and fiction, which frequently exhibit the ruined worlds of our imaginations: post-apocalyptic scenarios and dystopias. In the discussion to follow, the dystopia I refer to is as defined by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash in their introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility:* ‘Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither [unplanned or planned to be deliberately terrifying]; rather it is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society.’[[99]](#footnote-99) This is a world that does not work, or works only for the select, that is the dystopia of the contemporary imaginary, which I will focus on here.

Increasingly, young adult narratives set their protagonists within a post-apocalyptic, often dystopian, setting, in which there is no desire, or possibility, to return the world to its pre-apocalyptic state. Rather, the goal of the protagonists within these new narratives often revolves around a more laissez-faire attitude to the end of the world; rather than fighting to return the world to a post-apocalyptic state, or to somehow stop the apocalypse from occurring entirely, new narratives revolve around a distinct dystopian acceptance or resignation, with characters spending the majority of their arcs learning how to live in the ruins of the civilised world. The extremely popular *Adventure Time* (2010), for example, is centred around the adventures of a young boy as he navigates a post-apocalyptic society on the planet of Ooo, a post-nuclear war Earth devastated by the ‘Mushroom War’ that has destroyed a vast chunk of the planet and mutated the inhabitants.[[100]](#footnote-100) Finn, the protagonist, never seems overly concerned with the history of this war, the reasons behind it or how it could have been prevented, rather the episodes generally follow his own adventures and personal growth. Similarly, the characters of Rebecca Sugar’s *Steven Universe* (2013) blithely ignore the scenes of post-war destruction that they often travel through, scenes that, in their frequency, depict a world ravaged by an alien civil war that found its way to the planet. Once more the focus is on the personal growth of the titular Steven in a world that has been shattered by war, though to a far lesser extent than the calamity that befell *Adventure Time*’sOoo*.* While not post-apocalyptic, *Invader Zim* (2001) certainly follows this pattern in its depiction of a technologically advanced dystopia, where all of humanity has degenerated into grotesquery and stupidity, a situation that is never questioned by the characters nor in any way shown to be in need of resolution. Perhaps the most pertinent example of the shift towards a feeling of dystopian resignation, however, is that of *Samurai Jack* (2001). The main plot of the series is best summarised by the opening sequence of the show itself:

“Long ago in a distant land, I, Aku, the shape-shifting Master of Darkness, unleashed an unspeakable evil! But a foolish samurai warrior wielding a magic sword stepped forth to oppose me. Before the final blow was struck, I tore open a portal in time and flung him into the future, where my evil is law! Now the fool seeks to return to the past, and undo the future that is Aku!”[[101]](#footnote-101)

At first, an analysis of *Samurai Jack* suggests a departure from the themes explored thus far: Jack’s mission is to end the dystopian circumstances, to return to the past and undo the tyranny that is Aku ( a thinly-veiled straw-man for ecologically destructive capitalism). As the series progresses, however, this impression begins to wane. The audience becomes increasingly aware that Jack’s mission is, in fact, endless and that he must instead learn to adapt to the alien world if he is to survive, with the focus of the episodes becoming less about stopping Aku, than merely attempting to make this dystopian world more hospitable for those living within it. *Samurai Jack* and the examples explored here highlight just a few of a growing number of post-apocalyptic, often dystopian, scenarios where creatives and writers have begun to express their growing anxiety that a calamitous future is beyond prevention.[[102]](#footnote-102) This, however, was not always the case. A casual glance into some of the most popular cartoons of the mid-to-late 1980s shows us that a generation of artists and creatives once believed that, even with the impending financial and ecological disruptions, the world as they knew it could be peacefully maintained. The world used to be worth saving, evil used to be considered ultimately defeatable. One only has to look at the main narrative of *The Transformers* (1984-7)in which evil Decepticons attempt to steal the planet’s natural resources, only to be constantly thwarted by the heroic Autobots. Or, further, to both *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983-5)and *Thundercats* (1985-9), which feature withered ancient evils attempting to take over the world and instigate a reign of darkness and general nastiness, again thwarted by the main heroes, who manage each week to end their evil schemes. Most notably of all, and televised during the late stages of the postmodern shift, we find the environmentalist *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* (1993-6) in which a selection of children, the ‘Planeteers’, are gifted with rings embodying the essential elements of the planet - earth, fire, wind, water (and additionally the ill-defined, though all-powerful ‘heart’) – which, when combined, summon the eponymous Captain Planet, a hero whose mission was ‘to take pollution down to zero.’[[103]](#footnote-103) For an era defined by anti-utopian ideals and a cynical deconstruction of these, it is surprising to see such unchecked optimism in these narratives, yet this position of optimism and trust in the ability of those in power to maintain a balance has begun to wane in recent years, to the point of outright disbelief, suggestive of a lack of faith in governmental institutions as such contemporary narratives as *Adventure Time* and *Samurai Jack* evidence.

This sentiment, however, expands beyond that of young adult narratives. In various media forms across Western society, a rise in this attitude to post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives is evident, where the aim is less to resolve the situation than merely to find the means to live well in the wastelands of the future. ‘Dystopias follow utopias the way thunder follows lightning. This year,’ one reporter writes of 2017, ‘the thunder is roaring.’[[104]](#footnote-104) In the post-postmodern world we can see evidence of a new generation of creatives and artists expressing an underlying pessimism regarding the future, with narratives adopting these elements of dystopian resignation; as the same reporter argues, dystopia has moved from fiction of resistance to the ‘fiction of submission, the fiction of an untrusting, lonely, and sullen twenty-first century.’[[105]](#footnote-105) Across film and television we see this rise evidenced in such dystopian titles as *The Book of Eli, The Road, Snowpiercer, Dredd, The Day After Tomorrow, Interstellar, Oblivion, The Walking Dead, The Last Man on Earth, Dominion, Looper, The Handmaid’s Tale, Zombieland, The 100, 12 Monkeys, Black Mirror, Dollhouse, Terra Nova,* and *Revolution.* In literature, dystopian fiction, too is ‘back in vogue,’[[106]](#footnote-106) and continues to present narratives of resignation over restoration. Examples include, among many others, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Sarah Pinborough’s *The Death House,* Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go,* William Gibson’s *Neuromancer,* Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven,* Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* trilogy*,* Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One,* David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas,* and John Burnside’s *Glister*.[[107]](#footnote-107) Andew Hoberek identifies the post-apocalyptic narrative as the ‘master genre’ for post-postmodernism, that is to say, the genre which most succinctly complements the themes of the time as the detective and science fiction genres were for modernism and postmodern before, while also suggesting that the rise of post-apocalyptic narratives ‘might have everything to do with the present it seemingly rejects.’[[108]](#footnote-108) Indeed, this rise in dystopian and post-apocalyptic resignation narratives coincides not only with the end of the postmodern, but with a growing anxiety with the present, and a concern over the ineptitude of governing bodies to prevent local and global disaster.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Seen as burdened with an infernal constellation of unsolvable problems,[[110]](#footnote-110) western society finds itself under significant critical attention at present. Across the range of post-postmodern discussion, cultural theorists have begun to identify an unchecked, ‘increasingly uncontrollable’[[111]](#footnote-111) capitalism ‘indifferent to individuals,’ [[112]](#footnote-112) and which has promoted a significant deepening, or ‘widening, [of] economic inequality,’ alongside ‘stagnant and worryingly high levels of unemployment in the wake of ‘spiralling financial crises that seem as though never to end.’ [[113]](#footnote-113) The ‘hectic engineering of information technologies’ has failed to produce a globalised network of individuals, [[114]](#footnote-114) with the internet, as Jill Lepore writes, failing to ‘stitch us together.’ [[115]](#footnote-115) The geopolitical structures of western societies are perceived as either unstable, or yielding to authoritarianism, while the ecological structure of the planet too seem ‘severely disrupted’[[116]](#footnote-116) to the extent that there appears to be a ‘looming environmental crisis.’ [[117]](#footnote-117) Ecological disaster looms, while nations face continued disrupt from politically and religiously radicalised individuals in an environment of ‘exacerbated liberalism of competition,’ [[118]](#footnote-118) and indifferent capitalism.

Francesc Torralba, in an essay exploring the fears and anxieties of contemporary society,[[119]](#footnote-119) highlights several forms of fear that align with these statements: ‘There is fear of organisations, fear of job insecurity, fear of losing one’s health, fear due to the inconsistency of ties. New scenarios of this threat appear, new tales of future devastations that strike fear into the average citizen.’[[120]](#footnote-120) Fear has become a dominant cultural mode, the fear of the present that raises an anxiety over the future; ‘It is,’ after all, ‘fear that rules as we face an uncertain future.’[[121]](#footnote-121) The world, it really does seem, cannot be saved in our ‘terrifying new millennium of global risks.’[[122]](#footnote-122) Environmental and ecological disaster loom, exacerbated by unchallenged capitalism in an unstable geopolitical landscape, and economic inequality continues to expand rather than contract. The culmination of all these factors, ‘along with the accompanying hyper-anxiety brought about by twenty-four hour news,’ according to Alison Gibbons, ‘has made the western world feel like a more precarious and volatile place, in which we can no longer be nonchalant about our safety or future.’[[123]](#footnote-123) The rather pessimistic views presented of the present do contribute to the dystopian resignation, though, as post-postmodernity is defined by a ‘backlash against the government and public officials,’[[124]](#footnote-124) attributable to a distinct doubt in the efficacy of governmental and ruling forces to deal with the seemingly insurmountable problems of the present in such a way as will create a safe future.

‘No one will argue,’ states Lipovetsky, ‘that the way the world is going arouses more anxiety than unbridled optimism.’[[125]](#footnote-125) He cites the problems of the world as growing tensions between the (American) north and south, the rise in global social inequality and insecurity and, most significantly, that ‘the globalised market is reducing the power of democracies to govern themselves.’[[126]](#footnote-126) Zygmunt Bauman, of Liquid Modernity fame, and Ulrich Beck, advocate for Second Modernity and Risk Society, also both recognise a perceived scepticism towards western government’s ability to maintain security of state. For Bauman, the means available for local and global governments ‘to protect the rule of law and defend citizens are clearly insufficient to tame [the forces of global chaos.]’[[127]](#footnote-127) He continues that the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 in the United States of America, March 2004 in Madrid, and July 2005 in London all indicate ‘that the traditional means of securing and maintaining respect for law and order, crudely started, are worthless.’[[128]](#footnote-128) Bauman identifies a belief that the forces tasked with maintaining the safety of their governed citizens have failed in this objective, a belief that Beck, in two articles, relates not just to local failures, but to a failure of international organizations:

Despite this rapidly growing number of global organizations and transnational institutions, there is an increasing unease, nourished not least by the hesitant responses to the global financial crisis, the European currency crisis, and the poor results of the last global climate conference at Copenhagen, that these institutions are proving unable to address the challenges they were created to meet.[[129]](#footnote-129)

Can the World Bank solve the global problem of poverty? Can the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) solve a global food crisis? Can the World Trade Organisation effectively regulate global trade? It seems as if these institutions do not constitute a sufficient basis for managing or controlling the global risks and crises created by the global *victory* of industrial capitalism.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Beck claims that it is now ‘commonplace’ that national institutions are perceived as ‘unable to cope with the challenges of regulating global capitalism and responding to new global risks.’[[131]](#footnote-131) The United States is seeing ‘a rising generation of left-leaning Americans who possess less faith than their elders in the power of government to combat injustices and pursue noble collective enterprises,’ according to one journalist, with another writing that trust in American politicians, in 2014, was at an all-time low.[[132]](#footnote-132) In television the growing discontent with the rule of government is evidenced by the popularity of documentaries which question governmental policy and decisions, such as the recent rise in wrongful conviction documentaries (*Making a Murderer, The Confession Tapes, Women Who Kill*.) Such shows highlight not only the potential for incorrect decisions in terms of individual convictions, but often undermine the efficacy of governmental justice by portraying law enforcement and the judicial system as flawed or corrupt. The landscape of contemporary documentaries, even taken from a quick glance across Netflix’s catalogue, shows an ever-increasing range of content which aims to expose governmental, national, or corporate malpractice – aims frequently shared by tabloid newspapers continually reporting on ministerial scandals, whistleblowing activities, and institutional malpractice against the most vulnerable members of society.[[133]](#footnote-133) In film, the current popularity, and box-office supremacy of super hero narratives can also be explained by this anti-establishmentarianism (additionally via the nostalgia drive and infantilisation to be explored later); the rise of vigilante fighters, those who are able to bring societal justice where governmental law becomes ineffectual, or fails altogether.[[134]](#footnote-134) As a final note in evidence of this trend, audience participation within televised news and advertising is an additional symptom of a distinct mistrust in ruling forces; the audience is increasingly presented with eye-witness or by-passer opinions on subject matter in a response by media executives that speaks to a prevalent societal paranoia of information control in which affiliation-neutrality is the new reliability.

When the present seems so bleak, it seems only natural that creatives turn to expressions of dystopian resignation - neo-utopian sentiments that are mingled with the growing certainty of some form of apocalypse, leading to explorations of how we can live among the ruins of our own civilization; acceptance of the dystopian with a sincere desire to explore the ways in which we might survive in such environments. Such conventions are far from new to history, however, or literary works in the vein of *1984* would never have seen production. What makes such ideas particularly pertinent to the contemporary era is the proliferation of such ideas across all media forms simultaneously, foregrounding such dystopian resignation as a significant single obsession of contemporary artistic and cultural ideologies.

**2.2 Progress and Change**

Something, then, must be done. On that, according to Bauman, we are ‘almost all agreed’- that at least something must be done to alter the present.[[135]](#footnote-135) A change is needed to avert the potential post-apocalyptic or dystopian future that is so clearly a fixed trajectory to those in the 21st century. Spurred on by expectations of the apocalypse, the post-postmodern epoch is part-defined by unfettered, unregulated progress in terms of cultural production, often without any form of destination or long-term goal. Luke Turner describes how, in the wake of the global crises (ecological disturbance, financial breakdown, and ‘the escalation of global conflicts’), ‘we have witnessed the emergence of a palpable collective desire for change,’ for something beyond Francis Fukuyama’s ‘prematurely proclaimed’ “End of History.”[[136]](#footnote-136)

Several of the post-postmodern contenders have described this desire for change, particularly as a societal desire for some form of progress. Alan Kirby sketches both ‘onwardness’ and ‘haphazardness’ as dominant features of the Digimodernist era, identifying a world that is insistent on progress of any sort, though little concerned with the results.[[137]](#footnote-137) We are, Kirby writes, ‘confronted by a storm of human activity producing almost nothing of cultural value,’[[138]](#footnote-138) themes shared by descriptions of the ‘instability’ of hypermodern society in valuing ‘permanence and stability least of all, instead preferring competition, flexibility, mobility, and adaptability,’ all characteristics that Sebastien Charles also identifies with Bauman’s Liquid Modernity.[[139]](#footnote-139) Bauman’s depiction of contemporary modernity envisions ‘an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired,’[[140]](#footnote-140) a society in which ‘nothing keeps its shape and social forms are constantly changing at great speed, radically transforming the experience of being human.’[[141]](#footnote-141) Lipovetsky’s analysis identifies similar themes: his proposed societal paradigm, Hypermodernity, recognises that there is no longer a choice in the world other than to continue to develop, accelerate, and continue moving lest you be overtaken by the continuing advancements of technology and society.[[142]](#footnote-142) Automodernity, too, recognises the current desire for progress, highlighting the backlash against both the public realm and progressive social movements as symptomatic of a grand cultural desire for change.[[143]](#footnote-143) And while Laura Cumming may not see the Altermodernist movement as anything ‘as grand, or significant, as a movement,’ she does point out that the art ascribed to the Altermodern is one of constant movement across society, never touching down, but which ‘keeps on moving through places and ideas, made up by artists connected across the globe.’[[144]](#footnote-144) The Altermodern distinguishes the societal trend of movement and progress, describing art which looks to a nomad-style artist attempting to find something beyond the current predicaments of the local by constantly shifting perspectives. Bourriaud rightly identifies that ‘increased communication, travel and migration are affecting the way we live,’ and that as a response to this, artists shift perspectives across cultures in an attempt at creolization, to look beyond the borders of the local community for resolutions to global problems.

The desire for change and progress is palpable across western culture, visible particularly in the current political climate, with the last series of major elections and a referendum in America and the United Kingdom[[145]](#footnote-145) having absurdly close, and mostly unpredictable results as consequence of the voting population becoming increasingly unsure about *how* their circumstances should be changed, believing only that they *should* be changed.[[146]](#footnote-146) That such a wide range of critics describing the epoch should converge on this particular feature is no surprise, though most attribute the surge in innovation and production to a re-emergence of classical modernism in one guise or another, modernism after all having ‘long been wed to innovation.’[[147]](#footnote-147) While it is true, and supported by Luke Smythe, that in the wake of postmodernism there ‘has come a widespread interest in […] revisiting the fate of modernism,’[[148]](#footnote-148) the desire for progress in society could be argued to be less about a return to modernist values than a desperate scramble for a better future, where advances and changes made now can stop the world from its inevitable canter towards the dystopia of the collective imagination.[[149]](#footnote-149) One way in which this desire for change manifests is in the desire for the return of the individual in the face of the failed collective, as will be analysed next.

**2.3 The Odious Machine: Self, Standardization, and Sincerity**

Glancing across the vying Post-postmodern theories reveals a consensus regarding negative reactions to the global ‘victory’ of capitalism, a widely perceived fear of encroaching uniformity enforced by mass media and mass market control. Twenty-first century globalization has become, according to Bauman, a “strictly negative” shadow of itself, defined by adverse capitalist, media, and market forces, and a focus on breaking down barriers between nations purely to allow for “the movement of goods, information, crime, and terrorism,” without the forces necessary to properly enforce control.[[150]](#footnote-150) Now, more than ever, we are witnessing the global domination of market forces controlling how we engage with the world around us as ‘the ideology of globalised market economics,’ Kirby argues, has been raised to ‘the level of the sole and over-powering regulator of all social activity - monopolistic, all-engulfing, all-explaining, all-structuring.’[[151]](#footnote-151) Alongside Kirby, Raymond Federman, earlier into post-postmodern shift, identified the control of mass media and marketing forces, describing the ‘banalization’ that these forces impose on contemporary culture, ‘the hypnosis of marketing, the sweet boredom of consensus, the cellophane wrapping of thinking, the commercialization of desire,’ summarizing mass media’s effects on culture as a domination of ‘conformity and banality, triviality and obscenity.’[[152]](#footnote-152) Moraru points out that globalization, while offering the possibility for a grand human unity, could also ‘work as a conduit for indiscriminate, homogenizing mimesis and toward a world culture of selfsameness,’ [[153]](#footnote-153) and certainly the fear of standardization makes itself clear in the theoretical analyses of our time. Bourriaud, in an interview with Bartholomew Ryan, claims that the prefix ‘Alter’ in his neologism Altermodernism alludes not only to the end of the postmodern (offering an *alter*native, perhaps?) , but “to the local struggles against standardization,”[[154]](#footnote-154) expanded upon by Abercrombie, who identifies a reaction in the Altermodern age against the assumption that ‘we will all fall into line if we are all fed the same thing.’[[155]](#footnote-155) Samuels also notes that current counter-cultural modes of art have become ‘personalized expressions and repressions of capitalistic, mass-mediated alienation,’ further evidencing the current anti-mass-media sentiments within the arts.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Ulrich Beck, in conversation with Johannes Wiilms, speaks to this problem (that ‘the globalization process will affect all local identities,’)[[157]](#footnote-157) identifying two possible responses – to accept the plurality of culture and develop from within it, creating a local identity that ‘satisfies the desire to reach backward into local traditions without stopping local culture from opening up and letting more of the world in,’ [[158]](#footnote-158) or to block oneself off entirely from Bourriaud’s creolisation. To date, it is the latter response that is observable most in contemporary culture. Against the forces of globalization and the standardization of ‘selves’ as ‘consumers’ that has come in its wake, in which the only possible collective to belong to is that of the standardized consumer, the current cultural phase sees a violent reaction against conformity in the form of radicalized and ‘rampant’[[159]](#footnote-159) individualism, resulting in attempts to distinguish and define the self as opposed to the ‘other’ of global society. Unfortunately, this often emerges as, at best, something approaching a *sakoku* of the self and, at worst, categorical bigotry, both of which can be attributed to the fear of the strange, as defined by Torralba:

**Fear of the Strange.** Fear is caused by the worrying presence of the strange, ignorance of its intentions and reasons, its customs and its ways of life. In host societies like Europe the fear subsists of losing our own values, of dissolving in a sort of empty multiculturalism. The strange is always a violent presence, because it questions our own ways, because it demands we find a common language and guarantee minimum laws for good social coexistence. At the same time, though, it is also an opportunity to reflect on our own identity, on the collective singularity. Never before has it been so utterly difficult to define ourselves. This fear is not, of course, new in the history of Western civilisation, but in contexts of intense migratory flows like the present one, it once again bursts in and generates attitudes of putting up barriers, of social autism that turns the host society into an impermeable and static body. Phobia of foreigners can easily be turned into hatred of their presence. When this metamorphosis takes place, social cohesion is dismantled and barbarity bursts in.[[160]](#footnote-160)

As a result of the contemporary fear of the strange, of the other coming to dismantle our culture and fill it with an ‘empty multiculturalism,’ the contemporary individual increasingly attempts to define, if not protect, any personal sense of identity via the erection of ideological, or indeed ontological, barriers between the self and any self-threatening presence. Samuels identifies as specific ‘automodern backlash against minority rights,’[[161]](#footnote-161) within contemporary society that attests to the erecting of social barriers, citing a growing sentiment of seeking to ‘deny the need to help to help [minority and ethnically oppressed] social groups.’[[162]](#footnote-162) While this is observable in the growing transparency of far-right, white nationalist sentiments in the U.S, it attests also to the anti-standardization sentiment, specifically the need to radically define oneself, as described in Lipovetsky’s hypermodern sensibility, in which ‘individual pathologies are proliferating, together with the consumption characterstic of *anomie*, and anarchic behaviour.’[[163]](#footnote-163) The post-postmodern age is defined by anarchic, anti-social individuality, in attempts to define the self as a reaction to the fear of the strange and the other. We seek to define ourselves against the standardization of globalized capitalist forces, leading to anarchic, anti-social statements in which we define our self via violent rejection of cultural others. Eshelman’s recognition of the performatist aspects of contemporary society also pays heed to this, describing a trend in which the individual, in a performatist move, isolates the subjective self behind an impenetrable, simplified external self for protection in order to ‘preserve it.’[[164]](#footnote-164) The true self, or ‘inner frame’ is kept safe via the opaque, dense, ‘outer frame’ which ‘imposes some sort of unequivocal resolution to the problems raised in the work on the reader or the viewer.’[[165]](#footnote-165) In this way, the self is protected from the effects of external society and the impact of cultural others, who are faced instead with the opaque and contextually solid outer frame. Eshelman thus identifies a rejection of the other in favour of self-preservation, Lipovetsky recognizes a desire to define the self by anarchic means, and Samuels describes the contemporary desire to identify the self via the suppression of multiculturality. Each theory of the post-postmodern environment speaks to a current rejection of a collective, unified identity, arguably as a reaction to the grand capitalist movement in which individuals could have been united, but only as standardized individuals united in their singular market desires. Against this, and in the wake of the failed collective, the post-postmodern age sees an expansion in individualistic expressions of self and, subsequently, an emergent return to ideas of sincerity.

These expressions of sincerity have, as Jason Morris lists, found expression in several art forms:

In poetry, Andrew Mister, Joseph Massey, and Anthony Robinson have written manifestos. Drawing is the new old thing in visual art; in their use of the long take, among other stylistic devices, Wes Anderson and a few other young filmmakers (maybe quoting Dogme, Expressionism or Neo-Realism), nod toward the medium’s first promise — to be an “honest” representation of reality. In pop music, folk is making a resurgence. Performers like Will Oldham, Cat Power, Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom play with a kind of lo-fi, scaled-back immediacy which has been widely welcomed by audiences and critics alike. The Believer (whose name itself denotes a wide-eyed credulity) is among America’s best and most widely circulated literary magazines; its credo in large part defines it as against the ironic, the cynical, etc. (The Doubter?). [[166]](#footnote-166)

Indeed, Vermeulen makes a claim that sincerity is one of the sensibilities emerging from within the postmodern that no finger fits its framework and shows a movement away from it, along with ‘hope’ and ‘the inexplicable.’[[167]](#footnote-167) A “New Sincerity” has formed in the wake of the postmodern and in response to the years of cynicism and deconstructive irony, though initial conceptions of this new feature of contemporary artistic production suggested that the break was not clean. In ‘A Manifesto for New Sincerity,’ Jesse Thorn, widely credited with beginning the New Sincerity movement, describes it not in terms of opposition to irony, but rather as irony and sincerity ‘combined like Voltron, to form a new movement of astonishing power,’ or an absence of both entirely where ‘less is (obviously) more.’[[168]](#footnote-168) Thorn’s new sincerity advocates the subversion of traditional irony, here, through either an oscillating movement in which irony is tempered with authenticity, or rather sincere intent, or else abandoned entirely rather than remain in any capacity. ‘All across the pop culture spectrum,’ writes Jonathan D. Fitzgerald, ‘the emphasis on sincerity and authenticity that has arisen has made it un-ironically cool to care about spirituality, family, neighbours, the environment, and the country.’[[169]](#footnote-169) Sincerity, claims the title of Fitzgerald’s article, has become the ethos of the age and he continues in citing, once more, the events of September 11th as the catalyst for the shift away from postmodern irony and towards a contemporary sincerity, from the burlesque to the vulnerable.[[170]](#footnote-170) Sincerity, then, arrived in our culture as the shock of September the 11th ended the postmodern age and, as quoted earlier, a detached, ironic stance no longer seemed appropriate in the wake of the trauma. Kirby describes how, after 9/11, the advent of new sincerity was tied to the American attempts to reinforce and restore a sense of reassurance, given that ‘sincerity has traditionally been identified as a typically American trait [and] to have more of it is to reinforce Americanness.’[[171]](#footnote-171) He describes a cultural ‘earnestness’ that has gained significant grip on western societal identity in recent years until it is no longer ‘called for or promoted,’ but rather has become embedded in contemporary life ‘right at the heart of our culture.’[[172]](#footnote-172) While sincerity has been shown to be used in a wide range of senses and contexts here, it should be noted that the contemporary sense of sincerity is often synonyms not with anti-irony, as Thorn states, but rather with an honesty, emotionally or factually, and a desire for authenticity that manifests as earnestness.[[173]](#footnote-173) This cultural earnestness not only stems from the shift toward apocalyptic scenarios,[[174]](#footnote-174) the dystopian resignation of society, but also speaks to an anti- establishmentarianism within society, as ‘earnestness is a depoliticized, indeed desocialized quality.’[[175]](#footnote-175) While the new sincerity may seem a wholly positive movement, it is part and parcel with both the current dystopian acceptance and anti-government sentiments, revealing a societal desire to earnestly progress away from ironic detachment and dystopian foreshadowings. As Turner attests:

Ours is a generation raised the ‘80s and ‘90s on a diet of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, for whom […] irony and cynicism [are] a default setting, something ingrained in us. However, despite, or rather *because* of this, a yearning for meaning- for sincere and constructive progression and expression- has come to shape today’s dominant cultural mode.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Now is the generation, then, of the search for sincere post-ironic forms: Artists of all types, as Morris attested, are no longer creating pieces purely with the purpose of exposing the processes of their own construction for mere ironic affect or cynical amusement. Instead, artists are creating works which attempt to navigate from the heavy irony of the postmodern, to reach Fitzgerald’s authenticity, vulnerability, Kirby’s earnestness, Turner’s constructive progression – the New Sincerity. In literature, this desire is evidenced most clearly by the surge in production, and positive reception, of auto-fiction.

Defined by Jonathan Sturgeon as a new class of memoiristic, autobiographical novel, autofiction jettisons the logic of deconstruction and parody in order to, instead, become ‘more like Kenneth Burke’s definition of literature as “equipment for living.”’[[177]](#footnote-177) Autofictional novels are those in which the author’s own experiences are self-consciously fictionalised and written as plot and narrative for the text. Often this takes the form a singular defining or otherwise tumultuous moment for the author, rather than an autobiographical accounting of an entire life. Sturgeon suggests that autofiction fosters the belief that fiction is no longer false, lies, or “make believe”, but instead works as an example built from a fictional account of authorial truth, from which to draw implicit didactic lessons. Gibbons, too, attests to the boom of sincerity in contemporary examples of the genre, describing autofiction as ‘a genre that integrates the autobiographical into fiction […] not as a game, but in order to enhance the realism of a text and tackle the sociological and phenomenological dimensions of personal life.’[[178]](#footnote-178) As opposed to postmodern autofiction, which used authorial inclusion to foreground the artifice of the text, post-postmodern autofiction features the author in order to ‘signal realism.’ One example of such a text is Sophie Calle’s *Take Care of Yourself*, in which Calle, after receiving a break-up email ending her relationship with an unnamed artist, forwards the email to one hundred and seven other women, collating their interpretations and reactions and presenting them as the novel. Experimental in form, this example of autofiction originally presents as a late entry into the expansive canon of postmodern metafiction, but also displays a sincerity throughout, an emotional vulnerability and connection as each of the participants provide something beyond deconstruction of the email itself, aiming to emotionally support Calle that moves the text beyond the postmodern. While the title signals irony and self-consciousness typical of the postmodern, Monica Sabolo’s *All This Has Nothing To Do With Me* breaks away from such postmodern concerns in dealing with the similar topic: the end of a relationship and the fictionalising of that process, in an attempt to further resonate emotionally with the audience through sincerity of authorial intention. The novel details a period in the life of MS, name later revealed to be Monica S, focussing on her entire relationship from start to finish with a man simply known as XX. Here, Sabolo offers up the strange-seeming end of a relationship for analysis- but one which, again, wishes for a genuine emotional response, which is aiming to help people in a similar situation to achieve a form of closure that the author also strives for. Further, Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated* and Sonali Deraniyagala’s *Wave* fit comfortably into the post-postmodern, sincerity fuelled autofiction genre. Each author fictionalises specific inspirational or distressing events in their lives, instigating an emotional connection and, to repeat Gibbons’ earlier point, challenging the sociological and phenomenological dimensions of personal life.[[179]](#footnote-179) These authors are writing their often traumatic experiences in an attempt at connectivity, to ‘insist on our essential relationality - our connectedness as humans to one another in the globalizing world and with fictional characters as representations of our selves.’[[180]](#footnote-180) Autofiction takes the focus away from the debate between truth and fiction, instead posing questions about the way in which we lead our lives and pushes for a sincerity of meaning and connection by presenting the reader with the opportunity to engage with the challenges posed by modern life. It’s a post-ironic display, authentic, vulnerable, and earnest, and a clear expression of a desire for something beyond irony and towards a new sincerity or authenticity of intent.

**2.4 The Nostalgia Drive[[181]](#footnote-181)**

Linda Hutcheon, at the tail end of postmodernism, identifies the growing trend of nostalgia, discerning that in the 1990s, ‘it appears to be nostalgia that is holding sway,’ a nostalgia that has become an ‘obsession’ of mass culture and art.[[182]](#footnote-182) Far from the *nostos* and *algos* of the word’s Greek etymology (‘to return home’ and ‘pain’), contemporary nostalgia has turned from being the ‘social disease’[[183]](#footnote-183) of crippling ennui ascribed to Swiss soldiers by medical practitioners, to a phenomenon in which one ‘evokes a memory of a former pleasure, a bitter-sweet recognition of the passing of time, or a sense of a lost era.’[[184]](#footnote-184) Nostalgia, as defined by Roberta Rubenstein, has come to mean an ‘expression of a regressive wish to retreat to a less complicated moment in history or personal experience,’ again signposting the desire to return to a time beyond our own, an escape from the present into more pleasurable memories.[[185]](#footnote-185) Lipovetsky’s Hypermodernity evidences the role nostalgia increasingly plays in contemporary society, where individuals have become concerned with ‘ceaselessly’ exhuming and rediscovering their pasts in a desire for continuity between past and present, ‘longing to find one’s roots and discover one’s history.’[[186]](#footnote-186) The hypermodern individual celebrates ‘the slightest object from the past, invoke[s] the duties of memory,’[[187]](#footnote-187) in order to take refuge from the demands of the present ‘in the nostalgia for memories from the cultural past.’[[188]](#footnote-188) This desire to realign the past and present speaks directly to the nostalgic sentiment, and the need to return to ‘a time of youth,’[[189]](#footnote-189) and Rubenstein’s less complicated moments. By the end of 2016, Forbes magazine declared it as the year in which we hit peak, ‘mass’ nostalgia,[[190]](#footnote-190) with the previous year seeing aspects of 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s content making up eight of the top ten highest grossing films at the global box office.[[191]](#footnote-191) Indeed, the nostalgia drive in contemporary society finds its clearest expression within pop culture, most commonly within the film industry, with remakes, reboots and sequels now making up the majority of box office productions and successes: 2017 sees remakes of Stephen King’s *IT* (1990), Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)*,* and *Flatliners* (1990); the *fifth* iteration of the (critically maligned, commercially lucrative) Transformers franchise (1984), alongside a rebooted *Power Rangers* (1993)and planned reboots of both *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and the *Six Million Dollar Man* (1973) (re-named *The Six Billion Dollar Man* to adjust for inflation); the re-releases of both *Terminator 2* (1991) and *The Shining* (1980); *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Ring* (1995)*,* and *Trainspotting* (1996)have all received recent sequels, with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)*, Beetlejuice* (1988)*, Beverly Hills Cop* (1984)*,* and *Jumanji* (1995)sequels all planned or currently in production. In western television, we see the return of past series with new productions of adult-aimed shows like *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* (1988)*, Twin Peaks* (1990)*,* and *The X-Files* (1993)*,* alongside sequels or reboots of several children’s and young adult programmes, including *Duck Tales* (1987)*, The Powerpuff Girls* (1998)*, Samurai Jack* (2001)*, Tales From the Crypt* (1989)*,* and *The Magic Schoolbus* (1994). Similarly in western music, a nostalgic sentiment emerges via growing interest in the genres of Synthwave and Dungeon Synth, the popularity of hypnagogic pop, or the counter-cultural 1980s and 1990s nostalgia fest of Vaporwave that it inspired, genres which evoke a distinctly 1980s aesthetic reimagined or reproduced with twenty-first century digital software.[[192]](#footnote-192) Describing what he defines as new ‘hauntological’ genres in music, the British equivalents of hypnagogic pop, Mark Fisher highlights one of the main features of these emerging genres as a “confrontation with a cultural impasse: the failing of the future.”[[193]](#footnote-193) The idea of a contemporary discontent with the present, and the current anxiety over the seeming certitude of a future dystopia necessitating a nostalgic reaction, is also evinced by Goldhill, who signals the specifically reactionary nature of contemporary nostalgia writes that ‘today’s constant talk of nostalgia – for old passport covers, old manners, old food, and above all that fantasy of a Britain before multiculturalism – is in part a response to rapid social change and feelings of insecurity.’[[194]](#footnote-194) The ‘recent commercialized luxuriating in the culture of past,’ according to Hutcheon, points to a ‘dissatisfaction with the culture of the present,’[[195]](#footnote-195) and Di Placido, too, points to a desire to alleviate the anxieties of the present by nostalgic revelry, stating of 2016 that it ‘has been a tough year,’ and that in a bid to cope with the large quantity of celebrity deaths and increasing frequency of violent political arguments ‘we looked back to a simpler time [...] We wanted our beloved franchises rebooted and revitalized, to know that no matter what happens, our favorite fictional characters will always be there for us.’[[196]](#footnote-196) Justified or not, death and political unrest being frequent fixtures in humanity’s history, the current frequency with which nostalgia[[197]](#footnote-197) is invoked (or indeed retreated unto) is indicative of the fear of a distinctly outlined, negative, future, and an anxiety over the present that forces us to look backwards to the apparently more agreeable past. Linda Hutcheon offers one explanation for this desire:

The ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past. It is "memorialized" as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations. Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. [...] Nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects, making the past feel comfortable, stable, coherent, safe.[[198]](#footnote-198)

Hutcheon’s conception hints at the more dangerous aspects of nostalgia: warped or false memories. Nostalgia, while flawed, provides a ‘comfortable'[[199]](#footnote-199) escapism from contemporary problems, but also sanitizes our past experiences of potential harm in a selective mode that assuages dissatisfaction with the myriad of societal problems that plague the present, providing us with ‘comfort content’:[[200]](#footnote-200) ‘there is no misery, violence, prejudice or despair in a[n old] Hovis ad.’[[201]](#footnote-201) Nostalgia, as described by Susan Stewart, denies the sentiment of dystopian resignation by its very utopian nature, wearing ‘a distinctly utopian face,’[[202]](#footnote-202) while the narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction denies the present, and all its maladies, and gives authenticity to the rose-tinted past.[[203]](#footnote-203) Dystopian resignation thus leads to a desperate utopian desire for movement and progress, a sincerity of action, and the proliferation of nostalgic yearnings, all as escapism from the present. We forge ahead without asking where to, and look back without truly analysing where from, in a frantic, anxious endeavour to escape the contemporary, all of which leads us to the final component in our analysis contemporary culture: Infantilization. For, as Goldhill writes:

When we forget that the questions “where have we come from?” and “where we going?” are integrally linked, we drastically reduce our chances of self-understanding or effective action. If we oversimplify history, we will live – as both Cicero and Kant predicted – *with the shallow mindfulness of children.[[204]](#footnote-204)*

**2.5 Infantilization**

In conjuncture with the spread of nostalgic sentiment, post-postmodern society is defined by an indefinitely extended nonage (*non sapere aude!),* that is to say, by infantilization.

The comforts of nostalgia, it seems, have less in common with revisiting the securities of an idyllic *past*, but instead reveal a contemporary desire for, and fixation on re-visiting, the blissful ignorance of *childhood.*[[205]](#footnote-205) ‘The longing for childhood,’ writes Sturgeon, ‘is a broad cultural disposition,’ and leads to both culture induced and self-induced infantilism in an attempt to obtain said childhoods. [[206]](#footnote-206) Sturgeon is far from the only critic to note the rising tide of infantilism in contemporary culture. Kit Wilson, for one, points to a specific example of the way we seek to make western society ‘blinkered, mindless and immature,’[[207]](#footnote-207) by highlighting current trends in company nomenclature:

Look at the way today’s businesses choose to market themselves. They invent names that imitate the nonsense words of babies: Zoopla, Giffgaff, Google, Trivago. They deliberately botch grammar in their slogans to sound naïve and cutesy: “Find your happy”, “Be differenter”, “The joy of done”. They make their advertisements and logos twee and ironic — a twirly moustache here, a talking dog there — just to show how carefree and fun they are.[[208]](#footnote-208)

The west, Wilson argues, is an increasingly infantile society, a sentiment furthered by Diana West who, in an interview for the launch of her latest book *The Death of the Grown-Up*, describes the current epoch as the “Era of the Perpetual Adolescent.”[[209]](#footnote-209) She continues that “the cultural distinctions between children and adults “–who dress the same, all say “cool,” and even watch cartoons–” have “disappeared,” with current generations becoming “extremely immature, in fact, downright childish” in nature.[[210]](#footnote-210) West argues for a blurring of the lines between adult and child, suggestive less of a society who have been infantilized and more of a persistent arrested development of adulthood. The transitory moment between childhood and adulthood, or more specifically adolescence, has become the dominant cap on maturity. Erick da Silva too claims that adolescence has become a ‘state that is no longer transitional but a frame of mind to be sustained long past one's teenage years,’[[211]](#footnote-211) citing the increasingly juvenile themes characterizing modern cinema as evidence: ‘the most successful productions in the past two decades have been adaptations of comic books, Disney movies, and so on.’[[212]](#footnote-212) Da Silva also puts forward Jacapo Bernardini’s observations that the “adult uniform” no longer exists in contemporary society, with men no longer having a distinct dress sensibility from their own children, while women are described as being in thrall to ‘an industry catering to the sole purpose of restoring their lost youth […] botox injections, rejuvenating creams, sexual enhancement drugs, etc have all become unquestionably mainstream and accessible,’ all in attempt to desperately cling to ‘a fetishized ideal of youth.’[[213]](#footnote-213) Bernardini’s argument also highlights the significant differences between the infantilization of binary genders in contemporary society, and introduces the damaging nature of the way in which the infantilization of women is identified. While infantilization is a problematic and wide-spread phenomenon, it is most often significantly women who are targeted by the commentary, where, as Lisa Wade states, society demands that ‘youth, inexperience, and naiveté [should be found] sexy in women, but not in men.’[[214]](#footnote-214) Wade rightly asserts that this reinforces a power and status difference between the sexes, ‘where vulnerability, weakness, and dependency and their opposites are gendered traits’ desirable in women, but not in men, as a way to ‘remind women of their prescribed social position relative to men.’[[215]](#footnote-215) Allen Marshall O’Brien identifies the infantilization as ‘an phenomenon by which our society systemically equates femininity with things like vulnerability, submission, uncertainty, and childhood,’ suggesting the commentary as a ruse of the, more adult, patriarchy.[[216]](#footnote-216) ‘To be womanly today,’ O’Brien identifies, ‘is to be, in many senses, infantile,’ as evidenced by the ubiquity of age-masking products as outlined by Bernardini. This notion of infantilization serves a far more problematic purpose than that seen across society in general, namely the continuation of gender oppression (in line with the altermodern oppression of drives for equality.) While the infantilization of women, specifically, pushes for sexual ideals closer to childhood, one reviewer of contemporary culture suggested that general societal infantilization runs still further into the realms of infanthood, describing the current generation as one of the most regressive ever when it comes to culture and further claiming that the millennial generation desires ‘to remain as mentally and emotionally close to [their] mother’s womb at all times.’[[217]](#footnote-217) We are, as Sturgeon argues, infantilized and self-infantilized, both seeking and indulging in culturally regressive entertainment and having it foisted upon us. In most aspects of life, young-adults, according to Martin van Creveld, are being treated like children and unable to fend for themselves in terms of work, study, freedom of movement, attitudes to drink, and sex.[[218]](#footnote-218) Undergraduate students too, notes da Silva, particularly in a north American context, are also being infantilized as lecturers are advised to prepare ‘trigger warnings’ in advance for students who, given their lack of ‘emotional and intellectual maturity,’ need to be forewarned of ‘realities of the world, such as bigotry, racism, violence, and even disagreement, lest they break down in tears having found out that people can be evil, have different opinions, or that harsh things happen out there.’[[219]](#footnote-219) While a counter-argument can be made that trigger warnings serve as ‘potentially lifesaving for people who have dealt with traumas like sexual assault, hate crimes or violence,’[[220]](#footnote-220) it seems to speak more about infantilization than infantile individuals that such a term (‘trigger warnings’) has not come into common parlance until recently and evidences the rise of infantilization of the millennial generation, those current college students, in particular.

The infantilization process goes beyond the treatment of the millennial generation, though, to that of the contemporary cultural individual at large, a concern that forms a large part of Alan Kirby’s conception of the current digimodern age. Kirby initially conceived of the current cultural epoch as the ‘pseudo-modern’ before honing his ideas and declaring, instead, for *Digimodernism*. Both theories, however, describe the same: a cultural anxiety over the present predisposes us to a return to a nostalgic past, which effects a cultural infantilism. Kirby describes perceptions of the pseudo-modern world as ‘frightening and seemingly uncontrollable,’ inevitably feeding ‘a desire to return to the infantile playing with toys which also characterises the pseudo-modern cultural world.’[[221]](#footnote-221) The fatalistic anxiety of society in imagining dystopian futures feeds into this infantilization process, not just in terms of returning to the ‘toys’ of the past, but causing a general societal helplessness:

From a general fear of social breakdown and identity loss, to a deep unease about diet and health; from anguish about the destructiveness of climate change, to the effects of a new personal ineptitude and helplessness, which yield TV programmes about how to clean your house, bring up your children or remain solvent. This technologized cluelessness is utterly contemporary: the pseudo-modernist communicates constantly with the other side of the planet, yet needs to be told to eat vegetables to be healthy, a fact self-evident in the Bronze Age. He or she can direct the course of national television programmes, but does not know how to make him or herself something to eat - a characteristic fusion of the childish and the advanced, the powerful and the helpless.[[222]](#footnote-222)

Kirby argues that contemporary ‘popular culture’ is in fact a ‘narrowly focused children's entertainment plus "noise",’[[223]](#footnote-223) suggesting the ‘refurbishment of children's stories as material for the entertainment of young adults’ has come to define the major milieu of all cultural output in the twenty-first century;[[224]](#footnote-224) ‘news programs and documentaries,’ he writes, ‘are drained of information and jacked up with pseudodrama (the "dumbing down" debate is in truth mostly about infantilization); knowledge of the past is assumed to be zero outside of GCSE staples […]; and interest in "culture" is reduced to new movies and bands.’[[225]](#footnote-225) Michael Hogan, entertainment writer for the *Guardian*, highlights further examples of the way in which ‘pop culture has disengaged our brains and arrested our development’ through CGI spectacle, Pixar ‘cartoon cutesiness,’ filling our wardrobes with ‘hoodies, onesies, logo Ts and other outsized toddler-wear. Our Facebook feeds are all “yay!” this, “nom!” that and “fwee more sleeps to ickle-wickle holibobs!” the other. We’re preserved in pubescent aspic.[[226]](#footnote-226) Hogan argues for popular culture as the cause for infantilization, yet it is perhaps more accurate to say that current pop-cultural production is rather a symptom of cultural infantilization and an effect of the nostalgia drive, in which we reward (with attention, likes, shares, re-tweets, and ultimately currency) those pop-cultural artefacts which help us to engage with the nostalgic past. In doing so, the contemporary individual creates a potential feedback loop in which the reward of nostalgic content creates a market for more of the same, which increases the amount of content rewarded, which inflates the market (ad infinitum). If Kirby is to be believed, and cultural output and pop-culture does infantilize us, then such a loop proves only once more that we self-infantilize at the same time as we are infantilized. In TV, alongside the aforementioned effects on news and documentaries, the post-postmodern world sees a rise in the production and critical praise of cartoons aimed at adult audiences and featuring mature themes. While a traditionally childish medium, the 21st century has seen an explosion of production of these adult cartoons, including such examples as *Bojack Horeseman, Rick and Morty, Bob’s Burgers, Archer, Family Guy, Futurama, South Park, Drawn Together, Chozen*, and finally *Big Mouth.*[[227]](#footnote-227) Such cultural productions pay heed to Wade’s concept of the blurred lines between adult and child, alongside affirming concepts of the perpetual adolescent, and is suggestive a desire for simplicity of entertainment (and a departure from the real of the everyday).

In fiction, we see the infantilized desire appear in the current popularity of ‘crossover fiction,’ – as analysed by Rachel Falconer[[228]](#footnote-228) – the phenomenon of adult-readers engaging with children’s literature. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is an obvious example of this, and is well known to have an adult fan following, to the extent that ‘adult’ editions, with non-illustrated covers, were released during the series’ print runs, though Falconer rightly makes the argument that Rowling here perhaps invented the market demand for cross-generational literature rather than adhered to it.[[229]](#footnote-229) Falconer highlights that this phenomenon, of adults reading children’s literature, is not new, though she does recognise the role that such crossover fiction has as a ‘part of the larger story of the increasing hybridization of child and adult cultures.’[[230]](#footnote-230) The popularity of crossover fiction, in series such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Mortal Instruments,* and *His Dark Materials*, does reveal a specific infantilised desire in society via this hybridization, suggesting a desire to legitimise the paraphernalia of childhood and childish mediums for an adult audience in an attempt to assuage any potential guilt at enjoying such forms (why else do we hide such novels in ‘adult’ dust-jackets, after all). Paperchase, a shop devoted entirely to stationery, notebooks and novelty rubbers, flourishes; comic, toy, and gaming conventions receive enough custom and attention to become prestigious annual events; and *Dungeons and Dragons* is witnessing an unprecedented renaissance. These infantilising factors, whether societal or self-inflicted, return western citizens to a state equivalent to that of adolescence, where the affectations of the teenage are propagated, youth is fetishized, ‘adulting’ is problematized (with a myriad of websites dedicated to ‘how to adult’) and ageing is postponed unendingly.

Nostalgia alone cannot be the reason for such deterioration into childishness and infantilism, though it may have been a contributing factor. Instead, Kirby and da Silva, along with nerd culture poster-child Simon Pegg, all point to late capitalism as the culprit behind this shift. Pegg, recalling Jameson’s arguments about a cynical view of new social movements,[[231]](#footnote-231) identifies the consumption of “childish things” [[232]](#footnote-232) – comic books, superheroes – by adults as an aspect of nerd culture, itself, according to Pegg, “a late capitalist conspiracy, designed to infantilize the consumer as a means of non-aggressive control.”[[233]](#footnote-233) While the comment originally sparked enough controversy to justify a reply by Pegg, the sentiment itself could not be a more apt assessment of the driving forces behind contemporary infantilism, to wit the dominance of global capitalism and the apparent attempts to standardize consumers into one marketable domain. Adolescence, it appears, ‘happens to be very profitable.’[[234]](#footnote-234) Da Silva highlights that the adolescent is the ideal consumer model ‘being as [they are] in an immature state of interior formation defined by impulsion, self-absorption, and lack of long-term thought patterns.’[[235]](#footnote-235) Da Silva continues this argument, suggesting that the economic productions targeted at our society, therefore, ‘actively encourage the cheapening of our aesthetic sensibilities’ in order to appeal to this market and promote it, ‘churning out the mass-produced soft entertainment best fit for a globalized culture of perpetual adolescents.’[[236]](#footnote-236) Nostalgia then, in this model, provided an initial desire to look backward to a time of youth, thus opening a market desire for consumer products of the past, an opening so lucrative that market forces have sought to keep the desire from fading, infantilizing their consumers by providing increasingly childish goods in order to continue profiting from infantilized desires. Kirby, too, lays the blame at the feet of capitalist forces, arguing that ‘society has been infantilized, particularly through a consumerism that fetishizes spending and sees work as an irrelevant burden,’ linking this fetishization to ‘a failure of maturation, an economic refusal to outgrow childhood pretending, play, and dressing up.’[[237]](#footnote-237) The last of these points is particularly pertinent, as it reveals a larger cultural fear of autonomy that not only goes hand-in-hand with infantilism, but may go some way to offering an explanation as to how or why this has occurred.[[238]](#footnote-238)

West identifies a lack of cultural confidence and confusion over societal expectations as symptomatic of both contemporary culture and traditional adolescence. She suggests that this stems from Western society’s ‘split personality as both world policeman and, in many people's eyes, world villain.’[[239]](#footnote-239) This conflict, between the desire to police and the fear of refutation (or vilification) speaks to the post-postmodern desire to avoid personal responsibility that has emerged as part of societal infantilization, and da Silva argues that the current epoch is mired in a state of affairs where responsibility and maturity are seen as ‘impossible ideals.’[[240]](#footnote-240) ‘Da Silva’s point here also aligns with Eshelman’s performatist concepts in which the individual obscures the self to avoid ontological issues, here suggesting that such a move is not so much about a radical reaction against community and culture, but instead a desire to avoid the direct responsibility of having to defend one’s convictions. Torralba too recognises this desire to avoid vilification through avoidance, though describes it as a contemporary fear of freedom[[241]](#footnote-241), one among six major fears that dominate our society.[[242]](#footnote-242) Torralba identifies that the fear of personal self-determination, ‘of exercising one’s own autonomy, of defending one’s own convictions […] is growing significantly,’ continuing to state that the age in which we live fosters a fear within individuals when attempting to defend ‘solid ideas like freedom, truth, dignity or even equality,’ a fear based on seeming to cross the line of so-called political correctness or deviate from the ‘highways of official thinking.’[[243]](#footnote-243) By ignoring conflict, stifling potentially adverse opinions, and avoiding engagement with opposing arguments, the contemporary individual, via this self-censoring, actively participates in their own delayed maturation; as Wilson points out, individuals ‘learn to ignore, rather than engage with, genuine disagreement, and so ultimately dismantle the most important distinction between civil society and the playground — the ability to live respectfully alongside those with whom we disagree.’[[244]](#footnote-244) As a society, we self-infantilize in order to, as Kirby states ‘[take] the world away,’[[245]](#footnote-245) to remove ourselves from potentially fraught conflicts in which we may accidentally vilify ourselves in defending our convictions and opinions. Sturgeon links this movement and removal to Kant’s concept of the Unconditioned, suggesting that certain key figures emblematic of the current cultural zeitgeist express a desire for the ‘“tranquil inactivity and constant peace” that comes when all questions about the world have obvious answers,’ resulting in a ‘childlike, carefree glee.’[[246]](#footnote-246) Enlightenment principles have become the standard for maturity in the west, a stance also taken up by Wilson who compares current western infantilization to the end of Enlightenment as described by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Wilson highlights that Adorno and Horkheimer discuss the ‘suicide of Enlightenment thinking’ as a consequence of three historical steps, the most notable of which being society’s ‘lapse into infantile solipsism, duped by the immediate gratifications of capitalism,’ though Wilson sees the West as ‘far more childish than even they anticipated.’[[247]](#footnote-247) The dialectic between classical and contemporary enlightenment is thus one of friction, a collision between the desire for progressivism, so key to enlightenment thinking, and an anti-enlightenment immaturity defined by nonage. The term is somewhat passé by now, being as it attached to one of the most frequently quoted passages of Kant’s description of Enlightenment as the emergence from a self-imposed reliance on the wisdom of others to guide us:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. *Dare to know!* (*Sapere aude.*) "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.[[248]](#footnote-248)

Western maturity is thus measured by wo/man’s ability to transcend this period of nonage, yet this term accurately describes the post-postmodern cultural infantilism that individuals refuse to (or deliberately ignore the need to) transcend. Kant cites ‘laziness and cowardice’ as the reasons ‘why such a large part of mankind gladly remain minors all their lives, long after nature has freed them from external guidance,’[[249]](#footnote-249) and while to a certain extent we can describe the self-infantilization as a product of cultural cowardice, of giving in to a fear of potential vilification and demands upon autonomous justification, perhaps laziness is less accurate. While it is perhaps true that, to some extent, ‘it is so comfortable to be a minor,’ the overwhelming pressure of market forces that emphasise a youth-cult combined with a dystopian resignation that forces a nostalgic reverence are, arguably, more active than lazy activities; perhaps it is more accurate to say, desperation and fear are the reasons why such a large swathe of humankind gladly accepts or desires infantilization, remaining in perpetual, safe, nonage. We are infantilized by consumer culture, we self-infantilize for safety.

**3. Conclusion**

Postmodernism, in its purest form, is over, having been killed by globalization; the outright victory of capitalism against any other significant opposing ideology having led to a wide-spread consumer culture antithetical to the counter-cultural agenda of the postmodern paradigm. Standing over the corpse-like sleeper, multiple new theories have emerged that identify the varying cultural models that have emerged with the supposed death of the grand cultural mode. Many propose re-assessments of modernist principles[[250]](#footnote-250) while others suggest a clean break away from the mode and into something entirely contemporaneous. New cultural identifiers have emerged, with separate theorists focusing on such varied topics as sheltered selves, networked autonomy, anti-establishmentarianism sentiments, or the death of irony. Yet, while each focusses on seemingly disparate specifics, taken as a whole they all describe elements of a grander whole; a culture of dystopian resignation, attempting sincere progress without goal while simultaneously clinging to memories of the nostalgia-tinted selective past that creates a capitalist and risk induced infantilism. We cling to the past, desperate to escape the horrors of the present. We long for a better future, yet know that there is none to come. Such is the post-postmodern prognosis, a world riddled with anxiety about the contemporary, frantically reaching forwards and backwards to resolve the issues of the present.

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CHAPTER II – SOUTHWARD VS SINCERITY

In response to the vast amount of criticism Southward publicly received following the publication of *The Postmodern Problem*, Southward published *The Metamodern Solution*. This is the story we know from Southward’s own words and pseudo-autobiographical metamemoirs, though the essay presented here highlights a significant departure from the version later more widely publicised.

In this early draft version of the essay, Southward tackles what he deems the successor to the postmodern state, Metamodernism. The argument first explores metamodernism and the way in which it relates to the post-postmodern world through ironic play and oscillatory behaviours, before examining some minor ways in which the metamodern was seen to manifest at the time of writing. Significantly, Southward offers an analysis of several contemporary metamodern texts here, all examples of which have since been lost or burned in the great literary purge of his reign. Southward also posits a more optimistic model for contemporary life, in the form of a proposed ‘neo=sisyphism’ to be taken up in lieu of the more narcissistic behaviours he observed waning at the beginning of the post-postmodern period

This early version of the essay is interesting in its departure from the latter examples more well known in our current age, as scholars will no doubt easily see. One of the major departures is Southward’s seeming enthusiasm for new literary production and finding a means to transcend the postmodern, which runs directly counter to all opinions and desires observed during his reign.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

**THE METAMODERN SOLUTION**

**1. Introduction**

Post-postmodernism is an ugly word and an awkward term, but, for the purposes of my previous argument, a necessary one.[[251]](#footnote-251) For all the contenders to the throne of dominant cultural paradigm, there are none which accurately, or perhaps fully, describe the conditions of the contemporary zeitgeist and so eliminating the need for such a clumsy term – all barring one. Eagle-eyed footnote fiends may have noticed passing references to the grand theory which will form the centre of my argument here, but for the most part I have attempted to avoid discussing it until this point in my analyses of the present, perhaps in a poor imitation of Germanic ‘point-late’ style,[[252]](#footnote-252) but more likely for the sense of drama.[[253]](#footnote-253) The theory to which I refer describes the contemporary zeitgeist and the current cultural paradigms of the post-postmodern with far more accuracy than others previously suggested, tying together and answering all of the modal patterns as described in my previous argument. I refer here, of course, to Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s formation of the Metamodern.

This chapter aims, first and foremost, to analyse the metamodern impulse, and the definitions thereof, next looking at the under-researched topic of metamodern literature before a final, and by that point relatively apparent, examination of the way that ideas of the metamodern respond to the charges of the contemporary as outlined in *The Post-postmodern Problem*. To that end, let us first define and outline the markers of the cultural structure of feeling that is the metamodern.

**2. What is Metamodernism (and Why Aren’t They Saying Such Terrible Things About It)?**

*[Current cultural] trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern. They express a (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse […] The Postmodern years of plenty, pastiche and parataxis are over. In fact […] they have been over for quite a while now*.

-*-Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker-*[[254]](#footnote-254)

In 2010, Vermeulen and van den Akker published their article ‘Notes on Metamodernism*,*’ in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, claiming (as in the epigraph above) that the postmodern moment was on the way out and that emerging new phenomena across culture and in the arts were ‘characterized by an attempt to incorporate postmodern stylistics and formal conventions while moving beyond them.[[255]](#footnote-255) In the wake of postmodernism, Vermeulen and van den Akker identified a movement beyond the familiar tropes of pastiche, a movement – or rather cultural sentiment – that they titled Metamodernism. Building on from Frederic Jameson’s assertion of postmodernism ‘as a hegemonic “Structure of feeling” characterized by senses of an end,’[[256]](#footnote-256) metamodernism describes a new, somewhat inchoate post-postmodern version: ‘a structure of feeling is a sentiment or, rather, still a sensibility that many people share, that many are aware of, but which cannot easily, if at all, be pinned down.’[[257]](#footnote-257) Metamodernism differs from the previous ‘-isms’ offered up in that it does not seek to prescribe any specific dogma for culture so much as describe a series of current cultural developments. Metamodernism, according to Vermeulen, is a ‘mapping of contemporary culture,’ a term or label that ‘we [Vermeulen and van den Akker] could use to understand the post-postmodern condition, to understand those developments, those strategies, those new phenomena that were occurring, that we found we found we could no longer explain, we no longer contextualize, or map, with the vernacular that we had learned as students about postmodernism.’[[258]](#footnote-258) Metamodernism is not the extending of a dogma,[[259]](#footnote-259) nor a philosophy, movement, programme, aesthetic register, visual strategy, literary technique, trope, a system of thought, a manifesto, or a way of life.[[260]](#footnote-260) Instead, as Vermeulen and van den Akker repeatedly contend, drawing on Raymond Williams’s phrase, it is a structure of feeling:

When we say that metamodernism is a structure of feeling, we intend to say [...] that it is a sensibility that is widespread enough to be called structural [...] yet [it] cannot be reduced to one particular strategy […] Ultimately, therefore, metamodernism is a term used, by us, to periodize the contemporary and think the present historically.[[261]](#footnote-261)

Rather than, say, the hypermodern movement, which dictates that all human behaviour is regulated by hypermodern tropes and elements of hyper-individualism, the metamodern works as an umbrella term for the myriad developments that have emerged in the wake of the postmodern. Another significant difference between the Metamodern theory and those previously espoused is that the metamodern denies the events of 9/11 as the risk-trigger for the current complications of society:

‘We would like to make it absolutely clear that this new shape, meaning, and direction do not directly stem from some kind of post-9/11 sentiment. Terrorism neither infused doubt about the supposed superiority of neoliberalism, nor did it inspire reflection about the basic assumptions of Western economics, politics, and culture quite the contrary. […] The threefold ‘‘threat’’ of the credit crunch, a collapsed centre, and climate change has the opposite effect, as it infuses doubt, inspires reflection, and incites a move forward out of the postmodern and into the metamodern.’[[262]](#footnote-262)

Luke Turner, another key figure in the developing metamodern field, elaborates on Vermeulen and van den Akker’s point (who readily accept the need for such elaboration, describing their initial article as ‘still very much flawed, leaving many of the issues raised in the original contemporary aesthetics and culture underdeveloped or unexplored,)[[263]](#footnote-263) describing metamodernism as ‘descriptive, rather than prescriptive.’[[264]](#footnote-264) Turner posits metamodernism as a structure of feeling that is ‘*not* intended as a philosophy or an art movement, since it does not define or delineate a closed system of thought, or dictate any particular set of aesthetic values or methodologies.’[[265]](#footnote-265) Great pains are taken by those describing the metamodern to ensure that it adheres to this conception as ‘the best *descriptor* for contemporary culture.’[[266]](#footnote-266) ‘Ultimately,’ Vermuelen and van den Akker argue, ‘metamodernism for us, is a cultural logic, a certain dominant ideological patterning that leaves its traces across culture.’[[267]](#footnote-267) This dominant ideological patterning takes many forms, to be explored hereafter, but a universal constant of the metamodern moment is a palpable desire to surpass the dominant postmodern ideologies of deconstruction, irony, pastiche, relativism, nihilism, the rejection of grand narratives,[[268]](#footnote-268) alongside ‘cynicism, and the sort of despair that comes from thinking that everything is coming apart.’[[269]](#footnote-269) Metamodernism, its proponents argue, engages with this task by re-introducing themes of hope, dialogue, collaboration, sincerity, and optimism,[[270]](#footnote-270) as well as an emergent ‘New Romanticism,’ ‘and the potential for grand narratives and universal truths.’[[271]](#footnote-271) Rather than a diametric negation of those elements attempted to be surpassed with the elements to be re-introduced, irony with sincerity, deconstruction with reconstruction, the metamodern is characterised by the concurrent existence of both positions and an ideological desire to achieve the post-postmodern without abandoning the lessons learned within the postmodern era.[[272]](#footnote-272)

Metamodernism, ultimately then, is an effort to respond to the current cultural turmoil, a term to indicate the passing of the postmodern – or, rather, the contemporary attempts to do so. It is a cultural descriptor, not a creed to live by, and the major element of society as described by the metamodern impulse is one of oscillation between a ‘typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment.’[[273]](#footnote-273)

**2.1 Metamodern Oscillation**

Metamodernism, according to Vermeulen, is ‘above all’ about oscillation: ‘it is about the oscillation between the modern and the postmodern, history and ahistoricity, optimism and pessimism, sincerity and irony, the concept and the material, the figurative and the formless, narrative and the plotless, discursive originality and individual intertextuality, meaning and meaninglessness.’[[274]](#footnote-274) The metamodern moment is one of constant tension between two distinct, though not necessarily binary, poles, in which an individual is pulled between two opposing ideologies:

Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern. One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm.[[275]](#footnote-275)

Indeed, the epistemological origin of the *meta*modern, not in the common sense of ‘meta’ as self-aware (though there are aspects of that within the metamodern), derives from Plato’s metaxis, ‘describing an oscillation and simultaneity between and beyond diametrically opposed poles.’[[276]](#footnote-276) By way of example, Vermeulen and van den Akker analogize this societal oscillation by describing a captain sailing between islands on an archipelago, whose ship begins to sink:

Lyotard proposes another kind of system, this is a system in which you are a captain on a ship sailing between different islands. And so Lyotard says, in the postmodern vernacular, we need to sail between the islands without ever really setting foot on land and so you are constantly sailing between these islands. [...][ In the metamodern] the ship is sinking at this moment and so you are forced to make a decision, although you know that all of these islands probably have some value, that no one island is intrinsically better or more true than another. And so you are choosing, while knowing that you can't choose.[[277]](#footnote-277)

The ship is sinking and so s/he is forced to make a decision. The captain knows that ‘all of these islands probably have some value’, that ‘no one island is intrinsically better or more true than another,’ and so is constantly dragged between them, unable to choose. Metamodernism is this moment of ‘radical doubt,’[[278]](#footnote-278) of constantly shifting and repositioning between the islands, the innumerable poles, before ultimately having to choose, despite knowing it may not be the best choice. In their later *Misunderstandings and Clarifications*, Vermeulen and van den Akker further suggest ‘elasticism’ as a descriptor of this moment ‘in the sense that the captain is tied by an elastic to different islands and the further he stretches the band to one island, the more violently the pull, the swing, back to another will be – until it snaps, of course.’[[279]](#footnote-279) In particular relation to the post-postmodern, ‘metamodernism’ describes this radical doubt as a ‘double-bind’ tension between wanting to take a modernist ideological position on a subject whilst still being aware of a postmodern cynicism about the tenability of such a position; as Vermeulen and Van den Akker put it, ‘a modern desire for *sens*, and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all.’[[280]](#footnote-280) The dominant sensibility of present culture seems to have become an expression of ‘irreconcilability,’ in which an individual’s actions are governed by a cognizance that one possible position is incompatible with the other, despite a desire to ‘occupy both at once.’[[281]](#footnote-281) The double-bind of needing to make one choice while constantly drawn to a second, then leaning towards the second before being drawn to another (the first or otherwise), results in what Turner describes as ‘a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic realism, a moderate fanaticism,’ in which two opposing or alternative ideological positions (islands in the archipelago), that in some way negate one another, are sought to be occupied simultaneously as the individual attempts ‘to attain some sort of transcendent position, *as if* such a thing were within our grasp.’[[282]](#footnote-282) Vermeulen and van den Akker describe this situation, or complexity of complicity in the wrongs the individual may attempt to right by taking a distinct ideological position, as follows: ‘Fair trade? Some, if not most, of your T-shirts are still being produced in sweatshops. Yet you try. Climate change? You consume as much so-called ‘renewable’ energy as possible, but your car still drives on gasoline. And so on and so forth.’[[283]](#footnote-283)

The metamodern individual is aware of the weighted options in any situation, of one option being more viable than the other, possibly less morally reprehensible, choice, yet oscillates between both in an attempt to occupy both standpoints. For instance, recycling aluminium cans in the appropriate bins where available, yet throwing a can in general waste in public because it is the only option nearby, as an honest-enough sounding example. This oscillation, also termed an informed naivety or pragmatic idealism,[[284]](#footnote-284) is most often framed in terms of a sincere-ironic swing that epitomises the modern-postmodern poles (though, as Turner emphasises, it should be noted that ‘one does not necessarily diminish the other’) and this aspect, the new resurgence of sincerity, has been picked up as one of the hallmarks of the metamodern moment, specifically emerging via a New Romantic sentiment.

**2.2 A Resurgence of Romanticism and Markers of Movement**

Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that metamodernism finds its clearest expression in an emergent sensibility akin to Romanticism.[[285]](#footnote-285) In order to (circum)navigate the ‘notoriously pluralistic and ambiguous’ definition of Romanticism,[[286]](#footnote-286) they suggest that the current New Romantic sentiment, as aligned with the metamodern impulse, is defined by an oscillation between the seemingly binary elements of Romanticism as identified by Isaiah Berlin: unity and multiplicity; fidelity to the particular and vagueness of outline; beauty and ugliness; art for its own sake and art as instrument of social salvation; strength and weakness; individualism and collectivism; purity and corruption; revolution and reaction; peace and war; love of life and love of death.[[287]](#footnote-287) The New Romantic attitude,[[288]](#footnote-288) Vermeulen and van den Akker argue, is defined by the oscillation between these opposite poles in attempt to ‘turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized,’ though ultimately they reduce this to a ‘general idea’ of Romanticism as oscillating between attempt and failure, modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony. [[289]](#footnote-289) Seemingly as vague as the definitions of Romanticism as before, Vermeulen and van den Akker’s New Romanticism centres on this idea of failure in spite of itself, artistic attempts which attempt production in spite of the obvious pitfalls of such endeavours, emblematic of the metamodern desire to transcend the seemingly unsurmountable postmodern ideologies of recent history. Metamodern Romanticism, that is to say the New Romantic sentiment in the metamodern era, relies on the swing between attempt and failureas seen in certain artists’ conscious decision to keep creating their art, in spite of the ‘untenableness’ of their project.[[290]](#footnote-290) As evidence, Vermeulen and van den Akker highlight the works of Bas Jan Adder and Glen Rubsamen as artists whose works could have been more successfully employed through the use of differing techniques, but who chose to work in the original materials regardless:

Ader could have equipped himself with a better boat in order to sail the seas (*In search of the miraculous*, 1975); and he could have trained himself better in the art of tree climbing in order to longer hang on to branches (*Broken fall*, 1971). […] The reason these artists haven’t opted to employ methods and materials better suited to their mission or task is that their intention is not to fulfill it, but to attempt to fulfill it in spite of its ‘‘unfulfillableness’’. The point of Ader’s journey is precisely that he might not return from it; of his tree climbing precisely that he cannot but fall eventually. […] Culture and nature cannot be one and the same, nor can any one of them ever entirely overtake the other.[[291]](#footnote-291)

This decision to continue the work despite its ‘unfulfillableness,’ is precisely the New Romantic sentiment Vermeulen and van den Akker describe, and which Abramson articulates as a ‘romantic response to crisis,’[[292]](#footnote-292) which asks that society ‘remain optimistic in the face of our postmodernism-enabled hopelessness and act “as if” things will get better (even if we don’t necessarily think they will).’[[293]](#footnote-293) The ‘wilful decision to act as though the facts on the ground aren’t the facts on the ground,’[[294]](#footnote-294) or the current informed naiveté, is also characterized by what Turner identifies as a contemporary ‘yearning for meaning – for sincere and constructive progression and expression.’[[295]](#footnote-295) The desire for meaning in the face of postmodern fatigue has resulted in a metamodern cultural mode dominated by a desire for progression and a yearning for movement ‘in pursuit of plurality of disparate and elusive horizons.’ [[296]](#footnote-296) An optimistic desire for progress in the face of the conviction ‘that humanity is in decline’ as a result of postmodern conditioning,[[297]](#footnote-297) thus characterizes contemporary artistic production and this New Romantic desire for meaning and progress can be seen in varying forms, such as the popularity of the pop-cultural analysis YouTube channels like *Game Theory* & *Film Theory*, or the ontological questions foregrounded by both *Rick and Morty* (2013) and *Bojack Horseman* (2014). Both of these latter examples display protagonists searching for a grander meaning in a (fictional) universe which denies such; Bojack’s search for ‘happiness’ is constantly questioned by others and thwarted by his own narcissism, while Morty struggles to embrace his grandfather Rick’s Absurdist philosophies on the inherent meaningless of an existence in an infinite and uncaring universe. A useful example through which to explore this desire, though, is that of the musical genre of Vaporwave.

**2.2.1 From Vapourware to Vaporwave**

The New Romantic sentiment is seen in attempts to present the ‘commonplace with significance, the quotidian with mystery, the familiar with the aura of the unfamiliar and the finite with the appearance of the infinite.’[[298]](#footnote-298) These are endeavours that may not succeed but are attempted nonetheless and such a description easily applies to the (relatively) recently birthed musical genre of vaporwave. Epistemologically deriving from ‘vapourware’ – a product never intended to be produced, but advertised nonetheless to raise the profile of the production company[[299]](#footnote-299) – vaporwave is an anti-capitalist genre in which various forms of popular Muzak (lounge, smooth jazz, elevator music, phone hold tones as some examples), as well as ‘extracts of mainstream commercials and 1980s pop music,’[[300]](#footnote-300) are parodied through a process of deconstruction and then reconstruction, becoming ‘distorted by time stretching and pitch shifting.’[[301]](#footnote-301) This sound is then placed over distorted video imagery symbolic of VHS recordings, alongside other visual cues designed to trigger a nostalgic vision of the 1980s:

Just as the Muzak samples are distorted by time stretching and pitch shifting and musically reflect the layered critical and nostalgic narrative of consumer culture, so too the visual component of the music clips repurpose, decontextualise and distort symbolic artefacts of 1980s consumer culture. Vaporwave visual clips that accompany the music creations incorporate glitch art, early digital graphic design, isolated and floating roman busks, computerised tropical landscapes, with Japanese Kanji (language writing system) and other Japanese cultural elements also evident throughout, teamed with a consistent soft pastel colouring popular in the 1980s.[[302]](#footnote-302)

In doing so, the commercialised music and Muzak sampled is distorted into a form that demands attention and inspection, commenting on the parody of such pieces by turning them into unique songs. As Sharon Schembri and Jac Tichbon, in possibly the most significant academic analysis of vaporwave to date, identify, ‘Vaporwave participants [are] self-confessed digital rebels heretically presenting a critical narrative on consumerism […] producing, consuming and (inter)mediating culture in new and innovative ways.’[[303]](#footnote-303)

Schembri and Tichbon also identify the nostalgic elements that are brought to the fore by the combination of 1980s music and visual signifiers, an effect that can be clearly seen in the two pieces that have become synonymous with the vaporwave moment - Vektroid’s ‘リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュー’ (2012), a slowed and edited version of ‘It’s Your Move’ by Diana Ross (1984), and Saint Pepsi’s ‘E N J O Y Y O U R S E L F’ (2014), which contains distorted elements of Michael Jackson’s ‘Off the Wall’ (1979) played over clips of Mac Tonight, the anthropomorphised moon from a string of McDonald’s commercials in 1986. Both these examples adhere to the concept of presenting the commonplace with significance, in that, despite the anti-consumer message inherent in appropriating and distorting their themes, these pieces attempt, in a manner aligning them with metamodern New Romanticism and as Sutherland says, ‘to give meaning to soulless Muzak,’[[304]](#footnote-304) turning it away from the generic and into something more strange and potentially calming that demands analysis and attention. In line with the New Romantic sentiment as identified within the metamodern, this practice is also doomed to fail in this attempt. Ultimately, the techniques of vaporwave are often construed as part of ‘meme culture,’ purely parodical and nonsensical pieces which have more in common with the techniques of the postmodern than any attempt to surpass it and the flawed capitalist message contained within. Vaporwave is further hampered through the very aesthetics of the practice; Schembri and Tichbon highlight that ‘the essence of Vaporwave is [to be] retro cultural and nostalgic,’ following that, in relying on lo-fi technology for major releases seen on ‘cassettes, vinyl and VHS,’ Vaporwave ‘conveys a message of nostalgia and a sentimental attachment to technology of a bygone era,’ thus aligning itself with the current global capitalist agenda of comfortable nostalgia (as discussed fully in *The Post-postmodern Problem*). While aware of this contradiction – of using 1980s nostalgia to give meaning to songs as part of an anti-capitalist agenda, whilst the capitalist agenda seeks to commodify and profit from mass nostalgia – productions of Vaporwave continue. Vaporwave artists seemingly attempt, in spite of the ‘unfulfillableness’ of their task, to convey[[305]](#footnote-305) a message of meaning and deeper purpose to that which seemed purposeless, aligning to Vermeulen and van den Akker’s concept of metamodern upcycling, that is, taking lessons from the past and incorporating ‘them into a present, or future, that is as of yet unobtainable.’[[306]](#footnote-306) Vaporwave is indicative of the metamodern oscillation between irony and sincerity (although the pull towards the postmodern, especially in terms of parody and irony, is perhaps rather stronger here), but also demonstrates the desire for progress in an optimistic reclaiming of postmodern materials and cultural artefacts, imbuing them with a contemporary sense of meaning suggestive of a grander human ability to progress. From the ashes of postmodern cultural production, vaporwave demonstrates how new forms can be built and the yearning for meaning, purpose and movement can aim to be fulfilled.

A key identifier of the metamodern times is this yearning for meaning and desire for movement, though as Vermeulen and van den Akker explicitly signpost, it is a desire for a state which the subject knows is unattainable. They argue that mankind is *not* ‘going toward a natural but unknown goal, but they pretend they do so that they progress morally as well as politically.’[[307]](#footnote-307) Metamodernism is defined by individuals moving, in this manner, ‘for the sake of moving,’ attempting in spite of the inevitable failure of such attempts.[[308]](#footnote-308) The contemporary individual seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find, which does not diminish the search, but rather fuels it further,[[309]](#footnote-309) ‘for indeed, that is the ‘‘destiny’’ of the metamodern wo/man: to pursue a horizon that is forever receding.’[[310]](#footnote-310)

**2.3 Neo-Utopianism**

As a final brief observation, the metamodern, in pursuing the endless horizon, also describes another movement across culture, specifically the emerging collective re-examination, and desire for, utopia. Vermeulen and van den Akker identify the fact that ‘“Utopia” – as a trope, individual desire or collective fantasy – is once more, and increasingly, visible and noticeable across artistic practices,’[[311]](#footnote-311) though they are quick to point out that this practice is merely a desire, with metamodern utopianism expressing ‘that there are no clear utopian horizons after decades of TINA and carless consumerism.’[[312]](#footnote-312) Instead, as Luke Turner agrees, within the metamodern, we witness a ‘*yearning* for utopias, despite their futile nature.’[[313]](#footnote-313) Vaporwave, by way of example, emphasises a yearning for reconstruction beyond the postmodern and, by extension, a world beyond capitalism, yet cannot articulate such a world from within the generic limits of its form. The metamodern does not seek that perfect society, but rather new conceptions of the means by which to attain a positively different situation than that of the present. Utopian longings are not an escape mechanism, but rather a methodology by which alternatives can be examined. As Vermeulen and van den Akker posit, contemporary utopian longings are more a tool, ‘a looking glass’ for ‘scanning this world and others for alternative possibilities. It is not invoked to get us away from something according to this or that dogma.’[[314]](#footnote-314) While I have expounded the issues pertaining to contemporary utopian yearnings as expressed through a dystopian acceptance elsewhere,[[315]](#footnote-315) the metamodern supposes that such longings derive from a reaction to a ‘radically unstable and uncertain world, where political systems and power relations are diffuse and unpredictable, [and] financial security a rare privilege.’[[316]](#footnote-316) Risk and fears for the dystopian present thus instigate new utopian longings that are expressed via a search for meaning and purpose within artistic creation, an optimistic response in the wake of postmodern irony and cynicism that speaks of the metamodern oscillation once more; we swing between fear of dystopia and desire for utopia, the need to attempt and the certainty of failure, the modern desire for purpose and the postmodern acceptance of meaninglessness.[[317]](#footnote-317)

**3. Metamodern Literature**

Metamodern literary analysis is still a little-researched,[[318]](#footnote-318) rather inchoate field, as is to be expected considering the infancy of the movement into the post-postmodern. The majority of metamodern literary analysis, as yet, tends towards that of the case study, with any singular ‘comprehensive study of the ways in which contemporary literature relates to the metamodern paradigm,’ [[319]](#footnote-319) far from complete in the current field.

Although it is far from the scope of this argument to suggest just such a complete, comprehensive means by which the fledgling form of metamodern literature may be framed, it is my intention here, instead, to outline a particular trend that has begun to emerge across literature in the metamodern moment. This is not a complete categorization of the techniques that define the mode, but rather an overview of one potentially partially unifying paradigm that may begin to thread together some of the disparate literary examples of the epoch which, like postmodernism beforehand, is both the descriptor of the era and a genre.[[320]](#footnote-320) What I will focus on here is an emergent engagement with mythic modes and folkloric narratives indicative of the contemporary Sisyphistic quest for post-postmodern purpose.

**3.1 Mythical Mitigation of Present-Day Pain**

Contemporary literature, Sara Helen Binney contends, is characterized by a questioning of the Enlightenment concept of concrete and complete human understanding and ability to fully analyse each phenomenon encountered.[[321]](#footnote-321) While the field is, as stated, rather under-researched at present,[[322]](#footnote-322) one possible unifying concept of metamodern literature seems to emerge in the increasing number of contemporary novels that evidence this anti-enlightenment sentiment and an emerging ‘interest […] in the inexplicable, in the things that cannot be encompassed rationally.’[[323]](#footnote-323) Specifically, the metamodern moment can be, in part, defined by the increasing number of contemporary novels that encourage ‘a second look’[[324]](#footnote-324) at folkloric or mythical narratives, reconsidering and re-examining these in a manner differing from pure postmodern deconstruction and re-imagining, in the manner of Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Robert McKinley’s *Deerskin* (1993).

I will first turn to two contemporary texts which explore the mythic in juxtaposition with the commonplace. Both *The Crane Wife* (2013) by Patrick Ness and E.B. Hudspeth’s *The Resurrectionist* (2013) have definitive qualities that demarcate them from the postmodern and define them as metamodern texts. *The Crane Wife* centres around the story of George Duncan who, after helping an injured red-crowned crane in his London garden, finds himself suddenly in a romantic relationship with the enigmatic Kumiko, an artist who works with feathers. Together they collaborate on a successful art venture, while George and his daughter Amanda become increasingly attached to the enigmatic figure, before the final revelation of her status as a mythic crane goddess, in a re-working of the *Tsuru no Ongaeshi* folklore tale. In terms of the metamodern, the text marks a significant departure from the postmodern via the oscillation between irony and sincerity, evidencing a more metamodern stance that swings between both postmodern and modern ideological poles without privileging either. This is best illustrated in a comparison between the first and final paragraphs of the first chapter, as follows:

What actually woke him was the unearthly sound itself- a mournful shatter of frozen midnight falling to pierce his heart and lodge there forever, never to move, never to melt – but he, being who he was, assumed it was his bladder.[[325]](#footnote-325)

And, on hearing the Crane’s keening noise as it departs his garden, following George extracting a large arrow from its wing:

And then he realised that the call hadn’t come from an impossible bird vanishing from his garden and life and out of the whole world for all he knew. The keen had been set free from his own body, cried out from icy blue lips, torn from a chest that suddenly seemed to hold his irreparably broken, yet still beating heart.[[326]](#footnote-326)

The initial paragraph undercuts the fantastic with the mundane in a move that instantly suggests the presence of the postmodern sensibility in a particularly parodic moment; the call of the natural is assumed to be a call of nature in a subtle pun, which stands in stark contrast to the final moment in which George bids farewell to the Crane and has a significant emotional reaction. This sincerity of action relates to Nadine Fessler’s definition of metamodern literature as that which does not ‘dismiss postmodern ideas’ (the call of nature), but rather incorporates those ideas, though ‘utilizing them for completely different outcomes, for example for installing authenticity or sincerity.’[[327]](#footnote-327) The initial reaction is that of postmodern parody, yet by the time George witnesses the call a second time, now even issued by himself in longing, we are witness to a metamodern swing, specifically from irony to sincerity, all before the comical nature of the start to the chapter which follows draws the pendulum back to irony and play. This play between irony and sincerity, between play and authenticity, continues throughout the text, to the extent that the novel turns in on itself metafictionally at the finale. George, it is revealed, is the author of the text, though the questions of authenticity this would usually raise in such a text – such as the revelation at the end of Douglas Coupland’s *JPod* that the novel, in its entirety, was written subversively for the sake of achieving a set number of pages in order to fulfil a contractual obligation – are directly mitigated by George’s instant and sublime-seeming reaction to his ability to create the text:

He felt his heart surge, as if a golden light was flowing from it […]

Yes, he thought, tears in his eyes again.

*Yes*.

He answered the phone to his daughter with a broken but joyous heart, ready to speak with her of astonishment and wonder.[[328]](#footnote-328)

The metamodern striving for post-irony filters into the textual treatment of the mythic within the text, specifically forming an over-arching argument about the need for mythic integration with the everyday in order to combat the crushing banality and pain of contemporary life. The mythic interrupts the contemporary lives of the individuals, from Kumiko’s sudden appearance at the beginning of the text through to her actions saving the life of George’s daughter Amanda at the end, and is juxtaposed against the seeming futility, terror and pain of the everyday, as articulated primarily through Amanda and her struggle to find purpose or happiness:

Amanda sat back, lunchless, drinkless, furious that the tears were coming again, furious that everything felt like it was sliding apart, that it was doing so for *no good reason*, that nothing had changed except something slight, something she couldn’t put her finger on, something that took everything that was her life and placed it slightly higher up on a mountainside so that she had to climb for it, and when she got there, there was only more mountain, there was only ever going to *be* more mountain for as long as she lived, and if that was the case then what was the goddamn *point*? Of *any* of it?[[329]](#footnote-329)

Amanda’s personal belief that she is in some manner ‘broken’[[330]](#footnote-330) at her core, and unable to find happiness, is mitigated by her experiences with the mythic, which fill her with a hopefulness for a ‘hard-earned’ peace, or ‘possible liberation’.[[331]](#footnote-331) Ness’s characters also seem to constantly desire Kumiko herself, the representation of the mythic in the text being, as she is, the Crane Wife of the title, with George ‘ashamed of his greed’[[332]](#footnote-332) for Kumiko, his desire for whom he makes repeated references to, his need to understand. As he states, ‘so much of her is completely unknowable. And I get greedy for any tiny bit of her I can have,’ a sentiment reflected by Amanda’s initial reaction to Kumiko. Amanda, after first meeting the enigmatic Crane Wife, describes her as ‘a vital element that [she] needed to keep on living.’[[333]](#footnote-333) Not only do the protagonists desperately desire this embodied form of myth, but the collaborative art project of Kumiko and George, small tiles created from a combination of Kumiko’s own feathers and George’s deconstructed clippings from novels, have a similar effect on those who witness or possess them. Namely, a wondrous appreciation of the works, which are described as somehow ‘right,’[[334]](#footnote-334) ‘extraordinary,’[[335]](#footnote-335) and inducing a ‘desperate longing.’[[336]](#footnote-336) Characters gravitate to these artefacts of the mythical, both Kumiko and her creations, in order to fulfil some inarticulable desire for a sublime reaction; Amanda, looking at the private tile gifted to her by Kumiko and subsequently hidden away in her desk at work, she states that it ‘made her short of breath.’[[337]](#footnote-337) *The Crane Wife* depicts human interaction as a ‘hostile landscape, […] one whose entire set of rules seemed to exist for you to never properly learn and therefore be forever excluded, no matter how much you pretended it didn’t matter.’[[338]](#footnote-338) Against this, though, characters find emotional resonance and possible transcendence of the hostile world via their experiences with the mythical, which inspire tears, awe, and a reaction tending towards the sublime – the unthinkable that expands the mind.[[339]](#footnote-339) Ness’s text posits a cure for the apparent pain of human existence in the form of mythic, or narrative, integration through which his characters gain transcendence. Tellingly, if somewhat unsubtly, Kumiko herself is the one to articulate this overt textual agenda, metafictionally advocating for fiction’s ability to assist in the process of personal transcendence:

‘[…] a story *must* be told. How else can we live in this world that makes no sense?’

‘How else can we live with the extraordinary?’ George murmured.

‘Yes,’ Kumiko said, seriously. ‘Exactly that. The extraordinary happens all the time. So much, we can’t take it. Life and happiness and heartache and love. If we couldn’t put it into a story-’

‘And explain it-’

‘No!’ she said, suddenly sharp. ‘Not explain. Stories do not explain. They seem to, but all they provide is a starting point […] No, a story is not an explanation, it is a net, a net through which the truth flows. The net catches some of the truth, but not all, *never* all, only enough so that we can live with the extraordinary without it killing us.’[[340]](#footnote-340)

Myth and narrative, according to Kumiko, are not solutions to the potentially maddening and inhospitable world around us, but are a necessary element to add something more to life in the form of the inexplicable, or the mythic; myth, in Ness’s text, is not a tool for explanation, but an aid to personal revelation in the desire for something beyond the mundane. The inexplicable helps us to survive the world made difficult by our own knowledge and cleverness, as seen by George’s retreat into his own historical story, after which ‘pain was at bay, fear was held off, and everything was astonishment and wonder.’[[341]](#footnote-341) The inexplicable, in the metamodern, augments reality and hints at a desire for movement beyond postmodern meaninglessness: As Kumiko says, ‘how else can we live in this world that makes no sense?’ The intrusion of the mythic provides temporary relief from the pain and seeming injustice, or at least the indifference, of the everyday for Amanda, yet the same cannot be said of Spencer Black, the protagonist of E.B. Hudspeth’s *The Resurrectionist.*

*The Resurrectionist* is a novel of two halves, the first of which is the apparent biography of Dr Spencer Black, a 19th century anatomist who, following several personal tragedies, becomes obsessed with the notion that such classical mythical beasts as the chimera, Pegasus, the mermaid, and the harpy, are all genetic ancestors of humankind. The story follows Black’s descent into obsession and his decline from rising star of medical science and surgery, to circus side-show exhibitor, and, finally, to his death. The second half of the text is a facsimile of an academic text published by Black himself, *The Codex Extinct Animalia*, containing a series of extremely detailed anatomical drawings of Black’s creatures, including accurately labelled skeletal and muscular diagrams alongside minor notes from Black.

Much like *The Crane Wife,* Hudspeth’s text falls into the category of metamodern literature, not just by virtue of publication date, but in the clear attempt to transcend postmodern irony via the construction of sincere textuality. The text itself presents as a relatively paint-by-numbers Gothic affair, though the ironic twist, or parodic joke, never seems to arrive as it should in a text that adheres so stringently to Gothic conventions. Far from the oscillating register switches of Ness, Hudspeth’s text relies on Gothic tropes throughout, never attempting subversion or parody and, in doing so, forces a sincere reading of the story; the expectation of postmodern irony in a story that at first fits the genre so perfectly as to be parodic, is never fulfilled and, instead, the genre conventions are treated with a sincerity that denies the postmodern. The story itself, though, evidences the metamodern New Romantic sensibility, particularly the attempt to ‘turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized,’[[342]](#footnote-342) through an oscillation between attempt and failure, as Spencer Black desperately attempts to re-myth the world, to bring back mythical creatures into the everyday, and the unfortunate failures and frightful successes he has in doing so. Black experiments on his eldest son, Alphonse, ‘completing a procedure that rendered him “ageless,”’[[343]](#footnote-343) and turning him into The Sleepless Man. Black is also revealed to have been operating on his severely injured wife – injured in her attempts to destroy his work with fire – turning her, as is implied by her head appearing on the monstrous diagrams within the codex,[[344]](#footnote-344) into a whole host of mythological beasts before she ultimately kills him. The postmodern eye deconstructs the images in *The Codex Extinct Animalia*, while the modern eye marvels at their detail, and the oscillation between horror and wonder affirms the metamodern sensibility.

Again, much like Ness’s text, *The Resurrectionist* examines myth in terms of a desired augmentation to life, though here seen as a macabre, obsessive, and doomed endeavour. Black’s life is marked by repeated tragedy and death, beginning with that of his father after which he, according to his brother ‘leapt into [their] Father’s grave with all his heart, chasing after death to seek out its hiding place.’[[345]](#footnote-345) This is later followed by the deaths of his children Victor and Elizabeth, their names an overt nod to the text’s Frankensteinian lineage. As a result, Black becomes obsessed with discovering and proving the mythic origins of humanity, validated by his accidental discovery of a preserved, satyr-like body:

Black was convinced that the specimen held the secret to his research. He believed that the mutations were manifestations of the ancient past he had written about – evidence of a genetic code that was not completely eradicated […] the encounter with the fawn-child fuelled his obsession for finding a cure for the deformation that was paramount in his work. He would never again practise conventional medicine.[[346]](#footnote-346)

Black’s obsession reveals a quest for, if not a specific meaning behind the seeming unpredictability of life (‘a triumph over the fate of man’[[347]](#footnote-347) as he states of his own work), [[348]](#footnote-348) then something approaching Vermeullen’s concept of ‘depthiness’ – looking below the postmodern surface and finding nothing to see, but exhibiting a desire to find something there nonetheless.[[349]](#footnote-349) Black’s obsession with the search for something beyond the pain and seemingly chaotic nature of existence expresses itself through a desire to augment the present with the mythical, much like the inarticulable desires of Amanda and George in *The Crane Wife*, though in Hudspeth’s text the protagonist actively seeks to drag the mythical into the realm of the everyday via his experimental manipulations of animal and human tissues, as evidenced ultimately by his decision to ‘revert’ his wife to her ancestral mythic form:

I can hear Hell calling my name. Elise, my dear wife! I resolved to save her. I chose to give her a great gift, an ancient past resurrected. She was a descendent of a powerful species, the Fury. Elise is no longer the same woman, not is she one in the cracked body of burned flesh. She has emerged, she has awoken like the cicada […] I baptized her; with my knife, I saved her … again, I saved her.[[350]](#footnote-350)

Myth, and additionally the representation of madness on Black’s part, becomes a means by which one can escape the seemingly random and painfully fickle nature of existence, though *The Resurrectionist* points to a clear, polar opposite lesson to that of *The Crane Wife*; while Ness insinuates the need for the mythic to augment the everyday, as a cure for misanthropy, Hudspeth seems to argue that even such escapes, whether successes or failures, ultimately cannot mitigate the harshness of reality nor the finality of death, and the unpredictability of life. This is a sentiment, too, shared by Krysta, the protagonist of Eliza Granville’s *Gretel and the Dark* (2014) who emphatically writes that ‘life is hard.’[[351]](#footnote-351)

Both *Gretel and the Dark* and John Connolly’s *The Book of Lost Things* (2006) pose similar questions, though these texts focus on the manipulation of folklore over that of myth. First, then, *Gretel and the Dark* is a dual-narrative holocaust novel in which one narrative follows the horrors of a concentration camp as seen through the eyes of Krysta, while, in the second narrative, in pre-war Vienna, Josef Breuer struggles to discover the identity of young girl, whom he names Lilie, found naked and claiming not to be a human, but an idea sent back from the future to kill The Monster, a thin allusion to Adolf Hitler. The folkloric elements predominate in the Krysta passages, as she continually remembers the allegorical tales told to her by her former nanny, though these soon turn into an expression of, and escape from, Krysta’s sexual abuse at the hands of the Nazi officer ‘uncle’ Hraben. The content of Krysta’s plot is dark, yet the folk tales and memories which she retreats into are equally so, detailing parables ranging from a scissor man coming to cut off sucked-thumbs, to the rape and murder of a young woman while two women hide nearby.[[352]](#footnote-352) This latter story is recalled by Krysta in lieu of depictions of her sexual abuse, yet, as it is repeated multiple times in the latter end of the text, [[353]](#footnote-353) it serves only to reinforce the repeated nature of the attacks and the inability of the young girl to fully comprehend (or perhaps, more accurately, to bear to repeat) the nature of these events. Krysta is not retreating into the story, so much as covering some of the pain of her existence with a more metaphorical version that distances the acts from the teller. Krysta’s version nonetheless reveals the terrible acts forced upon her, but in doing so ties these acts to the allegorical, providing some form of meaning or lesson from trauma. While not explicit in the retellings, there is an implicit desire for justice that pervades these repetitions. In the original telling, the robbers who rape and murder the young girl are later brought to trial, before being ‘flayed alive and beheaded with axes.’[[354]](#footnote-354) In leaving out this ending to the tale in her retellings, and the tale repeatedly shrinking to focus entirely on the rape section, Krysta’s desire for retaliation, for those who abuse her to receive a fitting justice or judgment, is slowly seen to diminish, and disappear entirely, until there is seemingly no possibility of justice for Krysta nor punishment for the perpetrators of the act.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Folk stories and oral tales do not, in Granville’s text, completely hide the seemingly terrible nature of existence, but rather mask it in the form of a lesson, suggesting some potential meaning to be gained or moral learned, even when there seems to be none. In doing so, much like Black in *The Resurrectionist*, the narrative becomes a force highlighting the dark nature of existence while suggesting a desire for something *beyond*: for an unquantifiable meaning or layer behind the terrible events which may help to justify the pain inflicted upon the characters, and by association the writer, or indeed reader. This is reflected in the final moments of *Gretel and the Dark*, in which an elderly Krysta outlines the seeming philosophy of the text:

‘Books,’ I repeat, for they’ve not only been a solace during the long years but also provided the keys to understanding other people’s ideas and achievements, their hopes and fears, quirks and foibles, their dreams… their demons.[[356]](#footnote-356)

Through myth, folklore, and narrative, we are able to explore and experience ideas that would otherwise remain closed to us, even if those ideas only serve to highlight the dark nature of existence, whether within the contemporary or suggesting that this state of affairs has been constant across history. Mythic and folkloric narratives, in these metamodern texts, outline a clear desire to investigate a meaning beyond the postmodern, or at the very least serve as evidence of a new re-analysis of the role of myth in instigating conversations about such a desire.. While firmly situated within the metamodern double bind of doubt, such texts oscillate between desire for a relief from ontological dissatisfaction, and a postmodernism programmed existential nihilism, and utilise myth in order to foreground such issues. Of course, the texts presented here are merely three among a plethora of other such novels evidencing this trend: John Connolly’s *The Book of Lost Things*, for example, deals with folklore as a means of cathartic release and personal growth via the blurring of folkloric and personal anxieties in a world filled with ‘great grief as well as great happiness, with suffering and regret as well as triumphs and contentment’;[[357]](#footnote-357) Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant* sets an examination of love and marriage within a mythic mode, emphasising the harshness of existence via the protagonist’s journey through a pseudo-feudal Britain in contrast with the sincerity of the desires of the protagonists Axl and Beatrice to be loved by one another and remain together regardless of all else; and the protagonist of Paul Kingsnorth’s *Beast*, in which a confrontation with a mythic-seeming cat creature that stalks him through a hazy landscape of amnesia and self-annihilation, forces the character to ultimately grasp the importance of familial relationships in the face of the realisation that ‘nothing is really clear, but this no longer seems to matter. I once thought that my challenge was to understand everything, to build a structure in my mind that would support all that I experienced in the world. But there is no structure that will not fall in the end and crush you under it’.[[358]](#footnote-358)

**3.2 Tripping the Metamodern Fantastic**

The use of mythical and folkloric modes participates in a particular metamodern oscillationbetween desire for depth despite the knowledge of depthlessness, reacting, as Dempsey states, ‘not only against a discredited notion of transcendence but also against the unfulfilling shallowness and existential disorientation caused by postmodern surface.’ [[359]](#footnote-359) While significant in and of itself, the oscillation between these two ideological and topographical poles, surface and depth, also finds particular emphasis within metamodern narratives through the manipulation of the fantastic, which hesitates ‘between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described.’[[360]](#footnote-360) Binney cites recent novels *The Snow Child* by Eowyn Ivey (2012) and *Orkney* by Amy Sackville (2013) as ‘[problematizing] the supernatural elements of the folklore they engage with to the extent that the characters and often the reader are unsure whether the magic described in the novel is real, or if it is all in the mind of the first-person narrator or focalising character.’[[361]](#footnote-361) Dempsey, too, recognises the existence of this dichotomy within recent mythic texts, framing it terms of the immanent and transcendent:

In this dichotomy [between immanent/transcendent] the immanent denotes essentially the physical world as such, the domain of empirical phenomenon and of our sense perceptions. The *Transcendent*, by contrast, posits a meta-physical reality, which exists *beyond* or *outside* of the material world, more fundamental in vantage and essence.[[362]](#footnote-362)

Taken together, these theorists suggest a contemporary landscape of recreated folkloric and mythical texts ‘furnished in the fantastic’,[[363]](#footnote-363) in which the reader is compelled to hesitate between belief and scepticism, the transcendent and the immanent, or rather to oscillate between Todorov’s ‘the uncanny’ and ‘the marvellous.’

In *The Resurrectionist,* the fantastic is first encountered during Black’s discovery of the ‘fawn-child.’ Here, the narrator of the text delivers a clinical prognosis for the malformations apparent on the body, describing the cadaver as ‘displaying an orthopedic condition that had caused his knees to bend the wrong way. The bones were misshapen, and excessive hair was present over the entire surface of the skin.’[[364]](#footnote-364) This is followed closely by Black’s more fantastical assertions, wherein the body is described as ‘a relative to a satyr.’[[365]](#footnote-365) While Black’s own analysis is equally clinical, the reader is forced into a position between the two explanations, with neither receiving more or less attention or credence than the other, although Black’s own illustrations of the body do augment his argument somewhat. The reader is once more forced into a fantastic position by the latter half of the text, which consists of *The Codex Extinct Animalia*, in which mythological creatures – mermaid, chimera, dragon, ganeshi – are introduced alongside detailed (and, in terms of the labelling of musculature and bones, accurate) anatomical descriptions and drawings. The juxtaposition arises between a postmodern deconstructive stance, in which Black’s insanity is evident, the faces on many of the drawings bearing a distinct resemblance to that of his wife (which has multiple and disturbing connotations, as previously discussed), and a modern enthusiasm for the attention to detail and sincerity of Black’s own introduction to each section suggesting a certain plausibility of his claims – turning the finite to the infinite as the natural becomes the supernatural.[[366]](#footnote-366) Similarly in *The Crane Wife*, the reader is forced into a situation of indecision between belief and scepticism, through a metafictional ambiguity about the origins of the fire that begins in George’s home. Towards the end of the novel,[[367]](#footnote-367) a passage details five specific ways in which the fire could have begun, with the culprits presented as, first, merely a production fault in a lit candle, then George himself, Kumiko, her jilted mythological partner the Volcano, and finally Rachel, sometime friend of Amanda and ex-lover of George. The ambiguity here provides explanations ranging from the accidental to the intentional, explanations both mundane and mythical although the end result is the same. In *Gretel and the Dark*, the fantastic emerges from the desire to believe in Lilie’s mission, that there is a way in which the character, who, as the text progresses increasingly seems like a version of Krysta possessed of a means of time travel, could possibly destroy ‘the monster’ and thus mitigate the pain experienced by the rest of the cast of characters. The fantastic here, though, dissolves as the end of the novel approaches and Lilie’s narrative is revealed to be a story told between Krysta and Daniel, a means by which they main gain catharsis, or vengeance, in the form of this pretend narrative tale. . In each of the texts, the supernatural is represented with a distinct ambiguity that lends itself to the fantastic and forms a metamodern oscillation between belief and disbelief, alongside desire for the supernatural (which may resolve many of the protagonist’s pains) and the supernatural explained (which would resolve the questions of the text).

Far from a pure postmodern fantastic, in which the hesitation between belief and disbelief tends towards suggestions of the failures of language and expressions of irony, as in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, these metamodern texts use the fantastic to express the palpable desire to transcend postmodern meaninglessness. Fessler highlights similar emergent themes in her discussion of the use of the fantastic in A.L Kennedy’s fiction:

As McEwan does in *Atonement*, A.S. Byatt in *Possession* or Margaret Atwood in *The Blind Assassin*, [Kennedy] installs fiction as a powerful instrument that is used strategically by the protagonists rather than the protagonists being subjected to the overpowering nature of language and contextualization. The undecidability between fiction and reality that has been the clue of so many postmodern novels is not an issue anymore. Instead the value of aesthetics is highlighted by creating an emotional need in the reader for those kinds of aesthetic experiences (think for example of Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi).*[[368]](#footnote-368)

Myth and folklore in the metamodern era are used to engender a fantastic mode, providing the transcendent, uncanny, supernatural quantity against which a postmodern deconstruction may form the immanent or mundane and create space for the fantastic. In doing so, these metamodern texts evidence a desire for something *beyond* the postmodern meaninglessness, though they definitively do not suggest what this could be. They present as an effort to explore the inexplicable and augment the mundane, not *with* the supernatural, or with any particular depth of purpose or meaning, but rather with the possibility of this. The fantastic ambiguity created by each text opens up a space in which a desire for depthiness makes itself apparent; the texts do not suggest the return of any depth, of any special mythological reality, nor do they propose a surface-only world (in fact actively moving against this at points), but rather suggest a societal desire to begin searching for ways in which the depthlessness of the postmodern may be transcended. As Timotheus Vermeullen, writes:

Just maybe, we are seeing the first stage in another history of another kind of deepening, one whose empirical reality lies above the surface even if its performative register floats just below it: depthiness.[[369]](#footnote-369)

**3.3 Sisyphus Transcends Narcissus**

The desire for, and attempts to attain, Vermeullen’s depthiness – a shade of meaning, a hint of purpose, from the surface – is evident in metamodern literature beyond such texts as engage in mythopoeia. This, in turn, evidences an emergent societal paradigm, which I tentatively name, Sisyphism, in reference to Albert Camus’ analysis of the namesake *Myth of Sisyphus,* and which I wish to explore here.

In Camus’s *Myth of Sisyphus*, he outlines a conception of the Absurd, and in particular the Absurd Wo/man[[370]](#footnote-370) as one who recognises both ‘the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of the daily agitation [and] the uselessness of suffering,’[[371]](#footnote-371) in response to the ‘primitive hostility of the world,’[[372]](#footnote-372) alongside ‘the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.’[[373]](#footnote-373) The Absurd, as recognized by Camus, is the conflict between these two desires, between the human tendency to seek inherent value or meaning in life, and the human inability to discover this.[[374]](#footnote-374) ‘The Absurd,’ argues Camus, ‘is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.’[[375]](#footnote-375) In recognizing this condition, the Absurd wo/man gains a degree of personal freedom from oppressive ontological and ideological dogma, and relief from the crushing repetition of the everyday, the ‘weariness that comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life.’[[376]](#footnote-376) This is achieved via the post-weariness inauguration of moments of ‘consciousness,’ that is to say, of a particular clarity of determinism and will:

It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear on the contrary that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning.[[377]](#footnote-377)

Camus observes that the revelation of the Absurd, can provide some form of personal freedom from the oppressive nihilism brought about by a recognition of the ‘unintelligible and limited universe’[[378]](#footnote-378) in the face of a desire for meaning:

It is clear that death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live. [...] The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible, but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation.[[379]](#footnote-379)

The recognition of the Absurd leads to one of three outcomes: a momentarily lapse before a return to the everyday ‘chain;’ a recognition and suicide; or to recognition and recovery. [[380]](#footnote-380) Against the ideals of hope and consolation of his/her desire for Truth, Camus’ Absurd wo/man finds clarity from their acceptance of the Absurd condition of existence, realising that ‘the point is to live,’ to experience and to describe those experiences.[[381]](#footnote-381) The Absurd wo/man realizes their limited mortality and the lack of any particular grand meaning of special purpose to their birth, and instead seeks to take hold of their own fate, to ‘live out [their] adventure within the span of [their] lifetime.’[[382]](#footnote-382) Camus posits death as the final and only outcome to life, outside of which everything becomes a liberty in which wo/man ‘is the sole master.’[[383]](#footnote-383)

By way of example, Camus turns to the Greek mythological figure of Sisyphus, doomed to forever heave a boulder up the side of a mountain only for it to roll back down and his task begin anew. ‘One must imagine Sisyphus happy,’[[384]](#footnote-384) Camus famously writes, claiming that it is happiness that may come after the recognition of the Absurd. He pictures Sisyphus watching his rock roll down the mountain once more, and beginning to take heavy, measured steps back down towards his endless torment, yet in that space – the post-weariness in which the mechanical aspects of life are mitigated momentarily – Sisyphus finds a ‘breathing space,’ in which his consciousness rises to a more self-analytical level.[[385]](#footnote-385) During these moments, Sisyphus is aware of his personal determinism and fate, as well as the choices he has made to take him to this particular position: ‘At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning towards his rock, in that slight pivoting, he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him.’[[386]](#footnote-386) His fate belongs to him alone and the universe, ‘henceforth without a master,’ seems filled with possibility.[[387]](#footnote-387)

Camus’ proposition of the Absurd, originally written in 1942, seems a pertinent position in the metamodern moment[[388]](#footnote-388) with its exploration of the desire for meaning in opposition to an understanding of the infinite meaninglessness of mundane existence. Indeed, the connection seems so strongly to connect to Vermeullen and van den Akker’s assertion about the metamodern oscillation between ‘a modern desire for *sens* and the postmodern doubt about the sense of it all.’.[[389]](#footnote-389) Metamodern literature bears witness to a new engagement with this Sisyphean model, though now tempered with an additional desire to transcend the postmodern. ‘Living, naturally, is never easy,’[[390]](#footnote-390) writes Camus, and indeed the new metamodern Sisyphism posits an acceptance of the pain of the contemporary (*‘yes, life is hard’*),[[391]](#footnote-391) the seeming relentless trials and surface-only nature of life, counter-balanced with a contemporary search not for capital-T Truth, but for personal happiness (or acceptance) gleaned from beyond the self. Metamodernism accepts the postmodern surrender of clarity and meaning, the deconstruction of all structures of such meaning, and instead a Sisyphean attitude emerges in such contemporary novels as explore the Absurd in contrast with a desire for depth of connection, of social or personal obligation, rather than depth of purpose. What seems to be emerging within metamodern literature is a desire to mitigate the Absurd, to transcend the postmodern via external, rather than internal, perceptions of meaning, that is to say, an individual purpose created through personal interactions, rather than introspection of the role of the self. A societal step away from Narcissus, and towards Sisyphus - not doomed forever to gaze into the empty surface of the mirror, but instead doomed to relive the ignominy of life’s mechanical needs, albeit with brief respites in which consciousness may rise and happiness be gleaned, as Sisyphus after the rock has rolled. Yes, the metamodern text argues, life is absurd (in terms of the absence of profound reason, insane character of daily repetition, the uselessness of suffering, the hostility of the world) but perhaps happiness may be garnered nonetheless from personal interactions within the everyday, obtained via a Sisyphean freedom to find our own meaning.[[392]](#footnote-392) Camus gives us a ‘lucid invitation to live and to create in the very midst of the desert,’ and the metamodern responds with enthusiasm. [[393]](#footnote-393)

We can witness this new paradigm in the themes of the previously explored *Gretel and the Dark* and *Beast*. Within Granville’s text, life is repeatedly shown to be hard and challenging for Krysta, yet she has gained some modicum of happiness in her life following the incidents within the concentration camp in her life-long relationship with Daniel. She has accepted the Absurd, the search for meaning and purpose shown to be as fruitless as her impassioned fictional efforts at destroying ‘The Monster,’ while her life has led to contentment through her family. Similarly in Kingsnorth’s *Beast*, the central character comes to the conclusion of the Absurd at the end of the novel in, as examined earlier, his realisation that there was no structure in his mind which would support his understanding of the world. *Beast’s* protagonist then returns to his familial life, and gains some form of significance, or at the very least closure, from the attempt to re-establish these relationships. The Sisyphean impulse goes beyond analysis of the mythic, though, and features in a variety of other contemporary metamodern novels, including Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008)*,* Patrick Ness’s *More Than This* (2013), and Charles Elton’s *Mr. Toppit* (2009).

Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,[[394]](#footnote-394)* taken first, appears distinctly metamodern through the treatment of pop cultural references which frequently feature in the text, and through which the eponymous Oscar is characterized as somewhat ‘nerdish’; Oscar is depicted as a fan of of Star Wars, Star Trek, various cult science fiction films, Japanese anime, and other ephemera of western ‘geek culture.’ As one example among many, Yunior, the narrator of the text, reveals with some mild disgust that ‘the fool’ put up a sign on the door to their shared room: ‘*Speak, friend, and enter.* In fucking Elvish!’ (However, Oscar quickly corrects this to as *Sindarin* rather than Elvish.)[[395]](#footnote-395) While this may seem pertinent to a more postmodern agenda, the frequent references do not serve to reinforce intertextual play and irony, but rather, as Gibbons attests of the metamodern in general, instead foreground cultural issues in a manner akin to a more modernist use of this technique:

Another means in which metamodernism achieves its oscillation is through the assimilation of high and low cultural references. As a technique this might appear rather postmodern, yet it is employed in metamodernist writing not merely to create eclectic textuality but to present juxtapositions that evoke a reflection on contemporary culture.[[396]](#footnote-396)

Within *Oscar Wao*, geek and pop-culture references come to represent a means *through* which the events of the novel may be viewed and expanded upon. A prime example of this comes towards the end of a text when, after an affair with a prostitute, Ybón, Oscar finds himself kidnapped and taken to a cane field to be executed by men in the employ of the prostitute’s lover, The Capitán. Oscar sends ‘telepathic messages’ to those he will miss, ending with a message to Ybón herself:

‘No matter how far you travel … to whatever reaches of this limitless universe … you will never be … ALONE!’ (The Watcher, *Fantastic Four* #13 May 1963.)[[397]](#footnote-397)

Far from being a parodic moment, here Oscar’s use of a pop-cultural reference serves to foreground the emotional sincerity of his actions and feelings towards Ybón, a thematic use threaded throughout the novel. *Oscar Wao* presents the reader with an Absurd world, in which the trials of everyday life appear at times so relentlessly oppressive that individuals have turned to belief in the concept of “*Fukú,*” that is to say an unavoidable curse, in response, as we see here:

But fukú ain’t just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare. In my parents’ day the fukú was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew someone who’d been eaten by a fukú […][[398]](#footnote-398)

It's doom-ish in that way, makes it hard to put a finger on, to brace yourself against. But be assured: like Darkseid's Omega Effect, like Morgoth's bane, no matter how many turns and digressions this shit might take, it always - and I mean always - gets its man.[[399]](#footnote-399)

Yunior’s description of the fukú by extension implies a world in which the seemingly inexplicable, and truly unfortunate, strikes with such regularity that it has engendered belief in a ruling curse. Such a creation refers to an absurd world view, in which ‘punishment,’ or at least negative and distressing events, strikes individuals at random. Indeed, *Oscar Wao* paints a picture of an absurd world throughout, with characters experiencing tragic and ruinous events as their character-defining moments. Oscar’s mother, Beli, falls in love with and becomes pregnant by a man married to a member of the tyrannical Trujillo ruling family, and is made to miscarry after being abducted, taken to a canefield, beaten (and possibly raped) by men under Trujillo’s control, in an event described as ‘the end of language, the end of hope. It was the sort of beating that breaks people, breaks them utterly.’[[400]](#footnote-400) Abelard, Beli’s father, also suffered a terrible fate: he refuses to allow Trujillo to take his daughter’s virginity at a party, and, ‘not four weeks after the party, Dr. Abelard Luis Cabral was arrested by the Secret Police. The charge? "Slander and gross calumny against the Person of the president."’[[401]](#footnote-401) Abelard is arrested, abused in the cells, repeatedly tortured by the guards, sentenced to eighteen years in prison during which he is again tortured to the extent that he lives the last of his days in ‘an imbecilic stupor,’[[402]](#footnote-402) though Abelard does regain some form of occasional lucidity, as we learn from the outside:

There were prisoners who remembered moments when he seemed almost lucid, when he would stand in the [fields of the prison-grounds] and stare at his hands and weep, as if recalling that there was once a time when he had been more than this.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Similarly, Oscar sees the world as an inherently unfair, punishing place, to such an extent that he attempts suicide by throwing himself in front of a train, though he survives the incident (and blames everything on the fukú).[[404]](#footnote-404) Oscar’s life is marked by attempts to gain happiness through romantic relationships, though these ultimately seem to fail. At his last, however, Oscar finds the company of Ybón, and in doing so finds some measure of happiness despite the relationship leading to his death in the canefields, as evidenced by his final letter delivered to Yunior posthumously:

[…] but what really got him was not the bam-bam-bam of sex - it was the little intimacies that he'd never in his whole life have anticipated, like combing [Ybón’s] hair or getting her underwear off a line or watching her walk naked to the bathroom or the way she would suddenly sit on his lap and put her face into his neck. The intimacies like listening to her tell him about being a little girl and him telling her that he'd been a virgin all his life. He wrote that he couldn't believe he'd had to wait for this so goddamn long. (Ybon was the one who suggested calling the wait something else. Yeah, like what? Maybe, she said, you could call it life.) He wrote: So this is what everybody's always talking about! Diablo! If only I'd known. The beauty! The beauty![[405]](#footnote-405)

Oscar finds relief from the absurdity of existence,[[406]](#footnote-406) the wait called life, via his relationship with Ybón, though the fukú ultimately comes to claim him. While life may seem hard, and fukú unavoidable, absurdity inescapable, Díaz’s characters aim for a transcendence beyond the Absurd through their continued attempts to establish, maintain and enjoy their familial relationships, a turn that relates to the metamodern moment as described by Fessler:

Finishing with this last return, the return of transcendence, one could formulate a hypothesis: contemporary literature is trying to reintegrate precisely those themes and styles that postmodernism either was never interested in or was trying to get rid of. As a consequence, today’s novelists are finding inventive ways to create refreshing narratives that allow those themes a comeback under very specific circumstances, and by doing so are enabling a going ‘beyond’ postmodernism.[[407]](#footnote-407)

*Oscar Wao* transcends the postmodern by re-introducing a theme of transcendence in a move that expresses a desire not just for something ‘beyond postmodernism,’ but for a personal movement beyond the Absurd and the accepted depthlessness left in the wake of postmodern deconstruction. Oscar, after all, returns to Yunior in a dream, [[408]](#footnote-408) tasking him with writing the novel of his life in order to serve as a ‘zafa’ (counter-spell) to the fukú that may attempt to target his niece, Isis.[[409]](#footnote-409) Yunior hopes that Isis will ‘take all we’ve done and all we’ve learned and add her own insights and she’ll put an end to [the fukú].’[[410]](#footnote-410) While existence is challenging, affected by a fukú or just the plain absurd, Díaz suggests the means by which this can be transcended, though ultimately it is seen as just a hope for the future, not a definitive solution. Still, the text promotes an attitude in which there is the possibility of something beyond the Absurd, a lesson taken up, too, by Patrick Ness’ *More Than This.*

The plot of *More Than This* begins with the death of the main character. Seth, a teenage British ex-pat living in America with his parents and psychologically damaged brother Owen. Seth, following his decision to wade out into turbulent waters, begins to drown before being thrown against an underwater bluff, fracturing his skull and dying, only to wake up confused and semi-naked in a post-apocalyptic version of his birth town in England. Believing he has awoken in hell, Seth begins to explore, only to meet up with Regine and Tomazs, two other children who similarly seemed to die and awake in this reality. The three attempt to avoid the attention of the mysterious Driver, an automaton, who is revealed to be a type of janitorial robot, designed to maintain a series of VR pods, which the children have glitched their way free from following their deaths. The novel follows their attempts to discover the truth of the world, before their ultimate confrontation with the Driver, and the final decision by Seth to attempt to return to the VR world in order to right the wrongs of his life following his new found realization that there is ‘no point,’ or deeper meaning, to living beyond the relationships forged while alive.[[411]](#footnote-411)

Ness’s novel, then, foregrounds a questioning of the Absurd, though not, as in *Oscar Wao* through any kind of displacement belief in a curse. Life for the characters of *More Than This* is depicted as far from an entirely positive experience, with the three main characters defined, as Tomasz points out, by “child abuse, murder and suicide:”[[412]](#footnote-412) Regine dies at the hands of an abusive step-father, Tomasz is murdered by human traffickers, and Seth throws himself into the waves, ‘none of which,’ Regine describes, ‘happened for any good reason at all.’[[413]](#footnote-413) Seth, more than the other characters, epitomises Camus’ Absurd in both his recognition of the absurdity of the world and his own repeated instance on some higher meaning: as a child, he was forced to help an escapee convict who abducted and (in reality) murdered his infant brother. Later, as a teenager, he began a romantic relationship with his friend Gudmund, only to have the secret relationship leaked to the world at large and to realise that Gudmund was having an affair with another of their friendship group. Yet, Seth asks himself at one stage if ‘there was more to Gudmund,’[[414]](#footnote-414) and consistently offers up the idea that his situation is that of a story, [[415]](#footnote-415) his ‘brain trying to make sense of stuff,’[[416]](#footnote-416) and so creating a narrative. In confronting the fictional potential of the universe, Seth realises his own desire for some form of meaning or purpose:

He wanted something, he realizes now. Wanted an answer other than the ones he’d been given. Wanted to find out this whole world had some purpose, some *particular* purpose. For him.[[417]](#footnote-417)

Yet Seth’s most distinct confrontation with the Absurd comes during the initial stages of the text. Originally, upon waking, Seth believes that he has woken up ‘in his own, personal hell’ in the form of his childhood neighbourhood, now decayed and seemingly abandoned. [[418]](#footnote-418) In confrontation with this seemingly dead world, this unchanging environment of decay and long-passed human civilization, alongside his constant relapse into painful memories, Seth begins to follow through on one of Camus’ reactions to recognition of the Absurd, in that he resigns himself to attempting suicide again, this time by throwing himself from a cliff. Luckily, Seth’s attempt is aborted by his chance meeting with the other protagonists, Regine and Tomasz, after which the narrative proper begins, an act that becomes heavily symbolically charged in retrospect; in confrontation with the absurd nature of life – the primitive hostility of his environment, the seeming uselessness of his suffering and insane character of repeated agitations – it is through renewed human interactions that the decision of suicide is thwarted. Thematically the text follows through on this notion, offering a potential means to transcend the depthlessness and absurdity of existence through engagement with other individuals who have too come to recognize this. As Regine reveals to Seth in a pseudo-dream sequence, ‘real life is only ever just real life. Messy. What it means depends on how you look at it. The only thing you’ve got to do is find a way to live there,’[[419]](#footnote-419) a sentiment that returns to mind Camus’ own assertion that the point is to live. In the final revelations and conclusion to the text, Seth, in becoming the Absurd hero, recognises the absurd nature of the world in conflict with his own desire for meaning, coming to the conclusion that there is always more to life. An ambiguous statement, yes, but one that alludes to a desire for something beyond the seeming pain of unanswered ontological issues. A desire that Ness suggests may be assuaged by a loving, caring relationship with those whose lives intersect with our own, based on forgiveness and understanding,[[420]](#footnote-420) a poignant point which, through sincerity, reinforces the metamodern nature of the text.

Finally, Charles Elton’s *Mr Toppit* provides the most overt acknowledgement of the metamodern Sisyphean experimentation, mentioning, as it does, the myth on several occasions,[[421]](#footnote-421) though without the sincere optimism of Ness’ text, but perhaps with a touch of Díaz’s fukú in the form of the eponymous Mr Toppit.

The novel follows Luke Hayman, a pseudo-Christopher-Robin figure who finds himself in public life following the sudden Potter-like success of his late father’s children’s novels, staring Luke Hayseed. *Mr Toppit* is a family drama about how the reception to the novels affects the remaining Hayman family, mother Martha and sister Rachel, alongside the woman who made the books famous, Laurie Clow. The name of the text derives from the mysterious figure who, in Arthur’s novels, compels the young Luke Hayseed to seemingly arbitrary and dangerous acts (moving bees from a lavender bush to under a tree, for example[[422]](#footnote-422)), yet who only appears at the very final line of the last book of the Hayseed Chronicles.

*Mr. Toppit*, the novel, depicts characters caught in an absurd and problematic life, as emphasised by Martha having taught her children that life is both serious and difficult: Among a series of life lessons that Rachel recalls from her mother Martha (‘only the intellectually inferior have ‘amusing’ books next to the loo,’ ‘‘Silent Night’ is not a proper carol and must not be sung at Christmas’) is a misquote from Rilke: ‘Everything serious is difficult […] and nearly everything is serious.’ [[423]](#footnote-423) Laurie, for example, has an increasingly troubled life, with a growing history of sexual abuse revealed to the reader as perpetuated implicitly by her father,[[424]](#footnote-424) and later in her life by her friend Marge, who forces herself upon Laurie on the last night of their vacation on St Bart’s.[[425]](#footnote-425) Nothing, Laurie states, stays untouched, with the people around her ‘emitting some kind of toxic gas that seeped into everything and rearranged the DNA.’[[426]](#footnote-426) The absurdity of the world, in Elton’s novel, is that of the absurd humanity - hostile, agitative, causing suffering without profound reason or just punishment: babies accidentally drown, old people are ran over in the streets or slip and damage themselves at parties, all without significant provocation or reason.

Simultaneous to the depictions of the absurd, indifferent, world, *Mr Toppit* is populated by characters who express a desire for meaning and purpose, here transposed onto the enigmatic Mr Toppit of Arthur’s stories in a move similar to that of Díaz’s fukú, in terms of an attempt to rationalise the absurd nature of existence. Mr Toppit is described as ‘cruel and capricious,’[[427]](#footnote-427) never really revealing himself, with whom ‘nothing is ever simple,’[[428]](#footnote-428) a figure who is able to make dark dreams come true, as when the Luke of the books dreams of a dead crow, only to awaken ‘to a silent and deserted house, [after which] he looks out of his windows and sees the field that leads to the Darkwood black with the bodies of dead crows. Mr Toppit has made his dream come true.’[[429]](#footnote-429) Mr Toppit is an unseen influence, a seemingly wrathful, cruel and sadistic individual, who must be appeased by seemingly ‘terrifying and thankless task[s]’[[430]](#footnote-430) tasks that, as one fictional critic describes, are ‘variations on the myth of Sisyphus.’[[431]](#footnote-431) As such, Mr Toppit functions much as the fukú or as certain mythical fictions as a form of explanation of the absurd, or an answer to the question of ‘why me?’ As the world of the Hayseed Chronicles bleeds into that of Luke Hayman’s life, Mr Toppit becomes an explanation for the horrors and misfortunes of life, as seen in the revelation of Merry, Laurie’s Agent’s daughter regarding her father, Rick:

Merry might have been crying when she came out of the water or it might have been when we got inside [...] but she kept saying it was only because she was so happy. [...] what she was so happy about, she kept saying while she was crying, was that she had read the books and had realized that while they were about me they were also about her. [...] She knew who Mr Toppit was, she was saying, not who he was, like being a person you could recognize if you saw him on the street, but who he was if he was in your family. [...] What she was crying about was that she knew Mr Toppit was Rick, and reading the books reminded her of when she was a child and of what he had been like with her then. She forgave him, she kept saying. She loved him, she would always love him, but he shouldn’t have been like that. He shouldn’t have lost his temper. He shouldn’t have shouted all the time.[[432]](#footnote-432)

Mr Toppit does not exist within the same fictional level as Luke Hayman, of course, but his influence is nonetheless felt by those who engage with the text, and seems to be the major reason behind the popularity of the Hayseed texts.[[433]](#footnote-433) Mr Toppit’s absurd and dangerous task of moving bees from a lavender bush to shade is, by way of example, shown to provide comfort to a series of victims of a plane hijacking, who take comfort from Luke’s scene.[[434]](#footnote-434) As one of the victims reportedly states, whenever he is ‘tested,’ he thinks of ‘that moment when [Luke is] crossing the lawn with the bees in his hand […] and somehow things don’t seem so…’[[435]](#footnote-435) the report is interrupted, to Luke Hayman’s annoyance, yet the clear implication is that of taking comfort from the absurd in the assumption of an over-arching reason behind the horror, in this case Mr Toppit’s unwritten command to move the bees.

Living in an absurd world and desiring meaning, *Mr Toppit* signals an experimentation with the Sisyphean in which characters such as Laurie, who at one point states that ‘Keeping everybody happy was like one of those tasks from the Greek myths that never ended however hard you tried, rolling a stone up a hill only to have it roll down before it reached the top,’[[436]](#footnote-436) become the Absurd individuals: aware of their desire for some deeper meaning or purpose to life, but knowing that there is none to be found. As a result they turn to the supernatural Mr Toppit as explanation, a belief in which affirms some form of ‘grand power,’ justifying the terrors and pains of existence as tests of a whimsical, unseen figure though, in a typically metamodern move, such a belief offers no resolution to the characters involved. The text offers no solution to the problem of the absurd, only an exploration of the desire, highlighting the Sisyphean paradigm of the contemporary and the potential problems of attempts to transcend the Absurd condition.

Metamodern literature engages with the Sisyphean in a manner attempting transcendence. That is to say, metamodern literature acknowledges the Absurd condition of life, yet does not accept it. Instead, contemporary literature attempts to look beyond, a neo-Sisyphean model in which individuals seek to mitigate the problem of the Absurd, the oscillation between desire for meaning and knowledge of meaninglessness, by suggesting that such ontological questioning, ultimately, cannot provide comfort or happiness and that we, as a society, should perhaps strive to search for other means by which the ubiquitous existential dread and ontological crises may be appeased (though we are, the texts seem to suggest, always doomed to return, once more, to those lessons of depthlessness learned through the years of the postmodern). Narcissus’ pool, it seems, was merely the reflective face of a boulder worn to a mirror sheen from eons of rolling, and the metamodern Sisyphus turns from his endless, meaningless task, from his reverie and scrutiny of the self. Waking, as Abelard, from their stupor, the metamodern Sisyphus begins their descent, either happy as Camus would have us imagine, or staring at their hands and weeping, as if recalling that there was once a time when they had been more than this. Myth, in metamodern literature, serves the same purpose as those texts which question the Absurd, namely, to express the desire for something beyond the accepted depthlessness of reality; whether through the moment of the fantastic, or the examination of the Absurd, the desire for *more* is palpable within contemporary literature. Not, it must be stated, in terms of a capitalist desire for excess of commodity, but perhaps rather for more in terms of the *beyond*, the beneath, the glimmer of potential depthiness that may augment the everyday despite the insane character of daily agitations and the absence of any profound reason for living.

**3.4 Addendum**

I tentatively offer this conception of the metamodern Sisyphean attitude as a somewhat inchoate theory in the hope of further development by other scholars or academics, much as Vermeulen and van den Akker first offered the theory of the metamodern itself.[[437]](#footnote-437) It is, of course, merely one potentially unifying theme of metamodern literature, among so many identified themes within the budding environment. Literature is perhaps not the most supreme means by which the metamodern finds itself expressed, hence the relatively slow development of critique within the field. After all, what novel is not, in some manner, sincere of theme or intent? Still, critiques of the metamodern influence on contemporary literature are forthcoming. Alison Gibbons, for one, identifies several paradigms of metamodern literature, including tendencies towards ‘acknowledging our complicity in the state of global affairs (from intersubjective memories to awareness of our participation in various political, economic, and environmental networks),’[[438]](#footnote-438) alongside ‘the simultaneous and paradoxical sense of hope and future failure,’[[439]](#footnote-439) themes easily recognisable within Laurie’s description of human toxicity in *Mr Toppit* and Yunior’s desire to create the zafa to protect Isis in *Oscar Wao,* respectively. Fessler evidences the way in which metamodern novels ‘reintroduce a form of transcendence,’ as was lacking in the postmodern, though here citing the declining roles of fragmentation and destabilization as affecting this reintroduction,[[440]](#footnote-440) a concept visible again in *Mr Toppit*, in which the fragmentation of narrative voice through the narratorial switch affects a collage of understanding, as opposed to destabilization of truth. Alexander Wolff too identifies specific hallmarks of metamodern literature:

historic development does not necessarily mean that contemporary literature is able to deal with pre-postmodernist concepts only by way of irony and the constant reference to its symbolic constitution and discursive strategies. But, on the contrary, to move beyond postmodernism we need to take a look at the basic goals and structures of literary endeavour and to relocate it in a broader context of a communicative act from which meaning can be gathered only in front of a painful but inevitable social horizon.[[441]](#footnote-441)

Wolff highlights here the metamodern novel’s play with both irony and sincerity, dealing with pre-postmodernist concepts not purely by the ironic but in attempting to find other ways to mediate the Modern. This theme is also taken up as a central thematic concern of the metamodern by David James and Urmila Seshagiri, who claim that metamodernism’s ‘dominant strain’ that characterizes ‘an otherwise disjunctive collection of writers and novels’ is the desire ‘to move the novel forward by looking back to the aspirational energies of modernism.’[[442]](#footnote-442) Philip Damico identifies metamodern literature as defined by an engagement with sincere expression ‘while being aware of its appearance from a postmodern perspective,’[[443]](#footnote-443) an argument supported by Jeroen Popelier, in whose analysis of Joost Zwagman’s *Duel*, argues that ‘the metamodern generation wants to voice its concerns truthfully and authentically and sincerely, while knowing that there is no such thing as truth, authenticity is a construction and sincerity could only be smirked at – yet it does so nonetheless.’[[444]](#footnote-444) Sincerity, responsibility, transcendence, and a mediation of the modern from a perspective of the postmodern are thus equally valid signifiers of the metamodern as the Sisyphean.

As a final addendum, the concepts expressed of the new metamodern Sisyphean attitude are reflective of the philosophy of optimistic nihilism, as proposed by *Kurzgesagt*, in which existential dread is mitigated by the individual’s decision to enjoy what limited time is available to them:

It seems very unlikely that 200 trillion trillion stars have been made for us. In a way it feels like the cruellest joke in existence has been played on us. We became self-aware only to realize this story is not about us. […] Okay, but so what? […] You only get one shot at life, which is scary, but it also sets you free. If the universe ends in heat death, every humiliation you suffer in life will be forgotten. Every mistake you made will not matter in the end. Every bad thing you did will be voided. If our life is all we get to experience, then it's the only thing that matters. If the universe has no principles, the only principles relevant are the ones we decide on. If the universe has no purpose, then we get to dictate what its purpose is. [...] Do the things that make you feel good. You get to decide whatever this means for you.[[445]](#footnote-445)

Such a philosophical outlook matches closely Camus’ own original argument of the Absurd Wo/man accepting the absurd condition of life in contrast to their own desire for meaning, although here Kurzgesagt promotes a decision to create, or to chase, purpose and principles. While metamodern literature engages in a questioning Sisyphean mode, an optimistic nihilism suggests a disregard for the greater ontological questions in a quest for self-defined purpose.[[446]](#footnote-446)

**4. Answering the Charges**

*The Post-postmodern Problem* posits a change in society stemming from a dystopian resignation that causes significant societal shifts, namely a desire for progress though without any significant end-goal, the emergence of the new sincerity, the dominance of a nostalgic drive and, finally, the infantilization of society. Metamodernism perhaps best fits the era as the metamodern signifiers respond directly to this depiction of society, specifically in the ways that the arts respond to the challenges proposed.

A sincere desire to transcend the postmodern is observable in metamodern literature through engagements with the Sisyphean and the positioning of the fantastic, a particular theme that brings to mind Vermeulen and Van den Akker’s description of the contemporary generation as embodying a feeling of dissatisfaction with the promises of the past and the desire for a better future:

We could say [...] that nowadays there is, and very much so, a pessimism of the intellect and an optimism of the will. [...] The millennials know too much of today's exploits, inequalities and injustices to take any meaningful decision, let alone position themselves on a convenient subject position, yet they appear - from the political left to the political right - to be united around the *feeling* that today's deal is not the deal they signed up for during the postmodern years (with its promise of the end of conjectures, careless consumerism, and eternal youth).[[447]](#footnote-447)

Indeed, metamodern literature, according to Vermeulen, directly answers the concept of dystopian resignation by creating a ‘(post)modern world of failed utopias, missed chances and cynical deconstruction is represented as a horrendous, terrible place; but a place, still, a lived space of relationships and history, where one can begin to try and live again.’[[448]](#footnote-448) The metamodern desire to transcend the postmodern aligns with the contemporary desire to, in some manner, avoid the accepted consequences of current human activity and the inevitable, yet undesired, dystopia to come, resulting in the creation of fictional lived spaces of relationships and history in which one may attempt to ‘live again.’ Metamodernism describes the contemporary desire to move beyond the postmodern while infinitely bound to it, the individual constantly oscillating between belief and scepticism in a manner reflective of not only dystopian resignation, but for the desire for progress regardless of consequence or destination. Nothing is really clear, as the narrator of Beast suggests, but this no longer seems to matter.

Metamodernism, it hopefully should be clear, is the most likely successor to the problem of the post-postmodern empty throne, a detailed and specific cultural descriptor that fits significantly snugly to the observable reactions against postmodern practice within western society.

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CHAPTER III – SOUTHWARD VS SUBLIMITY

An interesting essay, this. Here, Southward displays a hitherto unrecognised appreciation for the now defunct Gothic mode, examining several contemporary examples of the genre in an effort to reconcile their efforts with the parameters established of the metamodern in his previous essay.

Southward focuses in particular on the ways in which the genre and cultural paradigm align, making a particularly prescient connection between the specific representation of a past long wished dead, but which returns to haunt the present as a central metaphor of both the metamodern and Gothic. Southward, too, focuses here on the idea of transcendence in contemporary Gothic novels and the way in which this is often employed as a metaphorical site for exploring the movement beyond the postmodern. Of course, Southwardian scholars will be greatly interested here in Southward’s discussion of the Sublime, given the recent Southwardian Sublime as proposed by Frack and Tobad, in which a feeling of the sublime has become a constant emotional state of humanity in the face of the untold horrors of the past century. Southward once more finds room for a discussion of sincerity, though here with somewhat less confidence given the less-than positive reception to both his literary and creative works at this point in his history; a certain bitterness threads itself through this essay, a warning sign those past scholars failed to recognise, much to our chagrin.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

**21ST CENTURY GOTHIC; TRANSCENDENCE, SINCERITY,**

**& THE SUBLIME**

*I am not centrally concerned with the assessment of Gothic elements in later nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction. The propriety of employing the term ‘Gothic’ to describe such works is, in any case, open to question.*

*-Elizabeth R. Napier-[[449]](#footnote-449)*

*The development of the study of the mind into the science of psychology has continued to affect concepts of human nature and their reflection in Gothic literature. The course of the Gothic tradition in the twentieth century merits a study of its own for this reason alone.*

*-Elizabeth MacAndrew-[[450]](#footnote-450)*

**1. Introduction**

The effect of years of postmodern dogma are beginning to bleed out of the Gothic.[[451]](#footnote-451) Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* offers a fresh attempt at transcendence, John Burnside’s *Glister* deconstructs the detective genre without irony, and Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* utilises metafictional techniques not to foreground issues of artificiality, but rather those of sincerity. Such literary endeavours form a small selection of an increasing number of twenty-first century Gothic texts which abandon or subvert the styles and tropes of their postmodern forebears in favour of techniques of sincerity, renewal, or reconstruction. The wound is far from fatal, however, the blood flow slow.

Fred Botting, in 2002, predicted a collapse of sorts of the Gothic genre, claiming that the mode had become inextricably subject to the black hole of consumption into which all cultural production was being drawn. Its trappings ‘emptied of any strong charge,’ its readership ‘inured to Gothic shocks and terrors,’ the genre, Botting argued, had fallen into a state of constant recycle without any significant development in an effort to ‘stave off’ the emptiness of postmodern plurality.[[452]](#footnote-452) Far from this bleak prediction, though, the Gothic prevails and pervades within cultural perception, for, as Beville rightly asserts, the paraphernalia of the Gothic is all around us today.[[453]](#footnote-453) Terror is a constant buzzword and pervasive cultural prefix (*attack, threat, plot, -ist*, -*ism*), horror abounds in both cinematic production and reports of natural disasters, alongside the consistent monstrous human actions which dominate the daily news reports, now riddled with seemingly unending reports of power, child, or sexual abuse. Gothic times, indeed.[[454]](#footnote-454) In this age of dystopian resignation and Sisyphean desire, the Gothic, as a genre, flourishes, and it is my intention here to demonstrate this, alongside an examination of some of the means by which contemporary Gothic literature responds to or inhabits the metamodern moment.

Such an endeavour, though, is brought up against an obstacle almost immediately by the very nomenclature of ‘contemporary’ Gothic, a phrase not only inherently flawed in its ambiguity, but which seems too to trigger a certain scholarly anxiety (see epigraph). Analyses of the contemporary Gothic seem to provoke critics to first adamantly defend the need for the distinction or, strangely, to pose the question via the mouths of students – as if doing so implies a certain innocence of the question (“is there such a thing as contemporary Gothic?”) creating a quaint picture of the stuffy professor standing open-mouthed, shocked into realisation by the inquiring mind of the earnest-seeming youth before them.[[455]](#footnote-455) To ask ‘if’ there is a contemporary Gothic is, it must be said, rather moot, and to answer such a question serves only to assuage the paranoia of that professor once more confronted by the hungry mind; Look to our cinemas and see a flood of contemporary horror films (*Split, IT, Get Out, It Comes at Night*), or to the shelves of booksellers and see the ubiquity of 21st century novels invoking typical Gothic conventions (*The Loney, Slade House, The Essex Serpent, The Girl on the Train, Lincoln in the Bardo, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, The Wardrobe Mistress)* and there find the Contemporary Gothic – an awkward phrase that will suffice for the moment.

David Punter, towards the end of the twentieth century, suggested that the most distinctive element to emerge within contemporary iterations of Gothic texts is that of ‘a sense of being *at a loss,* or perhaps a sense of loss itself, of loss of certainty.’[[456]](#footnote-456) This feeling of loss permeates the metamodern Gothic, though always in an oscillatory fashion; the feeling of loss swings between the various poles of yearning for more, the acceptance of meaninglessness, and the desire to escape irony.[[457]](#footnote-457) The analysis to follow charts the movement through contemporary Gothic away from postmodern ideals, initially engaging with an examination of texts which intimate an attempt to transcend postmodern practice from within, before highlighting the links between the metamodern desire for and the emergent trend of Gothic sincerity, and, finally, how the metamodern Gothic posits a new relationship with the sublime.

**2. Post-Postmodern Gothic; Transgressing the Patriarchal Postmodern**

The Gothic seems a singularly suitable site for explorations of the post-postmodern, and specifically the metamodern. As a genre concerned with memories of a past which still exerts a power over the present, ‘even if we sense in some way [it] ought not to,’[[458]](#footnote-458) and in which that which is thought dead, or at least wished so, returns to disrupt the present, the Gothic thematically aligns with contemporary desires towards the postmodern; we wish that it were passed, buried and removed, yet find it inextricably now bound to us somehow. The metamodern oscillation between postmodern and modern modes easily aligns with this form of haunting[[459]](#footnote-459) as depicted within the Gothic, in which our own with to obtain post-postmodernity is thwarted by the consistent re-appearance of those themes we wish to move forward from, yet we continue to wish regardless, oscillating between hope and hopelessness. Both Botting and Steven Bruhm argue that Gothic texts form around expressions of cultural anxiety,[[460]](#footnote-460) becoming product and barometer for the apprehensions and disquietudes ‘plaguing a certain culture at a particular moment in history,’ as well as helping to arouse and assuage such anxiety.[[461]](#footnote-461) Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park* both express this anxiety as one of a problematised postmodern, placing it as the central thematic societal anxious concern, as a range of contemporary Gothic texts tend to. Of course the return of modernist modes of thought, as posited by the metamodern, equally aligns with the recursive nature of the genre as one which ‘periodically repeats itself,’[[462]](#footnote-462) as too, Punter highlights, does the insistence of Gothic writers that realism ‘is not the whole story: the world, at least in some aspects, is very much more inexplicable – or mysterious, or terrifying, or violent.’[[463]](#footnote-463) Again, this thematically links the Gothic to the metamodern via an expression of events beyond the realist (as in Ness’s *The Crane Wife* and *The Haunted Book* (2012) by Jeremy Dyson.) The Gothic also finds similar expression of the metamodern via what Botting identifies as the double bind of our Gothic Times:

Gothic Times present a double bind: invited to choose, the subject is overwhelmed by the choices available; with the subject unable to choose, the matter of choice becomes all the more pressing. The deregulation of subjective desire and the confrontation with an unsurmountably sublime excess of choice signals a shift towards "postmodern capitalism." The collapse of distinctions between useful production and wasteful consumption means there is no regulative figure or ideal other than accelerated circuits of production, consumption and expenditure.[[464]](#footnote-464)

Parallels abound here: the Gothic as forcing the subject to choose, as the metamodern subject eventually must in their constant oscillations; the pressing nature of making such a choice, invoking an emergent desire to move, to progress, despite knowing such movement is aimless (wasteful); the production of potentially wasteful product, but produced nonetheless with an intention that speaks of sincerity of intention. Botting further describes the contemporary state of the Gothic as dominated by the cultural ‘black hole’ that marks the end of the postmodern age (engendered by the decline of the paternal figure and the loss of belief in metanarratives).[[465]](#footnote-465) Botting’s black hole ‘marks out a final limit, then substitutes a plunge into limitlessness, an ultimate meaning as meaninglessness,’ a descriptor that speaks to the analysis of the Sisyphean mode as discussed earlier (finding meaning from within an accepted meaninglessness), but also, once more, reminds us of the oscillation that defines the post-postmodern age as metamodern: ‘The light of enlightened modernity no longer has the speed to overcome the dead weight of its own history or advance in glorious progress. It is pulled back to the black hole of its uncertain, postmodern present.’[[466]](#footnote-466) Rather than an unbidden snap back to Botting’s black hole, the metamodern Gothic instead places the postmodern black hole and the speedy enlightened advance of modernity in competition. Vermeulen and Van den Akker’s sinking ship – if you’ll forgive the tortured metaphor here – becomes a foundering space-faring vessel, torn between the inevitable pull of the cosmic emptiness and destruction and the desire to speed away and forward into the vast unknown of cosmic discovery.[[467]](#footnote-467)

The Gothic, in its ‘compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions, and blockages,’[[468]](#footnote-468) becomes an apt site for expression of a desire to be free of the years of postmodern pastiche, and twenty-first century Gothic literature can be seen to evidence this societal desire for (and first tentative steps into) post-postmodernity, and specifically metamodernity. The first explorations of the shift into post-postmodernity by the contemporary Gothic are perhaps most observable in the two paradigms which I wish to explore further here: First, the reversal of the ‘postmodern rejection of concepts of wholeness,’[[469]](#footnote-469) in which fragmentation and multiple subjectivity becomes a tool for the expression of longing for movement, rather than a purely deconstructive tool. And second, explorations of textual *re*construction and the re-ignited possibility of personal transcendence, in stark contrast to the *de*construction and depthlessness of the postmodern.

**2.1 Anthologies of Interest; *Ghost Town, The Haunted Book, & Haunted.***

The anthology is seeing something of a resurgence in contemporary artistic production. In terms of film and televisual content, a small spate of new anthology texts has gained notoriety in recent years, prime examples being that of the Charlie Brooker’s *Black Mirror* (2011) the BBC’s *Inside No.9* (2014)*,* CreepyPasta based TV series *Channel Zero* (2016)*,* and the wildly successful *American Horror Story* (2011)*,* the latter two of which provide a stand-alone story each season as part of the anthological whole, while the first two showcase individual stories per episode. In film, both *The ABCs of Death* (2012)*,* and *V/H/S* (2012), along with their inevitable sequels – *The ABCs of Death 2* (2014)*, The ABCs of Death 2.5* (2016)*,* *V/H/S 2* (2013)*, V/H/S: Viral* (2014) – follow a similar pattern in presenting a selection of short stories framed around a central concept or theme. Similarly in fiction, several notable examples of anthology texts have arisen in the post-postmodern period that evidence a societal move, or desire for such a move, away from the postmodern paradigms that have dominated cultural production.

Patrick McGrath’s *Ghost Town*, as the first such example, can be most succinctly summarised by its own subtitle ‘Tales of Manhattan Then and Now,’ and indeed recounts three separate tales located in Manhattan at varying stages of its development; 1777 in ‘Year of the Gibbet’ focusing on the war of independence, ~1850 in ‘Julius’*[[470]](#footnote-470)* as the American empire flourishes, and 2001 in ‘Ground Zero’ which deals, not surprisingly, with the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center*.* The triptych formed by these texts presents an interesting site for thematic consideration. Originally ostensibly appearing just as described, three tales of the developing Manhattan, and by extension America itself, the texts could easily be argued to represent a development of McGrath’s own works in which he moves from a more classically Gothic mode (‘Year of the Gibbet’is representative of *The Grotesque, Spider,* and *Dr.Haggard’s Disease)*, through family/psychosexual drama (‘Julius’ is representative of *Asylum, Martha Peake,* and *Port Mungo*), to a final prediction of his works to follow– subtle psychological trauma and the repercussions of repression dressed lightly in Gothic garb (‘Ground Zero’ is representative of *Trauma, Constance,* and *The Wardrobe Mistress*). However, on a less metabibliographical level, the anthology, as a whole, presents a single thematic treatment of the concept of cultural threat.[[471]](#footnote-471) In ‘Year of the Gibbet,’the threat is that of the paternal, of the English invaders destroying the inchoate and infant America as-yet-to-be, treated here as a malign, sexually deviant, and malicious influence as personified by the central antagonist of Lord John Hyde. In ‘Julius,’ the threat progress from without to within (not a military invasion, but a flood of immigration that has already happened), and is represented by the threat of Irish immigrants to the purity of the growing American Empire, the apparent source of diseases that are observed to flourish in the ‘narrow city streets and fetid courtyards’ where they are seen to squat.[[472]](#footnote-472) Annie Kelly, the life artist who young Julius falls in love with is just such an Irish immigrant and serves as the contested woman around whose death Julius’s madness centres. These events force the end of the family line. Finally, ‘Ground Zero’perhaps most clearly engages with ideas of cultural threat, though combing elements of external and internal threat from the previous stories: Dan, the central character, is initially threatened by the September 11th terrorist attacks, believing that these external threats were in some way ‘directed at himself,’ yet also speaks to his psychiatrist, the protagonist-narrator of the tale, of his fear of the internal American political reactions: ‘He feared that congress was going to push through a bill letting federal agents lock up anyone they didn’t like the look of. He said these powers would be exercised with no judicial oversight, and the people the feds locked up would have no access to legal representation.’[[473]](#footnote-473)While Dan’s ‘troublesome thoughts’[[474]](#footnote-474) provide an example of the *reactions* to the cultural threat of terrorism, the psychiatrist herself provides the more detailed exploration of the effects of such, particularly in her overt racism and xenophobia with regard to the Asian prostitute who Dan finds comfort with immediately following the attacks. She refers to Kim Lee throughout in debasing terms, calling her a ‘creature,’[[475]](#footnote-475) ‘not beautiful, but certainly feline,’ having ‘a slick helmet of hair,’ carrying herself with ‘arrogance’ and ‘cruelty,’ as ‘a petite slinking creature,’[[476]](#footnote-476) a ’sociopath’[[477]](#footnote-477) with ‘a vicious little face.’[[478]](#footnote-478) Kim Lee devolves from an escort to a ‘Chinese hooker,’[[479]](#footnote-479) once the psychiatrist learns of her ethnicity, and as her attitude towards the potential threat of a foreign other begins to grow in the wake of the grand cultural threat of 9/11.

How does this pull us away from the postmodern? In creating such a collection which establishes both a metabibliographic linearity (aware of its own place within the author’s bibliography) to McGrath’s own works, but more so in the thematic explorations of cultural threat, McGrath’s text pushes the reader up against the postmodern ‘rejection of wholeness,’ forcing the suggestion of a thematic link between seeming disparate texts; regardless of the situation, the same concepts of threat to established cultures are a continuing problem and, far from a seemingly damning account of these problems, such a narrative provides an almost positive message about the indomitable nature of human culture. To wit: there have always been threats to the established culture of the period, yet the civilization continues regardless. The metabibliographic elements identified, too, add to this idea of a fragmentation not for fragmentation’s sake, but rather positing each section as a part of a larger whole, an exemplar of a specific movement in McGrath’s own treatment of the Gothic, or perhaps even charting a movement within the genre itself. A movement from skulls, disease, nationalism and heroines, through family drama, psycho-sexual madness, and romantic artists, finally to rest on more contemporary depictions of Gothic as exploring trauma, psychologically explicable mental conditions, hauntology, and terror. Sue Zlosnik, too, argues for a thematic link between the three texts as that of the ‘dead mother.’ Zlosnik identifies this ‘larger patterning’ of the trio in ‘Year of the Gibbet’ first, where the dead mother ‘has an all too visible presence,’ and similarly points to Julius’s mother as haunting ‘Julius’ ‘as an absence,’ having died in childbirth to the title character.[[480]](#footnote-480) In ‘Ground Zero,’ too, Dan’s dead mother, according to the narrator, forms the root cause of his psychological issues that first force him to seek psychiatric aid. Again, Zlosnik here identifies another manner in which the anthology expresses a specific thematic form, a series of stories which seem disparate, but in actuality deal with the same singular issue – the Gothic trope of the missing mother, in this instance – and thus force an iota of assemblage from the fragmentary form and exceed the paradigms of the postmodern. Not by dint of mere thematic link, it should be stressed, but by attempting coherence from within the fragmentary mode.

Jeremy Dyson’s *The Haunted Book* too envisions the genre’s evolution as the anthology progresses, though here in reverse, ranging from contemporary tales of haunted studios and government secrets, to witches and necromancy. Dyson’s text is an anthology of ghost and supernatural stories, told first through Dyson himself as he travels to the locales of haunted tales in order to get inspiration to convert the oral accounts into written narratives. Dyson soon discovers another book along his travels that seems to reflect his own journey – *This Book is Haunted* by H. Den Fawkes, printed in 1978. The text then turns into a facsimile of Fawkes’s fictional text, again following a writer as he collects tales of the haunted, before he too discovers a book matching his own research in the fictional Sir Eden Vachs’s *A Book of Hauntings*, purportedly published in 1938, into which the text again becomes a facsimile. Finally Vachs’s account, in the same manner as those two frames as came before, is overtaken by a facsimile of a further examination of ghost stories, here *Glimpses in the Twilight*, *being Various Notes, Records, and Examples of The Supernatural* by the Reverend A. Tennethorex (1885). All of this before the reader emerges into the last 29 pages of the text, which are printed on black paper and burst the ontological levels that the text has raised beyond the bounds of the page and to the reader themselves who, through clever manipulation, is positioned as the final textual layer, the ultimate palimpsest. The haunted ‘book’ of the title is revealed to be the reader of Dyson’s novel who, unbeknownst to themselves, is a futuristic ‘Book’ an ambiguous artefact into which a supposed ‘Reader,’ a human of the distant future somehow vicariously experiencing the life of the true reader, has become too deeply engrossed within and must be extracted. The anthology promotes a sceptical deconstructive reading via the open-ended frames which the reader continues to slip deeper into never to emerge, unlike the more traditional Gothic frames which more often than not encapsulate their tales (see, *Frankenstein, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, Melmoth the Wanderer’s* many nested tales). Expecting the ever-delayed return of the opening frames, the reader is drawn further into the text, thus being prepared for the theme of the black pages and the need to return from being trapped deep in the pages of a Book. Again, the seemingly disparate nature of the anthology serves a larger purpose, and one which is suggestive of a shift away from postmodernism from within. The text engages with postmodern depthlessness, with the tales themselves serving as seemingly emotional ‘bait’ to lure the reader to the finale revelation of the haunted self – as haunted by a future presence – yet it too breaks from postmodern doctrine in doing so. The essential point of the nature of the text is, in essence, to emotionally situate the reader in position for the final reveal. The multiplicity of tales, then, serves less to reinforce an acceptance of multiplicity as emblematic of a general depthlessness of tale, but instead to provide a building sense of a ‘wholeness,’ or rather a depthiness, in which the quest for meaning is forcibly foregrounded against the fragmentation.

Similarly, Chuck Palahniuk’s *Haunted* uses the anthology format to suggest a specific wholeness amongst seemingly disparate elements. The framing narrative is that of a series of amateur writers abandoning all civilization for a three-month-long writers retreat in utmost isolation organized by the mysterious Mr. Whittier. The novel forms a repeated pattern of switching between the events of the authors at the retreat and the stories they tell, centred on their lives before they chose to attend the retreat. Of course, in true Gothic fashion, it is all a sinister set-up, and individuals soon begin to die once the characters are sealed into their retreat, a sealed, isolated and decrepit old theatre. In a postmodern move, it is the apparent victims who, in the perverse desire for a victim story – how ‘Mr. Whitter took us hostage’[[481]](#footnote-481) – destroy the food rations, the washing machine, the fridge, the heating, each new hardship created by themselves as ‘another plot point for the story that would be [their] cash cow.’[[482]](#footnote-482) The victims, as they would probably wish to be known, desire this story to overwrite their own, of how they were forced to survive increasing hardships until rescue, not just as a means to obtain fame and fortune, but as the narrator reveals, in order to create a story through which they may transcend their own current existences:

We still hunt for ways out. We still stand at the locked doors and scream for help. Just not too hard or too loud. Not until our story would make a good movie. Until each of us becomes a character skinny enough for a movie star to play.

A story to save us all from the stories of our past.[[483]](#footnote-483)

Notably, the narrator most frequently identifies with the group, using collective pronouns throughout in a move that binds the perpetrators consistently together as one group, one selection of victims. The narrator’s identity, never fully revealed, thus becomes a moot topic. They are not one of the individuals at the writing retreat who increasingly mutilate, cannibalise and murder one another, they are in some manner representative of them all – the collective. Indeed, the various ‘confessions’ that form the short narratives of each character serve only to link each character together into one; they have all experienced tragedy and horror and, in doing so, a common backstory is built for each in which the world seems cruel, tragic, unpredictable and utterly, ultimately, Gothic. Scared and powerless individuals are forced to bear witness to horrors and grotesqueries, trapped in the labyrinths of their own lives. Once more, the fragmentary text serves to build a more general, cohesive whole from within a seemingly postmodern mode, eschewing techniques of fragmentation and pure-surface representations to create a collective impression of one victim, one story, one outcome.

Palahniuk’s text discusses the pitfalls of the over-written self, as the victims of the retreat seek to re-write and re-construct their own identity and circumstances, to forge a better future. Such reconstructions, however successful, do signpost a post-postmodern desire to move beyond deconstruction and irony and, instead, as the metamodern posits, engaging with the new Romantic sentiment governed by reconstructive attempts made from within possibly doomed scenarios. They attempt and fail, but attempt regardless, and in doing so signal potential alternatives to the current status quo. Another specific way in which this trend can be observed is in the twenty-first century Gothic’s treatment of transcendence, a concept often denied by the postmodern impulse.

**2.2 Beyond the Black Hole’s Deconstruction in *Gould’s Book of Fish, Glister,* & *The Terror***

The desire for something *beyond* the postmodern while seemingly bound to the impulse, as described by the metamodern oscillation, also finds expression in the Gothic, though much like Ness’ *The Crane Wife*, this seems to align with a Sisphyean attitude and a search for the means by which the postmodern may be transcended. In *Gould’s Book of Fish* by Richard Flanagan, for example, the ‘relentless humiliations’ of postmodern existence are harshly critiqued and found wanting:

The tourists had money and we needed it; they only asked in return to be lied to and deceived and told that single most important thing, that they were safe, that their sense of security – national, individual, spiritual – wasn’t a bad joke being played on them by a bored and capricious destiny. To be told that there was no connection between then and now, that they didn’t need to wear a black armband or have a bad conscience about their power and their wealth and everybody else’s lack of it […] We kindly pretended that it was about buying and selling chairs. […] The tourists had insistent unspoken questions and we just had to answer as best we could, with forged furniture. They were really asking, ‘Are we safe?’ and we were really replying, ‘No, but a barricade of useless goods may help block the view.’ And because Hubris is not just an ancient Greek word but a human sense so deep-seated we might better regard it as an unerring instinct, they were also wanting to know, ‘If it is our fault, then will we suffer?’ and we were really replying, ‘Yes, and slowly, but a fake chair may make us both feel better about it.’[[484]](#footnote-484)

The kind of eclectic materialism posited by postmodern dogma is here treated as a scam, with grand ontological questions about safety, guilt, power, hubris all still seen as part of the human psyche, mitigated and falsely buried in materialist consumption.[[485]](#footnote-485) The tourists seek emotional resolution, Sid Hammet and the forgers provide material comfort, not answering, but delaying the question. Postmodern ideology is thus shown to fail in the face of the contemporary need for meaning and it is just such a need which drives the main protagonist, Sid Hammet, into attempting vicarious spiritual transcendence via the blurring of his identity with that of the historic figure of William Buelow Gould, whom Hammet perceives to have achieved such transcendence.[[486]](#footnote-486)

*Gould’s Book of Fish* is a text draped in Gothic trappings. A Byronic hero, Sid Hammet, finds a mysterious and ancient seeming book, a palimpsest of loose sheets apparently penned by the madman and conman William Buelow Gould, and becomes obsessed with the story written within. The text, after Hammet reads it, dissolves into sea water and so it is up to Hammet to reproduce the events contained within – that of Gould’s imprisonment at a terrifying island penal colony in Tasmania, then Van Diemen’s Land. Gould, forced to paint pictures of fish for the grotesque doctor of the island, Mr. Lempriere, or face the wrath of the tyrannical Commandant, attempts escape, fails, is returned to the island and sentenced to death by hanging. Life, for Hammet, is an ‘ongoing act of disillusionment,’ until he comes across the text, after which he comes to believe he has been ‘swept up’ in a miracle.[[487]](#footnote-487) Seemingly charmed by the same ‘flotsam of the romantic past’ that he sells to tourists in an effort to assuage the ‘rotten present,’[[488]](#footnote-488) Hammet becomes infatuated with the book that he finds, which effects a sublime reaction in him upon first sight, ‘unravelling [his] heart and, worse still, [his] life’ into a ‘poor, scraggy skein.’[[489]](#footnote-489) In line with a Kantian reaction, his sense of self is unable to comprehend the text, and so breaks down, yet he still receives a Burkean sense of exultation as the ‘gentle radiance’ makes him question whether he has ‘lived the same life over and over, like some Hindu mystic forever trapped on the Great Wheel.’[[490]](#footnote-490) Before the dissolution of the text, Hammet becomes obsessed with the book, ‘carrying it everywhere, as if it were some powerful talisman, as if it contained some magic that might somehow convey or explain something fundamental to [him].’[[491]](#footnote-491) He is desperate to validate the book, taking it to historians, bibliophiles and publishers ‘for their opinion of its worth,’[[492]](#footnote-492) the result of which is that ‘the bellicose book’ is described as ‘the insignificant somewhat curious product of a particularly demented mind,’[[493]](#footnote-493) a quality forgery, and a ‘sad pastiche.’[[494]](#footnote-494) In the wake of the book dissolving into a brackish puddle of water, he eventually takes up the task of re-writing the text from memory, creating the version that we are treated to in the text. This frame describes Hammet’s finding of and subsequent recreation to the text, but this framing has a far more significant agenda than the mere expression of mania.[[495]](#footnote-495) Rather, the justification for Hammet’s seemingly sycophantic obsession with the text lies in the main theme of the narrative which he frames – that search for ‘something significant’, namely, significance itself. Gould’s narrative, after all, is one of enlightenment and transcendence. It is the story of a forger forced to produce something original, *The Book of Fish*, and how this ultimately leads him to become something grander than he could have otherwise achieved – in this instance represented by his ultimate metamorphosis into a leafy sea-dragon. In repeating the refrain ‘my name is a song which will be sung’ throughout the novel,[[496]](#footnote-496) Gould makes clear his desire for permanence, or rather, a legacy that achieves redemption, a freedom gained via the fish he paints.[[497]](#footnote-497) ‘The criticasters,’ Gould writes, ‘will say I am this small thing & my pictures that irrelevant thing […] but I am William Buelow Gould, party of one, undefinable, & my fish will free me & I shall flee with them.’[[498]](#footnote-498) He ardently believes that, via the painting of the fish pictures for Lempriere, he will achieve some form of freedom and a lasting legacy, that his name will be sung; Gould wishes to gain redemption via enlightenment, by finding and presenting some hidden meaning to the world for, as he writes, ‘my real crime was seeing the world for what it is & painting it as fish.’[[499]](#footnote-499) The fish come to represent not just portraits of people, but instead genuine ontological insights, a thing of worth that he is able to pass on and, in doing so, gain transcendence. ‘Perhaps,’ as Robert Hood writes, ‘it is best, then, to transform oneself, casting off the oppressive human form to live as a fish, free to swim the depths and watch the endless procession of human history as it goes its fraudulent, cruel, and controlling way.’[[500]](#footnote-500) Gould casts off his human form as he transcends the ‘cruel and controlling ways of human history,’ knowledge he has gained through his artistic creations.[[501]](#footnote-501) Hammet correctly surmises this goal when first describing the book:

The author wrote in colours; more precisely, I suspect, he felt in colours. […] his world took on hues that overwhelmed him, as if the universe was a consequence of colour, rather than the inverse. Did the wonder of colour, I pondered, redeem the horror of his world?[[502]](#footnote-502)

Hammet frames the text in order to appropriate this message of redemption and to control the representation of Gould within it to just that aim; much as Walton turns Frankenstein into a grander shade of himself, so too does Hammet turn Gould into a shade of himself, albeit a darker one living in a far more Gothic world. However, not content to simply leave the glory of this transcendence to a purely mise-en-abyme event, Hammet places himself as a haunting presence within Gould’s tale via a distinct blurring of the narrative boundaries. One way in which Hammet achieves this is through the mirroring of chapter presentation in order to present his frame as part of Gould’s text. Each chapter of *Gould’s Book of Fish* is framed by a replica of the original fish paintings by the real-world William Beulow Gould, on whose life the text is roughly based, followed by a brief abstract of the chapter events.[[503]](#footnote-503) This applies to both the first chapter, Hammet’s frame, as well as each subsequent chapter, Gould’s narrative sections. The join of the frame and main narrative thus blurs the line between the two sections, with Hammet positing his own frame *as* the introduction to Gould’s: the text states that ‘the first 46 pages of Gould’s notebook are missing; his journal begins on page 47’, page numbers which directly correspond to the pages of the text already expended by Hammet’s frame and also the corresponding page on which the Gould narrative begins.[[504]](#footnote-504) Gould and Hammet also both express a concern over re-incarnation, or a dual identity, in a manner aimed at reconciling the two narrators. Hammet foregrounds this issue in the aforementioned ‘Great Wheel’ analogy, while Gould, in a moment of seeming existential crisis, describes a terror that overtakes him with the suggestion that he ‘may actually be someone else’:

Everything around me was beginning to whirl, that all my life was only a dream dreamt by another, that everything around me was only a simulacrum of a world, & I was crying, lost, I really was somewhere else, somebody else, seeing all this.[[505]](#footnote-505)

The blurring between the two continues as the similarities between the men continue to develop: Each is in possession of a book of fish, before this is either lost or dissolved, and each begins to recreate a second edition from memory; each man turns into a Weedy Seadragon at the end of their respective stories; each is a counterfeiter and a forger, convicted of their crime; and each falls in love with a woman in contact with whom their identity becomes fluid (The Conga for Hammet and Twopenny Sal for Gould). Hammet, in framing the text (one could even go so far as to state that he has fabricated it entirely) presents Gould as a redeemable man, as a version of himself that has found some life-affirming meaning and subsequent transcendence through artistic creation.[[506]](#footnote-506) In doing so, he cements his own blurring with Gould, attempting a pseudo-vicarious experience where he does not actually live through Gould, but as the man. As Hammet tellingly reveals at the beginning of the text about the tourists: ‘They wanted stories, I came to realise, in which they were already imprisoned, not stories in which they appeared along with the storyteller, accomplices in escaping.’[[507]](#footnote-507) The tourists, as ironically hungry for meaning as Hammet himself later becomes, do not wish to travel along with the storyteller, but to be imprisoned within the story itself, an experience that Hammet himself desires; not a vicarious transcendence lived through Gould, but the same experience, the same reactions and knowledge gained through the blurring of their identities.[[508]](#footnote-508)

*Gould’s Book of Fish* ends in a circular reflection of the beginning, with the Seadragon and Hammet trading places:

Sid Hammet stares at me for too long. I am not afraid, never have I been afraid. I shall be you. I am ascending from the night, rising, rolling, passing through glass & air into his sad eyes. Who am I? he can no longer ask & I – my punishment perfect for one who has taken a life but not gained another in return – can only with for the certainty to the answer: I am William Buelow Gould.[[509]](#footnote-509)

This confirms the conjoining of the two parties as Gould begins to possess Hammet’s body and the transcendence Hammet wishes for, finally, is denied in a seeming act of possession. He has become Gould, though Gould, too, has become him. John Burnside’s *Glister* too forms a circular text, though *Glister* presents more as an ouroboros in form, the snake ever eating its tail (tale?), the story ever returning to that original point in which Leonard finds himself in an unusual timeless place, listening to the calling of the gulls.[[510]](#footnote-510)

*Glister* is, ostensibly, a detective story. Young boys have been regularly disappearing from the town of Homeland, one every year or so, and the only person attempting to solve these crimes, the policeman John Morrison, is implicated in their coverup. The town is at all points shadowed by the presence of the old chemical plant which has ravaged the local wildlife and left the landscape desolate, and around which the children of the town play and roam. For the majority of the text, however, the reader finds themselves observing one of these children, Leonard Wilson, in his experiences around the town, with the mystery of who has been kidnapping the boys of the city left largely untouched until its return in the final forty or so pages of the novel. Burnside’s text becomes, then, a metafictional take on the detective genre, dressed in Gothic trappings of ruined castles (the plant), malign patriarchal figures (Leonard’s depressive Father), sexual taboo (Elspeth’s sexual needs, despite her young age), madness or mental illness (Alice, again Leonard’s father), and violent death (Leonard’s murder of an innocent man). The novel is metafictional, here, in the sense that it deconstructs the necessities of the detective genre, posing the question of how a novel would work should the detective supposed to be investigating the murders be someone actively working to cover them up, as is the case with Morrison. Morrison, in the face of the first murder scene and the young boy Mark Wilkinson ‘suspended in [a] tree like a figure from some makeshift crucifixion,’[[511]](#footnote-511) finds himself wanting:

Morrison had to fight the temptation, then, to cut the boy down, to undo the ceremony of what had been done to him, to cover him up and not let him be seen like this by anyone else. […] And it was then that John Morrison understood, with a sudden and brutal clarity, that he wasn’t a real policeman after all, because he did not have what it took to deal with this.[[512]](#footnote-512)

Morrison calls for help and subsequently covers up this crime and all the same that follow, with the help of the wealthy psychopath Brian Smith, who comes to represent that typical Gothic villain – the wealthy land-owner subtly affecting the lives of the lower classes.

Towards the end of the text, one-hundred and fifty pages (roughly sixty percent of the text) after the initial set up of the mystery, in which we follow Leonard’s adventures around the plant, we return to the detective story as Leonard finds himself being followed, ‘watched’ by someone amongst the ruins of the chemical plant.[[513]](#footnote-513) This watcher is soon revealed to be the Moth Man, an adult friend of Leonard and amateur lepidopterist, who, as it turns out, is also the murderer of the children, a fact realised by Morrison only when it is too late; bound almost entirely in a body-cast by the Moth Man as punishment for his complicity in covering up the murders, Morrison realises that his punisher is the killer, yet is unable to ask him any questions about why, due to the nature of his imprisonment. Burnside, then, abandons the genre conventions of the detective mode, with the villain’s ‘big reveal’ left entirely to internal speculation on the part of Morrison, who is unable to comprehend, nor to interrogate the ‘villain’ about his motives. This critique, though, is not an entirely postmodern endeavour. The postmodern play and pastiche here serves a far more significant purpose in the text, in which the reason *why* the murders happen is considered unimportant in the wake of the *effects* of the murders themselves. The concern is not the past, the how and who of the crime, but rather the future, the intended, and actualised, purpose of the crime itself. Postmodern meaninglessness is thus driven to a background setting in which the quest for forgiveness, and a specific humanism, is foregrounded by the Moth Man’s agenda.

The Moth Man, it seems, kills the children in a sacrificial manner, but in doing so loosens their souls from their body that they may be led through the ‘Glister,’ a mysterious machine inside the plant that allows them to enter the space beyond life, described as ‘the point where every story begins and ends,’ by Leonard.[[514]](#footnote-514) The point of being led into this seeming limbo-like space beyond death (Leonard witnesses his own corpse strung up in the same manner as the other murdered boy’s before he enters the machine), seems to be to attain forgiveness, as Leonard states before he walks willingly into the machine:

I’ve seen in [The Moth Man’s] eyes that he is going to send me into the Glister alone. Which I should have known, of course, because he has to stay, he has to go on with his work. He *is* the necessary angel. I have an image of him going from house to house all along the peninsula, picking off the [descendants of those who closed the plant] one by one. That’s what I see in him, at least. An angel going from door to door. The angel of death. The angel of absolution, gathering in the souls of the wicked – not as a punishment, but because God has forgiven them at last, and is releasing them from the hell they had fallen into.[[515]](#footnote-515)

The Moth Man’s agenda is a redemptive one, not malicious or vengeful, bent on absolution and forgiveness. Indeed, the purpose of Leonard’s ‘death’ via the Glister seems to be that he is able to relive, or retell, his story in an effort to ‘forgive everyone who figures there, including myself. […] Life is bigger. As my own local variation of this one story begins again for the last time, in the moment before it is forgotten, it may become a perfect rendition, a true story, told once and for all. If it happens like that. If it happens in full, then everything is understood. Everything is forgiven.’[[516]](#footnote-516) By using techniques of postmodern deconstruction to force the detective genre into a less significant plot role, *Glister* is able to foreground issues of forgiveness, of transcending the typical postmodern techniques through a desire for something beyond. *Glister’s* suggested answer to the postmodern problem is the creation space in which to critically analyse those wrongs perpetrated upon us and, rather than to lament a lack of justice, or to seek vengeance in its place, to attempt forgiveness and transcend the meaninglessness of stories by imbuing them with the possibility of clemency. Perhaps most emblematic of this shift is the aforementioned ‘punishment’ of Morrison by the Moth Man, which is acted not to avenge his cover up of the bodies, but rather, as the Moth Man states, to give him ‘time to repent.’[[517]](#footnote-517)

If *Glister* moves beyond the typical concerns of the detective genre from within, then so too does Dan Simmons’ *The Terror* provide a further example of breaking the bounds of genre, in this case cosmic horror, to evidence a desire for something beyond the postmodern mundane.

*The Terror* follows several members of Sir John Franklin’s 1845 expedition to the North Pole in search of the North-West Passage through to the Canadian territories, consisting of two well-stocked ships, HMS Erebus, and HMS Terror. After being frozen in ice for two years before their goal could be achieved, the plot, primarily, centres on the captain of the Terror, Francis Crozier, as he attempts to keep his men alive in the face of oppressive arctic conditions, increasingly spoiled rations, the ever-present threat of scurvy, and, most threatening of all, an unknown bestial assailant who has begun to violently slaughter any crew member who should stray from the relative safety of the ship.

Dan Simmons’ text presents, initially, a slow building horror story of the trials that Crozier must face in the inhospitable extreme north and the creature slaughtering his men, yet soon emerges more into the territory of pseudo-Lovecraftian cosmic horror as the beast is revealed to be that of the Tuunbaq, a creature of Inuit myth. Created in a fight between cosmic and ancient gods but failing in its ultimate task, to defeat the rival gods of its creator, the Tuunbaq is banished to ‘the coldest, emptiest part of the crowded earth – the perpetually frozen region near the north pole.’[[518]](#footnote-518) There, a selection of psychically gifted individuals, the *sixam ieua*, keep the Tuunbaq sedate through telepathic promises:

The [*sixam ieua*] learned to summon *Tuunbaq* with their throat singing. Devoting themselves to communicating with the *Tuunbaq*, they agreed to allow the jealous and monstrous creature to deprive them of their ability to speak to their fellow human beings. In exchange for the *tupilek[[519]](#footnote-519)* killing-creature no longer preying on human souls, the-spirit-governors-of-the-sky promised the God Who Walks Like a Man that they – the human beings and Real People[[520]](#footnote-520) – would no longer make their dwelling places in its northernmost domain. They promised the God Who Walks Like a Man that they would honour it by never fishing or hunting within its kingdom without the monster-creature’s permission. […] They promised that no human being’s kayak or boat would trespass on the God Who Walks Like a Man’s seadomain.[[521]](#footnote-521)

The cause of the Terror’s woes, then, comes from the accidental breaking of this pact. In a true echo of the ethos of Lovecraft’s fiction, modern humans, in a quest for scientific mastery, find themselves in aggressive confrontation with forces far older and more vicious than they are able to contend with, and to whom a cult of individuals (a touch of King here, a cult of those who possess the ‘shining’) has formed to worship. In a similarly Lovecraftian convention, the Tuunbaq’s form causes insanity to those who view it; ‘any form it took was so terrible that even a pure spirit could not look upon it directly without going mad,’[[522]](#footnote-522) a concept that instantly brings to mind some of the more notorious beings purportedly listed in the Necronomicon, and in particular Cthulhu,[[523]](#footnote-523) whose sight drives the sailor Briden insane.[[524]](#footnote-524) Unusual for a Lovecraftian hero, though, Captain Crozier is not driven mad by his experiences with the Tuunbaq, but rather achieves a form of transcendence that moves the text beyond postmodern concerns. In contrast to, for example, Neil Gaiman’s postmodern love letter to Lovecraft in *Shoggoth’s Old Peculiar* (1998),[[525]](#footnote-525) Simmons’ take on cosmic horror focuses less on postmodern deconstruction and instead presents an entirely sincere treatment of the subject, though within the typically postmodern-aligned mode of the historiographic metafiction. *The Terror* reads as a slow-building cosmic horror that refuses an ironic stance and, in its place, treats the subject with a post-ironic, somewhat hopeful touch, as evidenced through Crozier Himself who, rather than be destroyed by his experience with the Absurdity of existence as epitomized by the cosmic horror of the Tuunbaq, is instead reborn. In opposition to *The Call of Cthulhu*’s Briden, who loses his sense of self to madness in wake of his interactions with the ancient, titular, cosmic horror, Crozier is instead turned from an isolated, desperate and dying sailor into part of the *Sixam Ieua,* becoming a member of the Inuit people as a shaman able to speak to the horror and taking the name of Taliriktug to mark the transition.[[526]](#footnote-526) Rather than the standard postmodern Gothic of before, and much like the role of the mythic in Ness’s *The Crane Wife*, Simmons’ text promotes a co-existence with the mythic as an augmentation to life that, in some manner, may help to transcend (or at the very least partially mitigate), the absurd difficulty and indifference of existence:

The Francis Crozier *inua*[[527]](#footnote-527)still alive and well in Taliriktug had no illusions about life being anything but poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

But perhaps it did not have to be solitary.[[528]](#footnote-528)

Crozier discovers peace within the brutish world through his new relationship with the mythic as one able to merge both worlds; to converse with the mythic and live amongst the real, crossing the boundaries of the seemingly depthlessness of existence and finding some form of happiness and transcendence.

The desire to transcend postmodern concerns, in particular those of fragmentation and the denial of transcendentalism within surface-based artistic production, finds clear representation within the Gothic genre, showcasing reconstructive attempts to move beyond the typical concerns of the period from within the methods. In line with the posited theories of the metamodern, such texts do not entirely manage to transcend the postmodern, but rather highlight attempts to do so from within the mode. Attempt is the key, not success. Fragmentary texts still exist, and are still used to suggest a certain unreliability of narrated modes, yet new themes are emerging from within such attempts to consolidate fragmentation through higher, loftier, thematic concerns. So, too, with the resurgence of transcendental themes within twenty-first century Gothic: Hammet blurs his identity into that of Gould to achieve vicarious transcendence of human concerns; Leonard transcends death in order to achieve some form of forgiveness; and, finally, Crozier transcends the constraints of his Modern existence, the reliance on technology, belief in progress, scepticism of religion and tradition, in order to accept the mythic and cosmic horror[[529]](#footnote-529) of the ‘brutish’ world and, in thus augmenting the mundane, achieve some form of personal tranquillity.

**2.3 Gothic Sincerity in *Cold Skin* & *The Testament of Gideon Mack***

While the previously identified trends in the contemporary Gothic signal a desire to transcend the years of the postmodern, further thematic developments in the genre more closely tie the mode to concepts not just of the post-postmodern, but specifically of the metamodern. In particular here I wish to focus, if somewhat briefly for the moment, on the growing attempts at post-irony and sincerity of emotional intent or impact that are increasingly emerging within the eldritch genre and which link to Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s identification of an ‘(at times feigned) sincerity that hint[s] at another structure of feeling [than the postmodern], intimating another discourse.’[[530]](#footnote-530)

The discourse of the postmodern cannot properly accommodate texts like that of J.B. Aspinall’s *Sycorax* (2006)or *The Resurrectionist*, which revel in the trappings and tropes of past literary endeavours, but do so without a sense of the ironic. *Sycorax* itself owes much to that classic of the Gothic canon, Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, following, as it does, the misadventures of a lecherous monk, tempted towards evil by devilish figures, yet Aspinall never overtly parodies this text, nor allows his own to fall into the parodical. Instead, the text relishes in the tropes of the Gothic from which it draws, unashamedly returning to a more classical Gothic mode. Palimpsestic, supernatural, maddening, and found-manuscript framed, Aspinall’s text is arguably clichéd in its use of Gothic tropes, yet they are employed entirely without ironic parody or deconstruction. So too, in *The Resurrectionist*, which eschews deconstruction, surface-play, parody and irony and instead presents critique-less Gothic tropes in the form of Frankensteinian doctors, grotesque creations, supernatural monsters, and (once again) the found manuscript, each a marker of the genre and a knowing-nod to the literary tradition created without attempt to satirise it. The language of the postmodern fails in confrontation with these offerings, works in which authorial intent is to affectionately or sincerely showcase their form, in opposition to presenting as a postmodern pastiche of it. Instead it is to the language and terms of the metamodern we must turn to find sufficient language of analysis, specifically the identification of such techniques as part of the emergent attempts at authorial sincerity. As Olsen argues, twenty-first century Gothic departs from the ‘dry academic discussion’ which would suggest texts as mere ‘intellectual puzzles, or some chaos to put in order’; instead, they offer a post-postmodern desire for something beyond irony in their attempts to effect affect.[[531]](#footnote-531) They are, he argues, ‘more,’ ‘they intend to chill and astonish, and they mean to be felt,’ and in doing so move beyond irony towards a sincerity of feeling and intent.[[532]](#footnote-532) Perhaps the best example of this metamodern Gothic post-irony, in terms of form, is that of Albert Sánchez Piñol’s *Cold Skin*.

*Cold Skin* depicts the struggle of an unnamed narrator seeking solace from the world as a weather official on a ‘tiny island swept by harsh polar winds,’ close to the Antarctic.[[533]](#footnote-533) The job of recording the daily weather conditions on the island – ‘[a] job as monotonous as it was insignificant’[[534]](#footnote-534) – is immediately interrupted on the narrator’s first night ashore by the attack of beasts reminiscent of the denizens of Lovecraft’s Innsmouth:

The lower part of the door had a kind of hatch. A round hole covered by a moveable flap. The [creature’s] arm was sticking out of it. A whole arm, naked and elongated. […] It was not a human arm […] I could see that the three bones at the elbow were smaller and pointier than ours. Not a speck of fat; pure muscle coated with shark skin. But the hand was worst of all. The fingers were joined by a membrane that went all the way up to the nails. […] Six or seven tentacle-like arms waved in front of their faces that came screaming out of some amphibious underworld; eyes like eggs, pupils like needles, holes instead of noses, no eyebrows, no lips, a huge mouth.[[535]](#footnote-535)

As the text progresses, the narrator comes to humanise the pseudo-Deep-Ones, named ‘Sitauca,’ recognising their attacks as an act of defence against the hostile invasions of humanity upon their territory, even going so far as to begin sexual relations with a female Sitauca, Aneris, ‘tamed’ by the island’s only other inhabitant, the ever-hostile Gruner. Gruner holds the only defensible section of the island, a heavily fortified lighthouse, which he eventually, begrudgingly, allows the narrator access within, though ultimately succumbing to his madness and rushing out into the ocean, and the death-by-Sitauca enacted on him there.

Much like *The Terror*, *Cold Skin* plays with Lovecraftian themes without pastiche or irony, attempting to take certain concepts further than their initial development rather than deconstruct them; while the love triangle formed between the bestial Aneris, the mad Gruner and the amorous narrator may at first seem a postmodern parody of the Lovecraftian[[536]](#footnote-536) – warping Lovecraft’s own detestation of the act of degeneration and of race-mixing into a tangled love story – in truth the text merely fleshes out certain sequences that were left to ambiguity in Lovecraft’s own text, namely the very relationships humans must have had with the Deep Ones of Innsmouth in order to produce their mixed bloodline. Piñol’s text expands upon a Lovecraftian concept without resorting to deconstruction or parody, and any sympathy for the devil, for the Sitauca, that may have been developing alongside their anthropomorphism by the Narrator is abruptly cut short by their ‘gleeful’[[537]](#footnote-537) destruction of Gruner and continued desire to rid the island of humanity even after his death, returning to Lovecraft’s original thematic considerations. *Cold Skin* serves as a sincere, in terms of authorial intent, re-visitation of classic Lovecraftian themes, though here slightly modified before returning to the original premise from which they pay homage. We begin to sympathise with the plight of the Sitauca, before being reminded of the horror of their nature. In a metamodern move, the text seems, at first, to be presenting a postmodern take on Lovecraft’s Deep Ones, those creatures from the sea that come on to land to water the bloodlines, so to speak, and form terrifying hybrids. Yet the text oscillates between fear and acceptance of the other, of the monstrous, between sincerity of Lovecraftian intent and irony of conventional, or genre, play. It is a sincere response to the literary legacy of one of the ‘canonical’ writers of the mode into which the novel fits,[[538]](#footnote-538) much like *The Resurrectionist, Sycorax* and, indeed, *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, by James Robertson.

Robertson’s text follows Gideon Mack, a Scottish minister conflicted both by his own secret atheism and his marital infidelities with his best friend’s wife. Mack, struggling with the moral implications of these issues, falls into a gorge while attempting to rescue a dog, and emerges some days later claiming to have conversed with the devil in the depths of the earth. Mack, on revealing his conversations to the public at large, is subsequently defamed by the kirk, deemed a madman, and finds his end apparently at the hands of the devil on a lonely moor, leaving only a manuscript (his ‘testament’) behind.

Framed at both ends by an editor’s narrative, that of Patrick Walker, finder of the Mack manuscript, the text pays both formal and intertextual homage to James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, referencing, as it does, the initials GM throughout in an allusion to the devilish Gil-Martin of Hogg’s text, as one amongst many intertextual cues.[[539]](#footnote-539) Indeed, most critics and reviewers of the novel pick up on these allusions as Robertson’s attempts to offer ‘a new perspective’ on Hogg’s text, if not that of Scottish literature as a whole, [[540]](#footnote-540) with Sarah Murchison in particular pointing to how both novels deal ‘with a universally human subject: that of the tension between certainty and uncertainty, doubt and faith.’[[541]](#footnote-541) *Gideon Mack* offers an honest homage to Hogg’s legacy, though introducing a transference of anxiety from that of the existence of evil to the seeming death of God, while suggesting a more humanist approach as a sincere response to these ontological anxieties through Mack’s own revelations post-devil: Mack confesses to his congregation at the burial of Catherine Craigie that he has met the Devil in the Black Jaws gorge, and in doing so attained a belief in ‘another world beyond ours, a world beyond death, the strangeness and wonderfulness of which we can only guess at.’[[542]](#footnote-542) The wondrous, strange land is neither heaven nor hell, the existence of which are denied by the Devil down in the Jaws as stereotypes to be ignored, and instead Mack has gained a belief in something undefinable beyond the ordinary realms of life. He expresses a sincere desire to spread this message, despite the inevitable claims of heresy applied to him, and a discovery of something beyond the realms of the everyday that can overcome the religious anxiety Mack feels following the apparent death of God.

Robertson’s text stands in stark contrast to another, particularly postmodern, Gothic novel which re-works Hogg’s *Sinner*- Emma Tennant’s 1978 novel *The Bad Sister*. Tennant’s text sees typical postmodern deconstruction applied to the novel, reversing gender roles in a move reminiscent of the works of Angela Carter, and creating a fragmentary text in which Gil-Martin’s influence becomes that of a patriarchal oppression, forcing specific gender roles upon the protagonist. A comparison across the two texts is suggestive not only of the shift away from such postmodern devices – Robertson eschews fragmentation from within the seemingly postmodern intertextual homage – but a move towards a sincerity of appreciation and conviction. The text, as Murchison argues, highlights the more emotional, human issues raised by an anxiety of faith, expressing sincerity through purpose and authorial intent that pays homage without irony, treating its subject not (as in *The Bad Sister*) as a series of tropes to be reworked entirely, deconstructed and reformed, but instead adhered to, or adapted, with due deference and appreciation.

Robertson posits Gideon Mack as something of a classical Romantic in his search for such feelings as religion once inspired – the strangeness and wonderfulness beyond death – from within a position of atheism, though locating these experiences not, for example, in the sublime landscapes of Thomas Cole, but instead in a particular acceptance of the death of God and the possibility of the supernatural. This re-introduction of Romantic sensibilities, too, finds expression as part of the metamodern moment, and the resurgence of New Romantic ideals, as recognised by Vermeulen and van den Akker, equally find expression and relevance in metamodern Gothic, as we will explore further now.

**3. The World Must be Romanticized**

Robert D. Hume, in the opening salvo of an academic argument with Robert Platzer, proposes the following: ‘That Gothicism is closely related to Romanticism is perfectly clear, but it is easier to state the fact than to prove it tidily and convincingly.’[[543]](#footnote-543) Truly, to trace the links between the Romantic and Gothic movements is a task far greater than I have sufficient space for here, and one taken up with greater accuracy by academics whose toes I have no desire to tread clumsily upon now. Suffice to say that Gothic tentacles reach into concepts of Romanticism from the very first and oft quoted text by Walpole who asserts, as MacAndew rightly highlights, in the preface to second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* that the textblends two identifiable forms of romance – the ancient and the modern.[[544]](#footnote-544) With their emphasis on emotion, the glorification of nature, criticism of the past, and artists who are often isolated (sometimes to the extent of madness), some significant links between the Gothic and Romanticism should by this stage in the twenty-first century be somewhat clear, though perhaps not as perfectly as Hume would have us believe. Rather than an entirely detailed look at the entire field of developments of Romanticism, my intention here is to signpost some of the continuations and adaptations of Romantic ideology within twenty-first century Gothic, before moving into a more in-depth analysis of one such paradigm in particular, namely that of the sublime.

**3.1 New Romanticism**

Romanticism, then, is being reappraised with regard to the relevance of its prescribed concepts in the post-postmodern age. Specifically, and as argued elsewhere,[[545]](#footnote-545) Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker identify one of the markers of these metamodern times as ‘an emergent neoromantic sensibility,’ by which (and in attempt to mitigate the ‘notoriously pluralistic’ nature of the phrase) they refer to a New Romanticism which centres on ‘the attempt to turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized,’ ‘oscillating between attempt and failure,’ or, additionally, a modernist enthusiasm and a postmodern irony.[[546]](#footnote-546) From this oscillation, they argue, core concepts of the Romantic emerge:

It is from this hesitation [between each pole of the oscillating swing] that the Romantic inclination toward the tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny stem, aesthetic categories lingering between projection and perception, form and the unformable, coherence and chaos, corruption and innocence.[[547]](#footnote-547)

Vermeulen and van den Akker’s recognition of the emergent New Romantic sensibility in culture can equally be seen in a myriad of examples of twenty-first century Gothic texts which express ideas of both classical (that is, pre-modernist) Romanticism and Vermeulen and van den Akker’s metamodern New Romanticism.

‘The child-worship of the anti-industrial romantics,’[[548]](#footnote-548) as a prime example, finds ample representation in contemporary Gothic texts, though here tempered by the contemporary Gothic’s obsession with loss; agreeing with Punter’s earlier sentiments on the subject, Steven Bruhm argues for ‘loss’ as central to contemporary Gothic:

What makes the contemporary Gothic particularly contemporary in both its themes and reception, however, is that these [Freudian] unconscious desires center on the problem of a lost object, the most overriding basis of *our* need for the Gothic and almost everything else. That loss is usually material (parents, money, property, freedom to move around, a lover, or family member), but the materiality of that loss always has a psychological and symbolic dimension to it.[[549]](#footnote-549)

In contemporary Gothic such a ‘loss’ finds representation in the apparent loss of the Romantic reverence of the childish often seen through the destruction of childhood innocence (which occurs with such regularity as to make Rousseau weep). In *Sycorax*, the young ‘child’[[550]](#footnote-550) Sukie Dobson, accused of witchcraft in the wake of her self-imposed social exile, knowledge of healing herbs, and ownership of a ‘sod of a black devil-dog,’[[551]](#footnote-551) is treated violently and abused; ‘[her brother] kneed her in the belly and punched her head until she was nearly unconscious’ during her arrest, followed by being stripped, shaved, repeatedly groped, and permanently maimed by her torturers in search of a confession of witchcraft. In Alice Thompson’s *Pharos*, Grace, a child born from the rape of a priestess, is ejected from her lighthouse home into the wild and harsh environments of the surrounding island, there to fend for herself or die.[[552]](#footnote-552) Grace’s mother, who died in childbirth, too forces additional hardships upon her daughter, communicating through her in a manner described as ‘the slavery of possession,’ and forcing Grace to forever become a host for her soul.[[553]](#footnote-553) In Sarah Pinborough’s *The Death House* children are removed from their families if found to carry the gene for an unknown disease, taken instead to a remote island from which there is no escape, there to live out their short lives in the knowledge that the grotesque ravages of the disease will soon take them. E.B. Hudspeth’s *The Resurrectionist*, too, showcases horrors done to children and their subsequent loss of innocence through Spencer Black’s own manipulation of his son’s body into a monstrous, timeless entity, leading to both Victor’s interment in a mental institute and predilection towards the torture of small animals later in life. Above all others, Andrew Michael Hurley’s *The Loney* perhaps reveals this lament over the loss of the Romantic ideal in the most overt terms, in which the ailments of the elderly are ritualistically transferred to an infant, which then becomes a grotesque: ‘The swaddling clothes had come apart, and although Leonard quickly stepped out of the [ritual performance area] to draw the sheets back over the child, he wasn’t quick enough. I saw the baby’s blind grey eyes. Its shrivelled yellow face. The grotesque swellings on its neck. The mangled claw of a hand.’[[554]](#footnote-554) Of course, beyond the loss of innocence of this baby, it is the shattering of the faith of the main character, nicknamed Tonto, and his brother, both of whom are children when they witness this act, that epitomises this loss. Rather than the repeated Christian rituals performed upon the narrator’s brother, Hanny, to cure his muteness, it is only through a pseudo-pagan evil – the aforementioned transference of ailments to a newborn child – that Hanny is cured. This loss is further compounded by Tonto’s discovery of Father Wilfred’s journal that reveals the reason for his suicide as a loss of faith in human decency and the existence of God:

And children themselves were changing. […] He had seen it in the youngsters he had caught one evening smashing gravestones with bricks they had knocked out of the churchyard wall, a kind of emptiness in their eyes. […] These weren’t just the jittery fears of an ageing priest, it was a genuine felling that all goodness and simple humility – for who on earth was humble nowadays? – had been excised from the hearts of men.[[555]](#footnote-555)

He had been wrong about everything.

God was missing. He had never been here. And if He had never been here, in this their special place, then He was nowhere at all.[[556]](#footnote-556)

The children have changed, God no longer exists (if ever He did), and in the face of these revelations the narrator is presented with the presence of the malign supernatural in the form of the transfer of disease from the elderly to the young, all of which contributes to the loss of innocence that leads to the necessity of psychiatric care repeatedly alluded to in the narrator’s later life.

Of course, this specific revisiting (and reversal) of the veneration of the child-like is far from the only Romantic ideal to be returned to in contemporary Gothic. Many twenty-first century Gothic texts witness the return of the ‘romantic supremacy of the creative urge,’[[557]](#footnote-557) often revisiting concepts of the isolated, emotionally vulnerable artist. According to Sue Zlosnik, in the later works of the reluctant Gothicist Patrick McGrath such Romantic isolated artists who sacrifice for their art too form a ‘central concern’[[558]](#footnote-558) (alluding to another Romantic ideal, specifically that of ‘knowledge to be gained through difficulty and pain.’)[[559]](#footnote-559) In terms of such works in the post-postmodern period both of the Rathbone children, Jack and Gin of *Port Mungo*, become isolated artists later in life, with Jack retreating to the eponymous port in the swamps of Honduras to concentrate on his art, while Gin too isolates herself, though in a more domestic environment. In his latest work, *The Wardrobe Mistress*, Vera Grice, a seemingly ‘fragile,’[[560]](#footnote-560) ‘hysterical,’ young woman ‘preoccupied with her work’[[561]](#footnote-561) as an actress, isolates herself in the loft of her marital home, there to better her craft for her upcoming performance. Such romantic artists – doomed, misunderstood, isolated, martyrs to their art – also find representation in Zampano of Danielewski’s *House of Leaves,* the enigmatic V.M. Straka of *S* by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams, and Stanislav Cordova of Marisha Pessl’s *Night Film,* to name a few amongst many.

In *Glister*, too, a convincing argument can be made for the protagonist as representative of ‘the romantic conception of the poet [who] ends in apotheosis,’[[562]](#footnote-562) as Leonard easily overlays with several attitudes attributed to that of the heroic, Romantic figure of Thomas Chatterton. A sensitive child, rejected by the cruel, vulgar world, yet who could be noble in the eyes of anyone able to understand him, with an uncomprehending family and who, ultimately, loses their life in a seemingly noble, emotionally charged manner akin to Goethe’s Werther – in Leonard’s case, doing so with aid of the Moth Man, but all in order to transition to a site in which forgiveness may be attempted.

Attempt is the central tenet of the metamodern new Romanticism, as described earlier, and contemporary Gothic literature too expresses not just classical Romantic ideals but explorations of attempt and failure that align with the metamodern ‘conscious decision to attempt, in spite of those alternatives’, untenableness.’[[563]](#footnote-563) Metamodernism, and by extension the new romantic structure of feeling by which it finds its clearest expression,[[564]](#footnote-564) ‘attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever a truth that it never expects to find.’[[565]](#footnote-565) Such descriptors find comfortable representation in the Gothic works of Mark Z Danielewski, who, in *House of Leaves, the Fifty Year Sword,* and, most recently, *The Familiar*, attempts to adapt modern horror media back into the more classical codex form. *House of Leaves* presents an attempt at the novelisation of the typical horror film, here translated through Zampano’s academic analysis,[[566]](#footnote-566) while *The Fifty-Year Sword* attempts to faithfully represent an oral ghost story in written form. Similarly, the multi-volume (on-going) project of *The Familiar* will attempt to re-create the structure of an American TV show, with each volume representing a single episode of a typical twenty-seven episode season arc. The success of such ventures is entirely up to debate and personal preference, though the challenges to such attempts are easily identified: *House of Leaves* experiments with the representation of a predominantly visual medium in a (relatively) non-visual format, *The Fifty-Year Sword* attempts a collage of voices, yet they appear less as a collage and more as a single broken voice from the very beginning – rather than a collage of disjointed voices coming together to echo Danielewski’s premise about the genesis of the ghost stories, the voices seem synched from the beginning as one narratorial and so problematise the collage. *The Familiar*, too, attempts to present a visual medium through cryptographic means, as in *House of Leaves*, though finds challenge in the infrequency of the releases of the volumes; which tv show, after all, releases one episode a year? Potential and observable issues are clear in Danielewski’s attempts, but the attempts are made nonetheless, regardless of their potential to fail in their main endeavour, a sentiment echoed by Bret Easton Ellis who, in *Lunar Park* writes that ‘defeat is good for art.’[[567]](#footnote-567) *Lunar Park* equally presents with an attempt in spite of itself, adhering to Vermeulen and van den Akker’s recognition of metamodern new romantic artists opting to ‘employ methods and materials’ that are not necessarily ‘suited to their mission or task’ in that the writing of the text was an attempt at catharsis for Ellis with regards to his lingering issues with his father:[[568]](#footnote-568)

I hadn't grieved for my father until I was midway through writing [*Lunar Park*], and he had died ten years previous to that. I had not grieved. I didn't grieve. […] I didn't expect to grieve […] there were a lot of unresolved things floating around in the air. Therapy didn't really help it, dealing with my anger and frustration, but I should have realized that writing a book was gonna do it. But I didn't. That was not a plan as part of writing this book, but ultimately, as I wrote it, I did. I grieved for us. Not only for my dad but for both of us. For the impossibility of our relationship.[[569]](#footnote-569)

While Ellis argues that through the process of writing he achieved a cathartic, therapeutic effect (‘at the end of this book I felt something lift off me, I felt something was resolved,’) the trappings of the Gothic through which the message is presented do somewhat muddy the results; While Ellis himself may have felt relief after writing, the fictional Ellis of the novel is constantly threatened by unresolved issues of fatherhood to the end of the text, with Bateman acting as a surrogate wayward son come to haunt him, and Robby disappearing at the end of the text never to return. All the while the fictional Ellis remains ‘arms held out and waiting’ for the return of his estranged son.[[570]](#footnote-570) Fiction, Christiane Blot-Labarrère writes, ‘delivers us from nothing, cures nothing, because by projecting one’s suffering, one freezes it and encloses it, one consecrates it rather than obliterating it,’[[571]](#footnote-571) a sentiment easily applied to *Lunar Park*’s resolution with regard to paternal anxiety – it is textually enclosed, problematised by the Gothic, and left relatively unresolved. Perhaps, then, not the best tool by which Ellis could have attempted to resolve his anxieties, considering the unresolved father-issues of the end of the text, yet an attempt made nonetheless.

While signposting these metamodern new romantic sentiments in the Gothic is, I hope, enlightening in and of itself, the one question that remains unanswered as of yet is ‘Why?’ Why do these Gothic texts continue in their presentation, and indeed foregrounding, of the new Romantic sentiment? A valid question, and one both posited and answered by the Editorial team of the editorial team of the flagship website of the metamodern, ‘Metamodernism.com’ founded and run by Vermeulen and van den Akker in 2009:

But why now? Why have artists taken to these Romantic sentiments all of a sudden? Our answer is that Romanticism provides them with the vocabulary and iconography to express a dissatisfaction about a present that is increasingly uninhabitable, and a desire for a future whose blueprint has yet to be drawn. New Romanticism expresses the transition from a place not yet left behind, to another space it has not yet entered, and probably never will. Ominous ruins as symbols for the cliffs of the past. Mysterious sects in situ the shores of the future.[[572]](#footnote-572)

New Romanticism, then, is a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the present that spurred the movement into the post-postmodern and which engendered the metamodern moment. The described displacement of the ‘cliffs,’ and ‘shores’ of the dissatisfied world with new ‘ominous ruins’ and ‘mysterious sects,’ not only aligning with and reinforcing our recognition of the Gothic sensibilities of our times, but also bringing to mind the sublime landscapes of the Romantic period: those great cliff faces and storm-warped seas which inspired terror and awe in the small, insignificant man to observe them.

The sublime, another indelible tie between Romanticism and Gothicism, continues to find representation in twenty-first century Gothic literature, though departing from the traditional Kantian or Burkean conceptions in an effort to further express the dissatisfaction about the present that seems increasingly ecologically and psychologically uninhabitable. The cliffs of the past are long-eroded, the shores of the future acid-rimed from burning oceans, where then can the sublime be located?[[573]](#footnote-573)

**3.2 Sublime Experimentation**

As part of the re-emergence of the Romantic (which is itself perhaps a reaction to the increasingly corporate, capitalist, and Sisyphean nature of contemporary Western life), metamodern Gothic too re-examines the Romantic notion of the sublime, though now moving beyond the traditional Burkean or Kantian definitions and reactions. In order to avoid a lengthy discussion of an historical notion covered in great detail by many critics, the philosophical notion of the sublime can be summarised as a reaction to a vast, incomprehensible stimuli (often the natural, the divine, or the terrifying) which challenges self-constructions within the witnessing subject in the two classical formulations mentioned previously: the Burkean and the Kantian. [[574]](#footnote-574) The difference between these two distinctions is effectively summarised by Helen Dennis as follows:

In Edmund Burke's account of the sublime the subject encounters the external cause of terror, the subjects' imagination “swells” and rises to meet it and feels a triumphant pleasure at having expanded the human facilities to join with it. In Kant, the sublime permits the imagination a merely futile attempt at this union before collapsing, and this failure produces not exaltation in the subject but obedient “Respect.” […] [After Burke] We cannot help but experience and perceive the sublime but the notion of the incomprehensible, the ungraspable, the infinitiudinal no longer shores up the human identity. Instead, it leads to yet more hyperbolic attempts to make the connection, to construct a metaphysical bridge over the abyss.[[575]](#footnote-575)

In a classical example, then, the subject witnesses a storm at sea and has a sublime reaction, a feeling of both terror and awe. In the Burkean, the subject witnesses the terror and raw power of the natural and momentarily feels insignificant in the face of it, yet ends with a pleasurable growth of the self, having safely confronted the stimuli and through the application of reason and logic, understood it. In the Kantian, the subject witness the horrors of the crashing waves, the power of the natural chaos and, unable to reconcile the insignificant self with such sights, fails in accepting the ability to tame such forces with reason, instead left only with a respect for the stimuli and a sense of internal collapse.[[576]](#footnote-576) A ship foundering at sea, a vast mountain range, an immense crashing waterfall, these are the classical sites of the Romantic sublime, where the subject is forced to consider the nature of the self in the face of the natural. Yet, as Vijay Mishra notes, the Gothic ‘tropes the sublime as the unthinkable, the unnameable, and the unspeakable:’[[577]](#footnote-577)

[The Gothic sublime] is not the vast oceans and tempests of Longinus or Kant, but the subterranean passages and the grotesque deformations contained in the dreamscapes of the Gothic imagination. The Gothic sublime is the sub, not as “up to” (as in *sub + limen*, the Latin etymology of the sublime), but rather as the *below*, the underneath, of the *limen*, of the limit of one’s perception.[[578]](#footnote-578)

Mishra’s description here foregrounds the use of the sublime in exploration of the self through engaging with that haunted attic (or perhaps cellar) of the Gothic, the unconscious. The sublime enables the self to be stripped back to expose the raw nerve of the unconscious self laid bare that the self may either swell or fail in the recognition, a ‘preoccupation’ ‘retained’ by the Gothic as it evolved, according to Maria Beville, into postmodernist forms that flaunted such issues of truth and subjectivity.[[579]](#footnote-579) Metamodern Gothic continues the long history of the Gothic sublime, though increasingly using it to attempt to move beyond notions of postmodern paradigms and explore potential alternatives to those sites of the sublime no longer able to elicit such an emotional response within the subject.[[580]](#footnote-580) One such text that explores the sublime as a site of bleached emotional charge is *Lunar Park*.

Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park,* while appearing as a text exhibiting a decidedly postmodern pastiche of autobiography,uses the sublime in order to critique just such postmodern practices. The story follows that of Bret Easton Ellis, a successful novelist, and his family life as he becomes haunted by the ghost of his father, the enigmatic doppelganger figure of Patrick Bateman, and an apparent demonic possession of his daughter’s pseudo-furby.

The sublime first manifests as something demonic, or at the very least evil-seeming, appearing to Bret in his back garden during a house party. Reflective of Lyotard’s thoughts on the postmodern sublime as that moment in which the subject’s ‘imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept,’[[581]](#footnote-581) Bret attempts to witness an emerging evil which has come to hound him, and subsequently fails in his attempt to represent what he witnesses rationally. His interpretation fractures into several Gothic, or horror, images in quick succession before settling on the indescribable: he witnesses a ‘shape’ that moves in a ‘spiderlike’ fashion, which ‘lurches ‘grotesquely’ after the dog, before a figure appears from the woods which flees across the field ‘grasping what appeared to be a pitchfork,’ and is accompanied by the sounds of locusts, the emergence of a headstone, large animal shapes and seemingly malevolent-minded wind.[[582]](#footnote-582) Bret, on first attempting to see these horrors in the woods, is unable to comprehend or represent what he is witnessing and falls into this series of fragmented images, absurdist in their reliance on Gothic cliché. His sublime reaction is thus a postmodern reaction as he falls back on repeated representations of terror that are, by this stage in the development of Gothic narratives, bleached of emotional resonance and seemingly hollow. The pitch-forked beast, here an ironic and outmoded signifier for the devil, comes to represent the major thematic concern of the text, namely that in relying on almost pop-culture depictions of horror, one drains it of impact and fails in representation; the purely postmodern can no longer aid us in our understanding of those stimuli which would effect a sublime reaction. Ellis here showcases the failures of the postmodern tradition, too foregrounding the type of tradition which Ellis’s son, Robby, seeks so desperately to escape from and which Ellis himself wishes transcendence from for Robby.[[583]](#footnote-583)

Beville states that the current ‘fascination with the Gothic is entirely narcissistic. It is to do with explorations of self and reality and the terror of the end, with issues that we cannot know or directly represent,’[[584]](#footnote-584) an argument *Lunar Park* manifests in its representation of the sublime in the form of Bret’s sublime narcissism. Traditionally, the sublime constructs an unnameable dread, a blockage that threatens subjectivity itself, and Bret’s narcissistic tendencies come to epitomise this blockage in the text, through which subjectivity finds threat.[[585]](#footnote-585) Bret’s narcissism is an internalized sublime; the dread is the loss of his subjectivity, his ego is the blockage that inspires terror and awe. Bret’s focus within the text remains purely on the maintenance of his self, whether lying about his relapse into substance abuse,[[586]](#footnote-586) visiting a psychiatrist to get help with regards to rekindling a relationship with Robby and never speaking of him once during the session,[[587]](#footnote-587) or his own belief that he is the centre of the haunting, not his family. These instances serve to establish Bret not only as the focus of the text, but as the subject around which all things revolve. His narcissism, in focusing the story only on his own life and issues, creates an environment which overrides the text, his sense of self becoming a sacred ideal not to be changed or tampered with. Any subsequent threat to that sense of self, such as the Patrick Bateman doppelganger that appears, the past sins of his life coming back to haunt him in the transformations of the house, or the warnings from his Father, produces a sublime effect. They create a simultaneous terror and awe within Bret, forcing moments that demand he expand his mind and self, only to be forcefully rejected in favour of his preservation of the original self to such an extent that he ‘rewrites’ segments of his life which challenge his self-conception:

I convinced myself I hadn’t seen [his dead father’s car]. I had done this many times before […] and I was adept at erasing reality. As a writer, it was easy for me to dream up the more viable scenario than the one that had actually played out […] I began realizing a new [series of events] with different scenes and a happier ending that didn’t leave me shivering in the guest room, alone and afraid.[[588]](#footnote-588)

In denying the events around him that may challenge his conceptions of reality, Bret is never able to achieve that moment of sublime self-expansion, leading each threat to become a constant experience of the negative sublime. The self is threatened and terror is created before Bret attempts to comprehend that he must somehow change and his sense of self must adapt, yet he frequently fails in this task instead lapsing into postmodern irony and a fragmented series of failed images.[[589]](#footnote-589) The techniques of the postmodern are a comfortable safe-space into which Bret retreats when his subjectivity, or rather his ego, is threatened, a safety net which enables the denial of the sublime. While such techniques save Bret from ontological uncertainty, they certainly do little to resolve the main thematic issues raised in the first place. A postmodern response to the sublime thus becomes a means by which to achieve a mitigation of potential problems, rather than a resolution. *Lunar Park* uses the sublime as part of a larger critique of postmodern ideology, positing the effect produced as no longer sustainable for our ideological experimentation in its failure to resolve Bret’s personal crises. *Lunar Park* poses questions of the postmodern, though the answer is merely a fragmented suggestion that something must change, that the generations to come will otherwise become lost to us. In *Lunar Park* the sublime is used to criticise the ideology of the postmodern and to suggest an emergent post-postmodern desire, yet such uses also suggest a certain failure of the postmodern to contain the sublime – or rather, that the sublime cannot be reconciled with the precepts of the postmodern; the postmodern permits no greater Truth into which the sense of self may expand when confronted with the sublime, and the only possible resolution is that of collapse.

Increasingly, the traditional forms of the sublime are represented as in some manner problematised, or under threat. *Lunar Park* demonstrates the inability of postmodern ideology to confront the sublime, yet the sublime continues to be represented as threatened too within metamodern Gothic literature, as observable in *S*, by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams.

*S* centres on the search for unifying meaning within fictional author’s V.M. Straka’s eclectic *oeuvre*. Inside the black sleeve of *S* the reader finds a heavily annotated copy of Straka’s *Ship of Theseus* filled with the conversations of Jen and Eric, an undergraduate student and a disgraced postgraduate student respectively, who annotate then pass the book back and forth in a collaborative attempt to decode the intent of the novel from within the marginalia. The mystery they reveal is that of a shadow society of writers known as ‘The S’ and their cult-war with ‘The New S,’ a group of corporate spies determined to stop the original ‘S’. The *Ship of Theseus* narrative itself, not the marginalia story that surrounds it, follows a man named only ‘S.’ as he is shanghaied onto a ship filled with grotesque muted sailors for unknown purposes. These sailors are presented as cultists devoted to their vessel and its unknown mission. Not only are the cultists devoted to their ship, but when the ship is destroyed in a cataclysm at sea, they are later seen to be resurrected along with it. Never explicitly named, this ghost ship of re-animated, undead denizens also adheres to the motif of the Gothic ruin, while transposing it into a mobile setting: it is a derelict place, anachronistic to the time period of the text, warped and torn with supernatural denizens and secrets kept within it. *S* presents the ship as a constantly degenerating and partially renewing construct, a ‘mad assemblage of misfit masts and decks and hatches and portholes and scuppers and bulwarks and bowsprit and wheel and rudder and sails […].’[[590]](#footnote-590) It is a ‘horrible thing,’[[591]](#footnote-591) as S. describes, with a crew devoted bodily to its maintenance. Each sailor takes shifts at a secret task beneath the deck and this is shown to physically ‘drain’ them.[[592]](#footnote-592) It is not a castle or an abbey, but a ship; able to travel across water and through time, and which inhabits a seemingly supernatural body of water as evidenced by the shock of the ship’s captain when Vévoda’s airplanes force entry into that space.[[593]](#footnote-593)

*S,* admittedly somewhat loosely, can be seen to follow certain genre tropes of the haunted house story, though challenging such conventions in a manner that provides the postmodern ironic pole on the metamodern oscillating pendulum. The site of the haunting is the ghost ship traveling within a supernatural, previously inaccessible ocean, but the actual haunted (or indeed haunt*ing*) figure is that of S. himself. Not only in the main narrative is S. haunted by repetitive figures representative of his past, his shameful decisions and his love interest Sola, but the tale of his life becomes that of a ghostly origin story in which he becomes, as the text states, ‘a man whose physical presence is intangible, but whose influence on the world – on its boundaries and its resources, its agonies and aspirations – is anything but.’[[594]](#footnote-594) S. (d)evolves into an avenging presence in the novel following his initiation into the cultish crew’s ranks. The chapter titled ‘Interlude’ follows his own forced lip-sewing ceremony, in which various agents of Vévoda, the book’s main antagonist, across different time periods are hunted down and assassinated.[[595]](#footnote-595) S. becomes a ghostly apparition, able to appear seemingly anywhere and kill his enemies, the sinister agents of antagonist Vévoda, leaving only a trademark crumpled page of ‘some madman’s tale’[[596]](#footnote-596) on the bodies as a calling card. He is a timeless figure that emerges from the archaic ship (the representation of the past) to disrupt the machinations of the present. In this way, *S* comes to reveal its true narrative, namely that of a ghost story but one filtered through postmodern metafictional experimentation. It is a ghost story told from the perspective of the ghost, not the victims who must discover the ghost’s origins and motive in order to end the haunting, as has become the archetypical monomyth of contemporary horror.

Dorst and Abrams explore the sublime in an attempt to move beyond both the postmodern inability to process such, and the more Classical unobtainability of Kant’s formulation. In *S,* the sublime chiefly manifests through the use of Vévoda’s new super-weapon and ‘the black, greasy substance’[[597]](#footnote-597) left in its wake. Vévoda, the main antagonist of the novel, rises to wealth and power through the creation of a super weapon that obliterates everything that it is deployed against. What it leaves behind, the by-product of the extreme destruction, is described mostly as a ‘substance.’ This is a black, ink-like tar that corrodes whatever it touches, yet is also able to be converted into a wine (albeit a flammable vintage that stains the tongue of any who drink it.) This weapon, dubbed a ‘Black Vine,’ is extracted from a specific source of the natural sublime. The primary ingredient is discovered to be mined from a range of mountains on a private island, mountains which are decapitated in the process, a ‘false mesa’ created on the summit with ‘an open pit’ dug into it, ‘with men and machines hacking out the hill’s innards.’[[598]](#footnote-598) It is this mining process which is seen to destroy, or to defame, the source of sublime inspiration, but the use of the Black Vine itself is specifically linked to the destruction of social myth and history.

[As a consequence of unleashing a Black Vine] individuals and communities are wiped clean. Traditions and histories, myths […] all gone.

To drink the black stuff is to drink what has been lost.

To hold it in a barrel, S. imagines, is to imprison the vital; to cellar that bottle is to warehouse the sublime.

To launch a Black Vine is to take all the churning fury of the lost and use it to render other people, in some other place, equally lost. [[599]](#footnote-599)

*S* suggests the idea of a metamodern sublime, or rather, a return to the grandeur of nature, the Romantic sublime and the insignificance it inspires, but with a knowledge that it has been, or is in the process of being, destroyed. This is an eco-conscious sublime, perhaps, or a neo-romantic sublime that links to that metamodern structure of feeling which finds its ‘clearest expression in an emergent neo-romantic sensibility.’[[600]](#footnote-600)

As Vermeulen and van den Akker state, metamodern artists, despite any differences in genre or mode, each employ ‘tropes of mysticism, estrangement, and alienation to signify potential alternatives’ and make a ‘conscious decision to attempt, in spite of those alternatives’, ‘untenableness.’[[601]](#footnote-601) It is this alternative that these two texts search for, and which *S* finds suggestions of through the depiction of Vévoda’s ‘black stuff.’ It causes fear, it forces those who witness it to lose their countries, their stories, to become estranged and alienated and creates an impression of awe upon those who are witness to its effects. In an environment of shrinking, or destroyed, natural sublime elements, where the ‘ecosystem is severely disrupted,’[[602]](#footnote-602) *S* asks if we must turn to this as a new source of that sublime feeling; should we look to the aftermath of the destruction itself, the black stuff left in the wake of a black vine, to experience this sublime feeling? Can we look to the human destruction of the sublime and historical and still receive the same experience as the sublime elements that have been destroyed? *S* explores this idea of an eco-concerned sublime, a humanized sublime, setting this within the Gothic context that previously supported such ideological questioning.

While *Lunar Park* problematises the sublime within the postmodern, and *S* suggests the destruction of the traditional sites of the sublime in the metamodern, Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* attempts to discover new sites of the sublime in the post-postmodern metamodern era. Problematising the timeline of the metamodern somewhat (published, as it was, in 2000, one year before the generally agreed-upon end of the true postmodern), *House of Leaves* conforms to certain patterns of the metamodern while also experimenting with the sublime. Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*[[603]](#footnote-603)(simply put and heavily reduced) follows the nested story of the Navidson family as they move into a new home on Ash Tree Lane. Soon after, Will Navidson discovers a series of impossible, endless, labyrinthine hallways somehow contained within the house, and the plot then follows his attempts to catalogue and explore the hallways. In *House of Leaves*,the sublime is experienced through Navidson’s confrontation with these hallways, the ‘strange passageway[s]’[[604]](#footnote-604) or ‘narrow black hallway[s],’[[605]](#footnote-605) filled with an ‘invariant […] oily darkness’ which disorientates and confuses the explorer, denying all categorisation.[[606]](#footnote-606) Danielewski uses this space to explore an idea of the Kantian, or negative, sublime, subverted by an adherence to the manmade as catalyst as opposed to the supremely natural. The hallways are a space that replicate the hallways of traditional ‘built’ houses, although those twisting and shifting halls could have never have been so constructed. The dark corridors present an uncanny sublime by creating a space which is both familiar and unfamiliarly autonomous, yet which still brings the feelings of terror and awe to the fore. The hallways ‘growl,’[[607]](#footnote-607) shift, and are seen to actively pursue the explorers, but are always still presented as hallways, inanimate at times, but somewhat familiar throughout.[[608]](#footnote-608) Mishra’s previous description of Gothic as troping the sublime as the ‘unthinkable, the unnameable, and the unspeakable’,[[609]](#footnote-609) can be applied to the unmappable hallways, which begin to present as somewhat uncanny; they are simultaneously autonomous and lifeless, familiar and unfamiliar, *heimlich* and *unheimlich* – uncanny. Here Danielewski presents these seemingly familiar halls as unfamiliar and cold, as existing where they cannot possibly exist,[[610]](#footnote-610) often transforming into an enormity of scale which dwarfs Navidson (the ‘Great Hall’ discovered in the house purportedly has a height of ‘at least five hundred feet’).[[611]](#footnote-611) He, and the other explorers, express a sense of insignificance before the halls, but also the desire to conquer, to explore, to understand, and in so doing, gain transcendence. As Zampanò surmises, ‘only knowledge illuminates that bottomless place’.[[612]](#footnote-612) They wish to gain something conclusive by conquering this uncanny sublime, desperately searching for a return to a Burkean sublime in which the mind is expanded by the experience, the self is improved, yet inevitably failing and experiencing a fracturing of the self – a move evidenced in the fragmentation of the text across the surface of the pages.[[613]](#footnote-613) Indeed, the challenging typography of the text could be said to also reflect Zampanò’s attempts to record the experience of the halls, only for the blind critic to fail in this attempt and lapse into delivering a fractured representation of the narrative as his ‘discourse itself breaks down’, his ‘reason struggl[ing] with imagination for ascendency: what can be grasped is not equivalent to what is meaningful.’[[614]](#footnote-614)

Whether Navidson or in fact the reader, the explorers of *House of Leaves* obsessively return time and again to the halls, seeking to tame, to understand, while knowing that there is never anything new to be discovered in that ‘absurd Rorschach test’ of a place.[[615]](#footnote-615) Within that labyrinth progress is impossible. It is a metamodern duality and multiplicity of polar desires that Danielewski offers, instead. It constitutes a yearning for progress, for movement, for understanding and the desire to keep experiencing that sublime, though from within an environment that never escapes from its essentially man-made aesthetic. The reader oscillates in their desire for the sublime, swinging between unknowing and understanding, awe and fear, desire and terror. *House of Leaves* demonstrates a metamodern yearning to regain, experience, or even *find* that feeling of the sublime within a human-made Gothic environment which eschews the natural.[[616]](#footnote-616)

*Lunar Park* suggests that the sublime cannot function within a postmodern environment, much to the detriment of those involved, and *S* foregrounds a need for new sites of sublime in the wake of ecological threat, while *House of Leaves* attempts to find a new way in which to discover the sublime, namely perhaps in the warped workings of the human-made. Twenty-first century Gothic literature, it seems, seeks to explore new means of obtaining a sublime reaction in a manner that speaks to Metamodern urge for progress beyond the postmodern nihilism and depthlessness, positing the sublime as a means by which a certain depthiness or simply something more than the postmodern can be possibly experienced, though always through an anxious awareness that such sites which could ellicit a sublime reaction are under threat. As such, an increasing amount of such texts attempt to explore the ways in which a post-romantic sublime may be forced from other, alternate sources – such as the sublime explored in *S* which attempts to position the destruction wrought by human industrial desires as that which can inspire just such a feeling. Finally, and briefly, in *Glister* we again see such experimentations with the sublime in the natural environs of Homeland that have become warped and mutated by the chemical factory that dominates the town’s financial and personal history:

The trees [near the edge of town], though still live, were strangely black, a black that didn’t look like charring or the result of drought, but rather suggested that the trees were veined with a dark, poisoned sap, black, but with a trace of livid green in the essence of it, a green that was bitter and primordial, like wormwood, or gall.[[617]](#footnote-617)

Morrison’s description of the trees of the ‘poison wood’ demonstrates, in a manner reminiscent of Vévoda’s Black Stuff in *S*, the defamation and destruction of the natural, here reduced to vividly sickly trees and (later in the text) descriptions of ‘mooncalfs,’[[618]](#footnote-618) ‘anonymous offal,’[[619]](#footnote-619) and the other warped creatures mutated and affected by the plant long after it has ceased to function. In place of these natural triggers, the sublime is instead experienced by Morrison as he discovers the body of the first of the Moth Man’s victims, Mark Wilkinson, an experience which forces Morrison to lose a sense of self and purpose, forgetting momentarily ‘who he was.’[[620]](#footnote-620) As Morrison himself attests, ‘he came to a total standstill in his mind and in his nerves and in his blood, suddenly drained of energy and will, captivated by the horror and, at the same time – and this was what transfixed him – by the sense that there was some meaning in all this.’[[621]](#footnote-621) The structure produced by the arrangement of the boy’s body produces an observable terror in Morrison, alongside something approaching awe as he attempts to decipher the scene. Ultimately, though, Morrison’s sense of self fails to swell in confrontation with this scene and he becomes intimately aware of the shortcomings of his sense of identity:

And it was then that John Morrison understood, with a sudden and brutal clarity, that he wasn’t a real policeman after all […] He could already feel some brittle structure crumbling in his mind and, as he stood staring at this sacrificed child, everything he had hoped for […] collapsed like a bad wedding cake. […] it was this chain of thought, this sense he had of something collapsing in his mind that wrong-footed him. […] At that moment, in his confusion and terror and the horrible emptiness of it all, what he had done seemed not so much the best as the *only* thing to do, his one possible escape. He has just realised that he was too tender a soul, too soft a man to see through the work he had chosen.[[622]](#footnote-622)

Morrison’s reaction to the terrors of humanity’s actions is that of the sublime, in which human barbarity causes a terror and awe which threatens identity, whether the self is able to swell and encompass the terror or, as Morrison does, break entirely in confrontation with it and be forced to recognise one’s own self-illusions, as Mishra states:

The Gothic sublime, is in many ways the voice from the crypt that questions the power of reason […] and destabilizes the centrality of the go in Kant’s formulation. It is the voice that wishes to write the narrative of the gap, the infinitesimal lapse, in which reason for the moment gives way to chaos as mind embraces the full terror of the sublime. The Gothic narrative is to be located at that indeterminate moment of the near-abyss where the subject says, I am my own abyss, and is faced with a horrifying image of its own lack of totality. Where the romantic version of this narrative re-establishes a totality as the ego under the security of reason embraces the magnificence of the storm or holocaust, the Gothic subject has none of the capacities of the supremely confident, overpowering (though often insecure) Romantic Ego.[[623]](#footnote-623)

The sublime aids an understanding of the self, whether through acceptance or failure, growth or collapse.[[624]](#footnote-624) Mishra’s arguments, formed at the tail end of the postmodern era, are as valid to this particular philosophical trope now as when written, the abyss of the self still an evident trope of the Gothic ‘hero’ in the metamodern exemplars of the genre: Navidson’s inability to conquer his halls; Ellis’s over-riding narcissism; Morrison’s collapse in recognition of his too-gentle soul; S.’s movement into the ghost that avenges the sublime; Father Bernard’s recognition of the lack of God in *The Loney*. Contemporary Gothic attempts an exploration of the sublime that continues to present the subject with the abyss of the self, though now coupled with the simultaneous search for new stimuli able to act as a catalyst for the sublime given the cultural and ecological denial of such elements as could elicit the sublime reaction.[[625]](#footnote-625) The metamodern sublime is the search for the artefacts able to trigger the effects that may expand or expunge the self, a new sublime experimentation attempting to find the sources in a world in which these are increasingly fleeting, regardless of the resolution to such an encounter.

**4. Conclusion[[626]](#footnote-626)**

The Gothic, as the genre that has ‘always been a barometer of the anxieties plaguing a certain culture at a particular moment in history,’[[627]](#footnote-627) is a fundamentally apt mode for metamodern experimentation, and for specifically exploring post-postmodernity. Paternal anxiety, a well-founded Gothic concern, becomes a prescient metaphoric site for the struggle for freedom from the ‘paternal’ postmodern impulse, while the found manuscript trope allows a metafictional self-analysis that establishes the Gothic motif of the text, while suggesting a need for change. The genre contains an inherent pastiche and irony, providing room for the postmodern pole, yet through ideas of enlightenment via the sublime, which I have focused on here, it can suggest a modern enthusiasm as the counter swing. And, of course, a metamodern sincerity is seemingly inherent within the Gothic as a form: Even though it is just a mad tale about an impossible tentacle-dragon god, we still feel fear when it rams the ship. Even though we always know he was the heir to the castle, we rejoice when he reclaims his birth-right. Even though the sublime has been defamed, destroyed or devalued, we still yearn for that terror and awe, for that pain and pleasure that can propel us towards enlightenment. It is through the Gothic that we, as readers, can explore our yearning and desire for movement, swinging in that pit upon that metamodern pendulum. Each metamodern Gothic text oscillates between postmodern ironic deconstruction and modern enthusiasm for reason and utopian ideals, between the sublime and the subpar, between hope and despair, sincerity and cynicism, never lingering at either, before being dragged back by the haunting presence of the other.

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CHAPTER IV – SOUTHWARD VS SOUTHWARD

So we come at last to the gem amongst these undiscovered papers – Southward’s earliest (unpublished) work on metafiction. This critic need not remind his reader of the importance and malign effects of the genre over the past century, forced, as it was, to be the only form of creative production publishable under the Southwardian regime. Nevertheless, it should prove of great interest to scholars that Southward here proposes a categorical separation and dissection of his beloved form, suggesting here two distinct sub-genres of metafiction: The Romantic and the Burlesque, the latter of which we have come to accept as the only acceptable method of publication despite, as will be shown, Southward’s own desire to seemingly *abandon this mode entirely!*

A clear pet project of Southward, this chapter does provide an important pre-history of metafiction, an endeavour never seen until this point, though with Southward’s own bias clear throughout. A far from comprehensive list, but an interesting one nonetheless, I’m sure scholars will agree. The chapter begins with a discussion of the now nefarious mode, before a lengthy history (Southward’s so-called *Dark History*) of the form up until the early 21st century and an analysis of certain contemporary examples of metafictional literature.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

**THE DARK HISTORY OF THE NOVEL; AN EXPLORATION OF THE METAFICTIONAL IMPERATIVE IN LITERATURE[[628]](#footnote-628)**

**1. Metafictional Post-Postmodern Post-Mortem**

*Metafiction, for its time, was nothing more than a poignant hybrid of its own theoretical foe, realism: if realism called it like it saw it, metafiction simply called it as it saw itself seeing itself see it.*

*-David Foster Wallace-[[629]](#footnote-629)*

*He wants to lock me into this violence, to ensure I will never talk. I can feel the locks, clicking shut. I get up […] hoping for an unseen plot twist to get me out of here.*

*-David Mitchell-[[630]](#footnote-630)*

Metafiction, the ‘theory and practice of self-conscious fiction,’[[631]](#footnote-631) is currently undergoing something of a slow and drawn out-death. Certainly, there has been no significant criticism on the topic since the beginning of the 1990s, despite the overwhelming prevalence of metafictional practices evident in such current literary productions as *S, Gould’s Book of Fish, The Fifty-Year Sword, Bats of the Republic,* and *Horrorstör* (among myriad others). How to properly explain this decline in critical analysis, then, especially with the current explosion of awareness of the term?[[632]](#footnote-632) In order to address this, we shall here examine metafiction as a whole, exploring the dark hidden history of the novel, in order to establish a critical background of the critiquing form before examining post-postmodern examples of the genre. The aim here is not to give a complete and exhaustive analysis of every text and ideological development in this long-standing tradition, with a canon that can be said to reach back to *The Canterbury Tales*. For that, we have our Patricia Waugh and Mark Currie. Rather, here shall be provided an over-arching, more general context of the form and its developments as a basis and precursor to the discussion of contemporary developments in a largely disregarded field: a eulogy to the seemingly departed mode, or, a post-postmodern post-mortem, if you will. First though, it would be prudent to properly outline metafiction.

According to Wallace, and as quoted in the epigraph to this essay , metafiction was a branch of deconstructive anti-realist theory with no greater goal than the ridicule of the realist mode in fiction. A damning account of the apparently ‘high-cultural postmodern genre,’[[633]](#footnote-633) by Wallace here, but by no means a solitary one. Metafiction is linked to both the ‘crisis,’ and the ‘death’ of the novel, and as Patricia Waugh highlights, critics have tended to see metafictional literary behaviour as ‘a form of self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of any art form or genre.’[[634]](#footnote-634) Metafiction, the apparent nemesis of realism, receives this disdain as a paranoid response to the claims of writers and critics for whom the rejection of realism forms the first of a series of stepping stones on the path to the rejection of the novel form entirely.[[635]](#footnote-635) Metafiction seems the apparent end of all novelistic creation as we know it. Naturally, then, it is something to be abhorred, yet the questions remain[[636]](#footnote-636) , what precisely constitutes metafiction and why should these techniques elicit such a response, or, as Waugh herself puts it in the chapter title to her excellent analysis of the form, ‘What is metafiction and why are they saying such awful things about it?’

Metafiction, as defined by the aforementioned Waugh, constitutes ‘fiction 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.’[[637]](#footnote-637) Metafiction is, then, a complex composite fictional mode comprised of a multitude of fictional techniques; a swiss-army knife of deconstructive practices employed specifically in order to ‘dramatise the boundary between fiction and criticism,’ and explicitly exhibit the ‘communication between author and reader.’[[638]](#footnote-638) Whether mired in repeated reference to previous literary genres, subverting the core conventions of said genres in an attempt to displace the reader, or borrowing thematic and structural principles from other narrative forms, metafiction strives to emphasise the artificial, constructed nature of narrative or form.[[639]](#footnote-639) In such ways, the metafictional novel draws the critical reception of the text into a more ‘meta-level of attention’[[640]](#footnote-640) with regard to recognition of the conventions, practices, and flaws of potentially no longer ideologically relevant generic conventions. Common metafictional conventions involve the breaking of the fourth wall, for want of a better metaphor, in which the text self-consciously forces the reader to recognise the constructed, or artefactual, nature of the object being engaged with. Techniques which produce this effect vary greatly, but a few more frequent examples are characters knowingly referring to their status as characters, as Christie Malry’s mother does in *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry*, alluding to the conventions of the novel, as the main character of David Mitchell’s *Number9Dream* can be seen to do in the quote preceding this essay, or playing with the paratextual and print conventions of the novel form, such as in *House of Leaves, Bats of the Republic,* or indeed *Willie Master’s Lonesome Wife*, by William H. Gass, whose importance to the field of metafiction will become apparent in due course. Self-aware characters, novels which breach the rules of the novel, parody of genre conventions, direct authorial intervention, and direct reader engagement, these are all metafictional devices employed throughout the mode’s lengthy history – a history which I wish to elaborate upon now.[[641]](#footnote-641)

**2. The Dark History of the Novel[[642]](#footnote-642)**

**2.1 Pre-Modern Metafiction**

The techniques of metafiction have a retroactive history that can be seen to expand backwards to some of the earliest examples of fiction from the UK, Europe, and America. Of course, to retroactively apply the term ‘metafiction’ to such texts is often problematic – we may interpret certain works as ontologically destabilising, but to suggest such as definitive authorial intent is somewhat presumptive on the part of the critic. Still, such examples do highlight the extended history of this form and so constitute an important insight into this dark, overlooked history of literature.

It seems rather apropos to begin this genesis of the metafictional mode with Genesis itself, that is to say, by signposting the Judeo-Christian Bible as the first appearance of, at the very least, metafictional *devices* if not intent, as argued by Stephen Prickett and Robert Barnes:

[...] the Bible is 'metafictional.' That is, it is a book about other books. The text makes constant and repeated reference to events or sayings in previous books, either to confirm their significance, or to reinterpret them as part of a new pattern.[[643]](#footnote-643)

By referencing sections of itself, the Bible provides, in a very mild manner, our first metafictional inkling in a move that would later be taken up and adapted as the self-intertextuality of such latter metafictional offerings as *Willie Master’s Lonesome Wife* and *Slaughterhouse Five.* Much later, we find another appearance of a metafictional device in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* (c.1320), which provides an early instance of the trope of the author within the text, being as it is written, narrated by, and starring Dante himself. Moving further forward in time again, 1484 saw the publication of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, and once more an artistic creation including the author-as-narrator figure. Chaucer’s text, too, foregrounds issues of authorial intent, as each of the pilgrim’s tales famously reflects on their own experiences and desires as authors. Next, chronologically, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, c.1599, offers an early example of the play-within-a-play trope of later metafictions which often revel in mise-en-abyme and nested narrative play (as also later seen in such texts as *The Arabian Nights.*)[[644]](#footnote-644)

In 1605, though, the metafictional canon finds its first definitive literary production in Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote,* which openly criticised the romance genre from within, highlighting the absurdity and naïve idealism of the genre’s literary conventions in a manner that spawned its own descriptor applicable to the tale - quixotic. Moving ever forward to 1759, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne forms our second canonically, that is to say widely accepted as such, metafictional text, becoming, as Marie Stoie points out, at the same time an autobiography and a novel about writing a novel:

The conception of Tristram is the conception of the book, and by mentioning the creation of the world and the myth of Adam, Tristram indeed confronts us with the creation of a world: the creation of Tristram leads to the creation by Tristram of “Tristram Shandy.”[[645]](#footnote-645)

Of course, the metafictional device most significant to this history is that of the infamous ‘black page,’ a page filled with a block of black ink rather than text. This, alongside certain marbled pages (which would otherwise appear only within the inner covers), serves to foreground the artificiality of the reading experience, forcing the reader away from the narrative and back into a meta-analytical level in which they must confront the non-standard textual presentation. The marbled page is usually taken to stand for the uniqueness of each reading experience, as the page would be different in each printing, and – as Tristram himself intones – is as an impenetrable a symbol as the black one, demonstrating that the world ‘with all its sagacity,’ still cannot comprehend or represent death.[[646]](#footnote-646) This is a thematic concern which we will return to later in this history.[[647]](#footnote-647)

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’ *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) and Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) both play with conventions of the novel, with the former produced entirely in letters while the latter forms a series of nested narratives and stories, yet it is to James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) which we next turn to in our exploration of the metafictional, rather than merely self-conscious, past. Here, Hogg problematises the production of texts through the discrepancy between the Editor of a tale and the Sinner’s tale itself, forming a specific friction between accounts. By involving Hogg himself in the editor’s narrative, explicitly signposting the textual nature of the artefact through the editor’s discussion of finding and naming it, and intertextually including a section of a separately printed article by Hogg, the text forms a convincingly proto-postmodern metafictional novel.

The next text significant to our metafictional history to appear in this period is that of Paul Féval’s *Vampire City* (1864), whichpresents as an early (if not the earliest) example of what would later be categorized by Linda Hutcheon as historiographic metafiction. *Vampire City* fictionalises the life of Ann Radcliffe, the famous Gothic novelist, inventing a fantastical tale in which Radcliffe serves as the primary protagonist and vampire hunter. While somewhat absurd a concept, the text is notable in its depiction of a factual historical figure and the attempt to fictionalise their life, the main premise of the historiographic metafictions of the latter centuries.

Finally, in this particular section, 1891 saw the publication of *The Story of the Glittering Plain or The Land of Living Men* by William Morris, a text which, despite a distinct lack of critical attention[[648]](#footnote-648), also deserves recognition as an example proto-postmodern literature via the conjunction of both supernatural and fantasy elements in a typical postmodern genre-blending move. More pertinent to this timeline, however, the text itself treats the typical chivalric romance genre in a metafictional manner, with the hero’s inevitably kidnapped spouse named only as The Hostage and taken to The Isle of Ransom where she awaits rescue. *The Story of the Glittering Plain* signals the tropes of its own genre in a move that would later become an archetypical technique of the metafictional, seen in the novels of Auster, Ellis, and Pynchon, to come in the modern and postmodern eras that followed.

**2.2 Into Postmodern Metafiction: The Mode Recognised.**

While the modernist period tended to eschew metafictional practice, as modernism entered ‘that moment, from 1913 to the mid-1970s, when [it] began its retreat,’[[649]](#footnote-649) it did see the production of the heralded supreme novel of the modernist movement – Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Enough, at this point in literary history, has been written about the text that there is little need to elaborate much upon it, though it should be noted that Joyce’s text does engage in metafictional play, achieving a subversion of the then-traditional realist narrative techniques, though it too evidences conventional play in terms of inclusion of its myriad forms (prose, poetry, script, newspaper etc).[[650]](#footnote-650) Less critically acclaimed, though no less vital, Miguel de Unamuno’s 1914 text *Niebla* (published in English as *The Mist*) follows Augusto who, after being spurned by his wife-to-be, seeks out Unamuno himself, who reveals that he, Augusto, is a fictional character in a novel written by Unamuno. This instance of a character’s recognition of their status as fictional breaks the standard realist concord between text and reader, creating a metaleptic rift between narratological levels that reminds the reader of their status as reader of a fictional construct; to paraphrase Julie Levinson, the creative process itself becomes the subject of this latter part of *The Mist*, presenting an absorbing, realist, tale in the form of Augusto’s romantic life, before then challenging the validity of our absorption in fictional constructs via the confrontation with the fictional/artefact nature of the representation.[[651]](#footnote-651) H.P Lovecraft’s 1925 short story ‘The Unnamable’ too plays with authorial representation, though doing so in order to seemingly foreground Lovecraft’s own beliefs with regard to his particular literary productions:

a mind can find its greatest pleasure in escapes from the daily treadmill, and in original and dramatic recombinations of images usually thrown by habit and fatigue into the hackneyed patterns of actual existence […][[652]](#footnote-652)

The text describes two friends, the narrator Carter and his friend Joel Manton and their experiences with the uncanny, though the narrator comes across as a clear stand-in for Lovecraft himself, as the following extract shows:

Besides, [Manton] added, my constant talk about “unnamable” and “unmentionable” things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author. I was too fond of ending my stories with sights or sounds which paralysed my heroes’ faculties and left them without courage, words, or associations to tell what they had experienced. […] Especially did he object to my preoccupation with the mystical and the unexplained. […] how can it be absurd to suppose that deserted houses are full of queer sentient things, or that old graveyards teem with the terrible, unbodied intelligence of generations? And since spirit, in order to cause all the manifestations attributed to it, cannot be limited by any of the laws of matter; why is it extravagant to imagine psychically living dead things in shapes—or absences of shapes—which must for human spectators be utterly and appallingly “unnamable”?[[653]](#footnote-653)

A clear link between Carter’s own works and those of Lovecraft himself appears,[[654]](#footnote-654) the subsequent tale soon devolving into a similarly Lovecraftian story of ‘shapes of horror beyond all memory,’ ‘ultimate abomination[s],’ and ‘threshing’ unseen entities. Rather than question the validity of literary productions, as the conversation between Augusto and Unamuno does, Lovecraft places himself within his story here to enforce his literary ambitions in writing as a means of escaping the ‘daily treadmill’ through fantastic and terrifying literature – through confrontation with the Unnameable. Joyce again appears at this juncture, with *Finnegans Wake* (1939) subverting language expectation through the creation of a seemingly nonsensical, though in actuality highly referential, language that forces the reader into a constant cycle of repeated reading evocative of the texts own cyclical thematic treatment of repeating histories. Published the same year, and replicating the techniques of Unamuno somewhat, Flann O’Brien’s (or, Brian O’Nolan’s) *At Swim-Two-Birds* too fictionalises an interaction between characters and author to the extent that Jorge Luis Borges described the text as a ‘verbal labyrinth,’[[655]](#footnote-655) though in O’Brien’s text the interactions are more two-sided, rather than Unamuno’s clear argument, with characters and apparent author interacting as their respective frames begin to blur. 1939 also saw the first publication of Jorge Luis Borges’s ‘Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote,’ which parodies academic textual analysis and review in a manner that raises questions of authorship and appropriation as Menard, the critic, comes to recreate Cervantes’ text. Such blurring between the genres of fiction and criticism reaches both backwards and forwards within the timeline, appropriating elements of Hogg’s *Sinner* in the internalisation of analysis and anticipating Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* and Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, respectively. In 1956 William Golding, of *Lord of the Flies* fame, published *Pincher Martin*, a text which attempts to represent insanity and sanity in equal measure and, in doing so, metafictionally deconstructs the realist novel’s tropes of linear narrative, reliable narrator, clarity of action and typical character development. A tall order, but one gracefully achieved through Martin’s apparent death at the beginning of the novel, thus enabling a more spiritual conversation to arise as Martin’s temporarily ‘saved’ spirit reminisces on the sins of his past life while forcing a criticism of typically realist modes in their inability to represent insanity or death, akin to Sterne’s black page. The non-linear nature of the narrative is a feature shared with *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs (1959), a notorious text which seemingly too abandons plot and ‘coherent characterization,’ thus laying bare the literary devices of the traditional novel.[[656]](#footnote-656)

As our history enters the 1960s, and the postmodern moment proper, metafictional experimentation and techniques reach their peak creative output, with the next three decades seeing the most recurrent production of metafictional novels of any previous time period. The first text to emerge in this period, and a definitive addition to the metafictional canon, is that of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), which presents initially as a scholarly publication of the final poem of fictional poet – John Shade – composed by his self-appointed editor Charles Kinbote. The text predominantly features Kinbote’s own notes and analysis of the poem, however, and structurally subverts the traditional novel by presenting the ‘plot’ within the seeming analysis and footnotes to the poem. Spike Milligan’s *Puckoon*, published a year after *Pale Fire,* forces the reader to confront the fictional nature of the character, à la Unamuno, with Dan Milligan, the main character of the tale, speaking directly to the author at several points in the novel, yet the next major literary work of metafiction would not come until 1966 with the publication of Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, which draws ‘a metafictional portrait of human life as textually trapped in a universe where the categories imposed by those traditional paradigms start crumbling down.’[[657]](#footnote-657) The text, as Borys Róg rightly highlights, can be read as a parody and metafictional deconstruction of the detective genre, in which protagonist Oedipa Maas must resolve the case of ‘lot 49,’ and the intentions of the Trystero corporation, yet never succeeds in this endeavour:

Oedipa steps into the auction house to finally resolve the case of the “lot 49” and the true face of Trystero, but we do not get the answer – the novel ends before the auction starts. At this highest point of uncertainty and chaos, which was gradually growing throughout the plot, Pynchon exposes the way in which mechanisms borrowed from the structure of detective fiction can be manipulated. […] Even if detective fiction may have different, more or less fluctuating structures and methods of introducing complexities, they almost always end in a solution of the mystery. Such a thing does not occur in [*The*] *Crying of Lot 49*, where mystery is the principal and triumphant element in the story.[[658]](#footnote-658)

Following this initial flourishing of the metafictional, in part inspired by the deconstructive and parodic techniques of the growing postmodern ideology, the first works of metafictional literary analysis begin to emerge, arguably the first of which is John Barth’s ‘The Literature of Exhaustion,’ published in 1967. Barth refers to the ‘used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities’[[659]](#footnote-659) in fiction, pointing specifically to Borges’s *Pierre Menard* as an example of a new form of fiction attempting to deal with the ‘the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature,’[[660]](#footnote-660) by confronting the ‘intellectual dead-end’[[661]](#footnote-661) of current literary production which, by Barth’s estimation of the period, ‘has by this hour of the world just about shot its bolt.’[[662]](#footnote-662) Barth text describes novelists playing with the conventions of literature in an attempt to invigorate a form which has seemingly become stagnated, literature which actively rebels against the exhaustion of current literary production, through the creation of ‘novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author,’[[663]](#footnote-663) and serves as one of the first recognitions of the metafictional impulse within contemporary writing..

While ‘the literature of exhaustion,’ is Barth’s ‘chic’ title for the literature he attempts to describe, 1967 also saw another critical attempt to define and delineate this ‘new’ form of literature, with Robert Scholes offering up the nomenclature of ‘fabulations’ as the ideal term. *The Fabulators* by Scholes is an earnest enough attempt at the categorization of metafictional practice, though he describes the term as ‘a gimmick, an attention-getter,’ but, rightly, ‘an honest attempt to find a word for something that needs one’:[[664]](#footnote-664)

Fabulation, then, means a return to a more verbal kind of fiction. It also means a return to a more fictional kind. By this I mean a less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative: more shapely, more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things. I am not proposing here an airy program for the future of fiction. I am talking about what is going on all around us.[[665]](#footnote-665)

Scholes’ ‘fabulators’ are those who parody the realist modes in a manner that brings to the fore questions of the nature of ideas and ideals, springing from ‘the collision between the philosophical and mythic perspectives on the meaning and value of existence, with their opposed dogmas of struggle and acquiescence.’[[666]](#footnote-666) Interestingly, while Barth picks up on the need for metafictional modes as a reaction to society’s perceived wish to avoid stagnation of form, Scholes highlights the more emotional, or philosophical, side to such experimentations, a dichotomy that will return time and again in the analysis of the metafictional: formal experimentation against humanist emotional expression.

The following year, 1968, William H. Gass had both the short story collection *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* and *Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife* published, the latter of which pushed the boundaries of the current metafictional experimentation by being a self-aware novel; it does not include a self-aware character, but is a book that presents as a character, aware of the reader’s touch and gaze upon her – for it is definitively, and admittedly somewhat problematically given the contemporary advancements in gender equality, a female book – body and pages. The text plays with textual presentation, paratextual elements and photography in a manner that wholly parodies typical formal novel conventions. Yet, in a perfect fusion of Barth’s literature of exhaustion and Scholes’ fabulation, it delivers an emotional impact underpinning the irony and play at the end of the novel that cements the text as a serious, and necessary, member of the literary metafictional canon. The same year saw the publication of Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse*, a well-known literary metafiction in which Barth employs his previous theories of literature, presenting as a textual object to be cut out by the reader and formed into a Mobius strip, along with other stories which comment upon their production, in particular ‘Life-Story’ which, again, attempts to actively involve the reader in its production by asking them to fill in certain blank spaces. In 1969 the metafictional canon expanded significantly with the publication of four major metafictional works: B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, and *La Disparition* (or, *A Void*) by Georges Perec. *The Unfortunates* foregrounds the artificiality of the novels construction by presenting the reader with a selection of individually printed chapters which they are invited to shuffle into a random order before reading. Vonnegut’s seminal text, too, deconstructs assumptions of novel production through various metafictional means, the most prominent of which is the inclusion of what would ordinarily serve as (what seems) an authorial preface to the novel about the processes of its conception, here delineated as the first chapter of the novel, thus linking the production of a text with the content therein, and in doing so suggest the equal standing of that which surrounds a text and that which is contained within. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* distorts traditional narrative through the inclusion of multiple endings (a technique sadly frequently abandoned or relegated to the ‘Choose-Your-Own-Adventure’ genre of children’s books in the Twenty-First Century, which have a history too long to adequately explore here), while Perec’s *A Void* is a literary triumph in its production, completely foregoing the use of the letter ‘E’ in both the original French and English translation by Gilbert Adair, a technique that is noticed by the characters within as an uncertain feeling that something has disappeared from their lives.

In 1970 we reach one of the most significant moments in the history of metafiction, with Gass’s publication of ‘Philosophy and the Form of Fiction’ in his *Fiction and the Figures of Life,* which includes the following significant description in which the field receives its name:

And then there is the monster of present-day metafictions. These are works which contain, one way or another, explanations and references to themselves. They are fictions about fiction; not in the obvious sense in which one of the characters is a writer, for that can be taken up in the traditional form. Rather metafictions are fictions in which the content of the work being structured is the structure of traditional fiction.[[667]](#footnote-667)

Unfortunately for Scholes’ formulation, the nomenclature of metafiction proved infinitely more palatable a term than that of the fabulators, having its etymological roots in ‘meta,’ specifically used as a prefix in lieu of ‘self’:

There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those like some of the works of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called anti-novels are really metafictions.[[668]](#footnote-668)

In a staggeringly significant moment in the history of the mode, Gass coins the term metafiction, identifying it as the name for such fictions in which forms of fiction directly impose upon other forms, which take the traditional structure of the novel as their content and subsequently subvert it. Scholes, in the same year, deferred to Gass’s term, publishing an article further exploring metafictional techniques in the Fall issue of *The Iowa Review* and in which he outlines, once more, the dichotomy of formal vs ideological experimentation found within metafictional literature:

Barth and Barthelme are the chroniclers of our despair: despair over the exhausted forms of our thought and our existence. No wonder they laugh so much. Coover and Gass are reaching through form and behavior [sic] for some ultimate values, some true truth. No wonder they come on so strong. All four are working in that rarefied air of metafiction, trying to climb beyond Beckett and Borges, toward things that no critic – not even a metacritic, if there were such a thing – can discern.[[669]](#footnote-669)

The same year also saw Muriel Spark’s *The Driver’s Seat* published, a text which eschewed typical conventions of characterization and clarity of plot action, avoiding the traditions of the omniscient narrator as a means to provide insight into character motivation and problematized by the narratorial address to the reader: ‘Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?’[[670]](#footnote-670) John Gardner’s *Grendel* (1971) appears next, re-framing the narrative of Beowulf through the perspective of the initial epic’s antagonist – the titular Grendel. The text thus subverts narrative expectation, forcing the reader to confront their own narrative assumptions,specifically how their judgement of textual characters is easily coloured by authorial representation and narrative manipulation. In 1973, another small flourishing of canonically significant texts occurs, with Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* both seeing publication, alongside B.S Johnson’s *Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry*. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is often describes as an example of historiographic metafiction, as it will later be titled, in which historical events are fictionalised (and in doing so questions are raised about the fictional nature of all historical accounts), while *Christie Malry* plays with textual presentation, experimenting with self-aware characters and the warped morality which literature may promote (Christie’s mother introduces herself to her son as merely a character, used to give a sympathetic background to Christie in order to assuaging his terrible acts later in the novel). *Breakfast of Champions* is arguably Vonnegut’s masterpiece in terms of metafictional production, playing as it does with page presentation, self-aware characters, authorial inclusion and interaction, intertextual references to other of Vonnegut’s novels, and repeated language games to highlight the constructed nature of language and its application in literature.

In the last year of the decade another canonical metafictional text emerged in the form of Italo Calvino’s 1979 *If On A Winter’s Night A Traveller*, a text which relishes in open-ended frames and analysing the reasons why a reader engages with literature at all. During the years between *Breakfast of Champions* and this text, however, further significant studies of metafictional practice emerged: Robert Alter’s *Partial Magic* (1975) and Larry McCaffery’s *The Art of Metafiction* (1976). Robert Alter, first then, misses the coining of the metafictional term, instead referring to texts which are definitively metafictional in nature as ‘self-conscious’ novels throughout.[[671]](#footnote-671) The work, though, does contribute significantly to the field despite this terminology, examining the way in which self-conscious novels ‘flaunt 'naive' narrative devices, rescuing their usability by exposing their contrivance, working them into a highly patterned narration which reminds us that all representations of reality are, necessarily, stylizations.’[[672]](#footnote-672) Alter draws the metafictional into categories beyond the fictional, suggesting that such experimentations move outward ‘to the society that supplies the materials for literary representation and that tries to dictate literary convention,’[[673]](#footnote-673) significantly linking metafiction not just with literary, but societal commentary on the underlying shape of pattern organisation itself, alongside raising critiques on the nature of art.[[674]](#footnote-674) McCaffery’s examination specifically attempts to distance the metafictional from the anti-novel form, despite the fact that the former often resemble ‘anti-novels of the past, for example, in tending to appear unconventional and experimentation.’[[675]](#footnote-675) McCaffery subsequently also asserts that it is through metafiction’s specific relationship with foregrounding the processes of fictional creation itself that the form is elevated beyond the anti-novel, and which proves the form worthy of academic discussion.

At the dawn of the 1980s, alongside Umberto Eco’s detective-genre bending and intertextually dense metafictional debut *The Name of the Rose,* and a year before Donald Barthelme’s short-story-form and grammar subverting *Sixty Stories* (1981)*,* the first full-length analyses of the metafictional impulse arrived in the form of Linda Hutcheon’s *Narcissistic Narrative*, an exploration which tackles the problem raised by metafiction’s seeming ability to pre-empt the critic’s role as commentator.[[676]](#footnote-676) Hutcheon’s analysis foregrounds the inextricable link between the postmodern moment and metafiction, stating that metafiction is most frequently ‘recognised as a manifestation of postmodernism,’[[677]](#footnote-677) while also proposing that no over-arching theory of metafiction is possible: ‘there can be no "theory" of metafiction, only "implications" for theory; each self-informing work internalizes its own critical context. To ignore that is to falsify the text itself.’[[678]](#footnote-678) The metafictional paradox of the title, too, ties into the by now recurrent thematic dichotomy of formal vs emotional experimentation, suggesting that the two are less in opposition, than parts of the same goal:

Self-conscious fiction tries actively to *prevent* even a temporary abandoning of human experiential responses, while also trying, it is true, simultaneously to lure the reader into an overtly fictive universe.[[679]](#footnote-679)

The paradox of the metafictional is outlined here as the desire to repel the reader from the fictional conventions of the novel form, while simultaneously attempting to avoid alienation from emotional reactions and experiences of the text, a paradox one can easily identify as at work in *Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife.* Hutcheon’s work defends metafictional practices against the critical claims that metafiction marks the end of the novel form, suggesting that such claims are premature in their assumptions that the novel has somehow died giving birth to metafiction, or expired while staring into its own reflection.[[680]](#footnote-680) Instead, as Hutcheon asserts, self-reflexive fiction acts more as a saviour for the novel, echoing Barth’s sentiments that the literature that deals with the exhaustion of forms aids in the fight against the stagnation of formulations:[[681]](#footnote-681)

Modern metafiction which thematizes its own fiction-making processes signals a contesting of "realism" of this kind. Perhaps it even means a return to what might be considered the mainstream of a tradition of narrative freedom, for it embodies its own theories demands to be taken on its own terms. The course of literary history is being altered, and, as always, it is being altered by the texts, not the critics. In fact, this new narcissistic fiction is allowing (is forcing?) a re-evaluation of the novels of the past, thanks to its challenging of the inadequate, reified critical notion of "realism" based on narrow product mimesis alone.[[682]](#footnote-682)

A substantial defence of the metafictional form, and one which situates Hutcheon’s text as one amongst the core canon of metafiction criticism, alongside Fowler, Alter, Scholes, Gass, and, as of 1984 and the publication of seminal *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh, whose text rivals that of Gass in terms of significance for the form. Waugh’s essay offers the reader an analysis of the techniques, practices, and critical reception of the form, before offering up a considered treatise on metafiction that neither defends nor defames the mode. Significantly, Waugh suggests that metafiction is a vital component of all novelistic production, that it is ‘not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency within the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels.’[[683]](#footnote-683) Metafiction, she argues, converts the perceived negative values of outworn, often to the point of cliché, literary convention into the basis by which constructive social criticism may be attempted:

Ostentatiously 'literary' language and conventions are paraded, are set against the fragments of various cultural codes, not because there is nothing to talk about, but because the formal structures of these literary conventions provide a statement about the dissociation between, on the one hand, the genuinely felt sense of crisis, alienation and oppression in contemporary society and, on the other, the continuance of traditional literary forms like realism which are no longer adequate vehicles for the mediation of this experience.[[684]](#footnote-684)

Waugh links metafictional practice here to an almost modernist aspirational desire for deconstruction in the hopes of constructive reconstitution of archaic ideologies; metafiction is the salve against which the ‘sense of crises’ in postmodern society is both established and expunged, in a manner contrary to certain postmodern depthless ideals. Indeed, while the deconstructive elements of metafiction are by this stage quite clear, and linked to the postmodern, there is a certain hopefulness which Waugh highlights as inherent to metafictional intent, which evidences hopeful authorial desire to move beyond tired forms and into something new and beyond the contemporary meaninglessness. However, as Waugh herself suggests, by foregrounding authorial intent and desire, metafictional texts present more as Postmodern than Modern; ‘While modernism pursued impersonality (‘showing’), such contemporary metafictional texts pursue Personality, the ironic flaunting of the Teller.’[[685]](#footnote-685)

Waugh’s depiction of the teller as a ‘flaunted’ individual at first seems to fail in the face of *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985), yet the ending of the text cements itself as metafictional, and somewhat narcissistic, via the inclusion of the academic symposium presented as the novel’s conclusion. Here dry, future academics deconstruct the text, examining it in detail and providing potential discussion in a move that echoes *Pale Fire*, among other self-analytical metafictions, and foregrounding the compositional elements of the tale *through* this pseudo-academic analysis.[[686]](#footnote-686) Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* also saw publication the same year, subverting typical conventions of the detective genre by having clues provided to the novel’s detective protagonist by the author himself via direct authorial intervention. The text marked the beginning of Auster’s ‘New York Trilogy,’ widely regarded as metafictional in its deconstruction of genres and blurring of the lines between author and character, reality and fiction.

Alastair Fowler’s 1987 critical analyses of the history of English literature as seen through the production and propagation of literary forms marks the next development in the field of metafiction. In this text, *A History of English Literature*, Fowler furthers critical reception of the field by identifying a further sub-genre of metafiction as that of the poioumenon (the other being that of the aforementioned historiographic metafiction). Described as ‘self-begetting novels,’[[687]](#footnote-687) Fowler delineates the metafictional poioumenon as that which takes for its ‘central strand of action’ the composition of the work itself, though using this strand in order to subversively explore further socio-political examples. Fowler’s example of such a technique is that of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* which, while focusing on the production of itself, in actuality ‘is about the composition of India after independence.’[[688]](#footnote-688) ‘Influenced more or less directly by literary theory,’ Fowler writes, ‘the poioumenon is calculated to offer opportunities to explore the boundary of fiction and reality – the limits of narrative truth.’[[689]](#footnote-689) Fowler’s text marks the second-to-last significant theoretical development in the field of metafiction during this seeming ‘golden age,’ after which the genre witnesses a distinct decline in critical development and analysis, coinciding not so incidentally with the slow movement towards post-postmodernity. The last gasp of metafictional criticism is that of Linda Hutcheon’s 1988 *The Politics of Postmodernism*, in which historiographic metafiction is further delineated by Hutcheon, with regards to its particular importance (and as summarised by Currie):

The importance of historiographic metafiction is defined in terms of its ability to contest the assumptions of the ‘realist’ novel and narrative history, to question the absolute knowability of the past, and to specify the ideological implications of historical representations, past and present.[[690]](#footnote-690)

Literature, meanwhile, continued to see production of works of metafiction well-suited for inclusion in the canon, including Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapter* (1990), which problematises history as fiction, like earlier examples of historiographic metafiction, and aligning with Hutcheon’s theories on the nature of such fictions as forcing the reader into a recognition of the fictional nature of historical record. *Time’s Arrow*, by Martin Amis, saw publication in 1991. Explicitly owing a debt to Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it is a text in which the chronology of a Nazi doctor’s life is played out in reverse, his seeming penance for experimentations on prisoners of concentration camps is to be forced to relive his life forwards and backwards again and again. 1995 saw the publication of metafictional maestro Gass’s magnum opus *The Tunnel*, which defies most narrative conventions that one might consider the novel to require. The text plays with textual representation while contemplating (and complicating) the act of writing. In a reverse of *Pale Fire* and other such critically minded texts, *The Tunnel* does not critically analyse itself, but rather offers the reader an extended prologue to a critical thesis, now turned into a rambling (though beautifully, endlessly poetic) plot. Authors writing about writing, the role of writing, the role of the author, the uses of writing, all such typical metafictional concerns are addressed slowly and eloquently in a work that could easily be heralded as *the* metafictional novel, which all previous metafictions pale in retroactive imitation of. The same year saw Currie’s *Metafiction* published, a small collection of critical essays around the topic, and the last critical text to analyse the postmodern metafictional practice, notably going against Hutcheon’s early claims in arguing the mutually-exclusive nature of metafiction and the Postmodern, claiming that metafiction ‘is neither a paradigm nor a subset of postmodernism.’[[691]](#footnote-691) The final two texts in this long history of postmodern metafiction are David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Mark Leyner’s *The Tetherballs of Bougainville* (1997), the former of which, as the name might suggest, becomes a circular, endless text in which the end invites the reader to once more begin the text and thus discover new associations, plot revelations and intertextual references. Leyner’s text, however, has received less critical attention than that of Wallaces, with *Tetherballs* serving as both the example par excellence and the emblematic last gasp of postmodern metafictional techniques. The novel is a true poioumenon, concerning its own creation above all else, filled with arbitrary diatribes about a vast range of subjects that can be charitably called irrelevant to any semblance of plot. *Tetherballs* is flippant about subject, mixes low and high art, alludes repeatedly to its own creation and textuality, and blurs genre lines, the text thus performing as metafiction, though the argument has long been exhausted – we know the trick, we have heard the punchline, so why, one much ask, repeat the joke? I mention this text, perhaps admittedly a bit acerbically, because, as the last postmodern metafiction formed before the end of the postmodern era, it serves as a fitting example of the failing flaws of the form that would soon dwindle away as we enter the metamodern moment.[[692]](#footnote-692)

**2.3 Past the Post(modern): Metamodern Metafiction.**

Metamodernity witnesses a steady decline in the production of metafictional texts. True, Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction continues regardless, as in the examples of Eco’s *Numero Zero*, Granville’s *Gretel And the Dark*, Morris’s *I, The Sun,* and *The Medici Mirror* by Melissa Bailey. Such texts, however, are not the concern of this metafictional history – historiographic metafiction deviates from the apparent purpose of the metafictional novel and its attempts to foreground fiction. The ‘narcissistic narrative,’ meanwhile, has seen little in the way of publications.

Published one year before the September 11th terrorist attacks that would so often be cited as the end of the postmodern, though arguably post-postmodern in influence,[[693]](#footnote-693) Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000) adheres to metafiction’s long tradition of typographical experimentation and play. The text forms a labyrinths of its own pages to mimic the labyrinthine nature of the environment explored by its characters, leading readers back and forth through pages and footnotes. *House of Leaves*, too, concerns its own production as the novel is formed of a triptych of narratives: The original ‘Navidson Report’ which serves as the novel’s central plot; Zampanò’s academic analysis and thesis on the Navidson Report; and, finally, Johnny Truant’s editing and footnote-formed narrative that often overtakes the text – though this too is moderated by the unseen Editors. Again, *Pale Fire’s* legacy rears its head, with the academic analysis overtaking that of the original artefact itself. Danielewski’s text also features itself within its own pages, with Navidson at one point tearing the pages from the novel and burning them for light.

Two years later, in 2002, Jonathan Safran Foer published *Everything is Illuminated* to critical acclaim. Again experimenting with page presentation, though to a far lesser extent, *Everything is Illuminated* mixes prose, epistolary, and script formats to foregrounds the issues of storytelling and the main character’s desire for a story, rather than the truth which comes as a sublime – terrifying, awesome, self-challenging – moment towards the novel’s climax. The trope of author as character, too, re-appears here, with the text presenting as pseudo-autobiographical in a manner that would be later taken up in Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park* (2005). Ellis’s text at first seems an autobiographical account of the author’s life, though this soon begins to deviate from the truth and plummet into Gothic horror archetypes, while twisting such tropes into a commentary on the societal ennui surrounding postmodern ideology. 2005 also saw the release of Danielewski’s *The Fifty Year Sword*, a text which attempts to imitate a collage of voices across the page and, in its original format, had a limited release within a wooden framed box with five clasps (as does the titular sword within the novel). Foregrounding the artefactual nature of the text, *T50YS* also displays several photo-pages with elements from the plot recreated from stitching, in an effort to emphasise the ‘stitched-together’ nature of ghost stories in general which, as Danielewski argues, have histories which are ghost stories unto themselves.[[694]](#footnote-694)

Next, Douglas Coupland’s *Jpod* (2006) appears as a pseudo-successor to *The Tetherballs of Bougainville* in its presentation of vast swathes of seemingly inconsequential matter, though Coupland makes it clear at the end of the novel that the pages upon pages of random lists, repeated symbols or other obscure matter are intended merely as page-filler in order for Coupland himself to fulfil a contractual obligation to ‘write a novel.’[[695]](#footnote-695) The novel adheres to several typically metafictional concerns, including the representation of its own production as a key theme, clear reference to authorial intent and appearance, and, of course, a form of typographical experimentation that, it should be clear, is endemic to metamodern metafictions, and which is evidenced by the next two texts of this metafictional history ­– *Take Care of Yourself*, and *The Raw Shark Texts*.

Sophie Calle’s *Take Care of Yourself* (2007) is an overtly metafictional text, beginning with a description from the author of the objectives and constructive process behind the text’s production, in this case that the author was rejected by a lover via email, an email ending with the title phrase of the novel. Calle sends copies of the email to over one hundred women and collates their responses to the text as the multimodal novel, which includes a physical DVD copy of several of the responses within its pages, alongside a small separately printed (though bound within the book itself) romantic novel, several letters and performance pieces by a clown, a parrot, and several famous artists. Stephen Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*, published the same year, again experiments typographically, having several pages where images of sharks are formed from words and letters, which grow or shrink following the shark’s movements through the text. The plot of the novel follows a man who has, subconsciously, obliterated his sense of self in an attempt to resolve his lingering guilt over the death of a loved one, and the novel follows the protagonist as he attempts to regain his identity and stop the typographical shark from eating more of his memories. True to metafictional form, the end sees the protagonists recreating the ending of the film *Jaws* in an attempt to catch the antagonistic shark, and, in doing so, comments on our appropriation of narratives, the need for narrative closure, and pop-cultural obsession.

Continuing the legacy of Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* and Danielewski’s *T50YS*, Anne Carson released the next metafictional text to be examined here in the form of *Nox* (2009). Bound in a large box, the text itself consists of an accordioned series of pages intended to replicate a lengthy stitched-together collection of notes and collages created by the author as a form of eulogy for her estranged brother. Carson’s novel, removed from the box, is an inherently fragile and cumbersome thing, the form of the pages somewhat mimicking the awkward and difficult to grasp relationship between author and brother. The left hand side of the text follows a dissemination of Gaius Valerius Catullus’s elegiac poem *Catullus 101*, a word-by-word dissection reflective of the author’s own search for meaning in her brother’s death. Experimental in both form and content, the text includes replicas of photographs, snippets of poetry and prose, alongside facsimiles of other notes, again playing with the materiality of the text, though here less to point to conventions of literature, than to, perhaps, aid in bringing the reader closer to the fiction; the facsimile proves, rather than problematises, the account of events, reversing the traditional anti-realist elements typical of metafictional criticism. Next, in 2008, Irvine Welsh’s *Filth* again adhered to metafictional conventions of typographical experimentation, with sections of the novel being overwritten by the narrative of a tapeworm growing within the stomach of the main character. These sections, printed to look as if they were overlaying the original text with an ever-increasing tube structure, serve not only to remind the reader of the object nature of the text as a construct, but also to provide narrative backstory to the protagonist. The (tape)worm at the heart (stomach) of the character made flesh, as it were, upon the page, the metafictional device subverts the mise-en-abyme of traditional metafiction itself. Here, the story within the story actively overtakes the frame which seeks to contain it and actively comment upon it, rather than the traditional method by which the framed story often serves as a condensed parable elucidating the surrounding action.

As *Nox* is to *The Unfortunates,* so to is Jeremy Dyson’s *The Haunted Book* (2012) to *If On A Winter’s Night a Traveller*. Dyson’s text, as with Calvino’s, presents a series of frames that never close, though *If On A Winter’s Night A Traveller* is perhaps less overtly metafictional (both literally and in Hutcheon’s sense) than *The Haunted Book.* Dyson’s text, then, follows a series of narrators as they work seemingly on the same goal, of the creation of a book of local folklore, before each discovers the work of his predecessor of which the book then becomes a facsimile. The book, in the final few black pages, reveals its true metafictional nature, however, in a manner quite new to the metafictional timeline, by positing the reader as the book itself. The word Book, capitalised, is used by a sentient computer programme to remove the Reader, a far-future human, from their surroundings and show them a historical vision of the past. The reader of *The Haunted Book* is posited as a Book, an artefact through which an unseen presence is experiencing their life, and whose reading of *The Haunted Book* is a computer-generated escape mechanism for the Reader trapped inside. The text reverses the roles of reader and text, suggesting that one’s own life, the life of the individual holding the text, is the true novel itself to some unfathomable other, and in doing so comments on the role of fiction itself.[[696]](#footnote-696)

The next series of texts in the metafictional timeline come from 2014s *Horrorstör* and *Gould’s Book of Fish*, by Grady Hendrix and Richard Flanagan, respectively. *Horrorstör* presents its text surrounded in the paratextual paraphernalia of a pseudo-Ikea catalogue, with renditions of order forms, store floor maps, and other allusions to the Swedish furniture outlet, here titled ‘Orsk.’ While *Horrorstör* is only metafictional in terms of formal play, changing the physical conventions of the text to illustrate and parody, *Gould’s Book of Fish* returns to more classical modes of metafiction, as seen in Vonnegut’s works, *Willie Master’s Lonesome Wife*, and even Lovecraft’s *The Unnamable,* through its use of metafictional devices to emphasize the inherent value of fiction. *Gould’s* sees the narrator, Sid Hammet, desperate to validate the Book of Fish, which he finds while disillusioned with his criminal enterprises. The book, considered a fake, a forgery, or even worthless, is inherently valuable to Hammet as it describes the life of the convict William Buelow Gould, a convict who achieved transcendence despite his criminal life, an attractive prospect to the disillusioned narrator. Hammet and Gould’s narratives begin to blur, with several iterations of the book of fish appearing throughout Gould’s narrative, and even sections of his own frame narrative appearing, tellingly, within the pages of records which will exonerate Gould; Hammet finds reprieve from his ennui via Gould’s text, and Gould’s reprieve will apparently come via Hammet’s written frame.

Finally, the most recent metafictional text to date, and the novel which ends this discussion, is that of Zachary Thomas Dodson’s *Bats of the Republic* (2017), which subverts standard novel typographical practices, blurring several modes – epistolary, romance novel, sci-fi novel, supernatural bildungsroman – into one continuous story. The text also includes a sealed envelope at the end of the book, which the reader must open and therein find the final chapter, though they are invited to form an infinite loop from the contents, reading them endlessly. *Bats of the Republic* presents two distinct narratives, each claiming to be the author of the other, yet both telling an essentially similar story about an increasingly similar cast of characters, forcing the reader into an uncertain limbo between the fictions in which they must decide their own personal interpretation of textual hierarchy. The text, as in *Gould*, is interspersed with several diagrams of animals, though here serving to depict the protagonist, Zadock Thomas, as he sinks seemingly into insanity. Such metafictional techniques employed (dual narratives, conflicting authors, overt references to writing, the mixing of genres and forms) serve, as in the majority of metamodern metafictions, to emphasise authorial intent; no longer merely a tool for the subversion of outmoded novel conventions, *Bats of the Republic*, among its contemporaries, serves as an exemplar text of the increasing number of metamodern metafictions which *use* metafictional practice not merely to destabilise for its own sake, but to destabilise the ontological levels of the text to allow the reader access to a more sincere, emotive authorial concern. Such concerns, however, often fail to find their target given metafiction’s negative critical reception. As one reviewer of *Gould* writes:

When Gould witnesses his own book - and this one - burning in a fire, one can only groan; we've heard all this before. If we've read our Calvino and our Borges, we get the joke; if we haven't, where is the joke?[[697]](#footnote-697)

**3 The Ouroboros**[[698]](#footnote-698)

**3.1 Post-Postmodern Metafiction**

The movement into the post-postmodern era seemingly heralded a crisis for the metafictional form. No longer the dominant mode of ideological expression, irony was now depicted as the enemy of progress, and a certain societal desire for post-ironic, sincere forms of expression has emerged in the wake of postmodernism’s apparent demise. How, then, would such a form as metafiction survive, given its status as a form seemingly intrinsically linked to ideas of irony, pastiche, and parody, that such critics as Vermeulen and van den Akker deride as no longer able to represent the societal zeitgeist. Indeed, metafiction seems doomed to a conjoined[[699]](#footnote-699) relationship with the postmodern paradigm and to fade alongside it, as Daniel Grausam signposts:

Though recent scholarship has given us a sense of the historical investigations of postmodernism, the more extreme forms of metafiction that emerged in the 1960s have largely been relegated to the dustbin of history: even a critic as attentive to the historiographic interests of so much postmodern fiction as Linda Hutcheon has been interested in drawing lines that separate historiographic metafiction […] from the less-obviously referential forms of metafiction.[[700]](#footnote-700)

As critics seemingly flee the sinking ship of metafictional ideology, however, metafictional practice continues to appear within contemporary literary production, though with significantly less formal experimentation occurring than during the ‘golden age’ of the 1960s and 1970s.[[701]](#footnote-701) Metamodern metafiction, may continue to be labelled as ‘a hackneyed bit of self-indulgent postmodernism,’[[702]](#footnote-702) or an undeniable manifestation of this,[[703]](#footnote-703) yet still finds consistent representation. Metafiction, in fact, lives, and may indeed thrive in the societal oscillation of metamodernism, due to the inherent duality of the form; there is a significant part of metafictional practice which flies in the face of the postmodern, for as Currie states, ‘the idea of self-consciousness is strangely inconsistent with most postmodern literary theories, which would attribute neither selfhood nor consciousness to an author, let alone a work of fiction.’[[704]](#footnote-704) It is just such practices and inconsistencies which may prove to be the salvation of the form as it endures into post-postmodernity. In order to answer the questions of how, if not indeed *why* the form continues to survive, we first need to examine the inherent duality of the genre.

**3.2 The Romantic and The Burlesque**

Metafiction, as has been suggested, is a field rife with dichotomy and paradox. Hutcheon herself coined at least two distinct dichotomies in the form of the historiographic and traditional metafictions, alongside the identification of ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ metafiction, which, respectively, either explicitly signpost their own self-consciousness and ask the reader to engage, or implicitly force the reader to ‘to create a fictive imaginative world separate from the empirical in which he lives’.[[705]](#footnote-705) Other splits abound, too, whether the efforts may be classified as fiction or criticism (or both), whether the form is the death of the novel or its ‘salvation,’[[706]](#footnote-706) self-conscious or merely self-obsessed, a paradigm of or partitioned from postmodernism. Yet such ideological splits are as yet unanswered in the field, mostly due to a lack of critical attention, but also due to the sheer impossibility of properly theorising metafiction as a whole:

No attempt has been made to propose a comprehensive theory of metafiction. In the first place, any such theory would be reductive, much more reductive than any other theory of the novel in general. This is because the point of *meta*fiction is that it constitutes its own first critical commentary, and in so doing […] sets up the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered.[[707]](#footnote-707)

Hutcheon states that there can be no single theory of metafiction, only implications for theory, as a consequence of each metafictional text forming its own, internalised, critical context.[[708]](#footnote-708) The aim, then, cannot be to propose a grand metafictional theorem, under which all metafictional impulse is accounted for and all paradigms explored, yet metafictional texts do not defy categorisation in and of themselves; while the practices employed by each text vary drastically, overt, covert, or otherwise, the field can be seen to produce texts which fall within a specific continuum that unites the seeming dualities of metafiction. I would like to propose here not an over-arching metafictional theory, but instead a duality of poles either side of a new spectrum, or rather continuum, along which the majority of metafictional techniques, and for the most part texts, may be considered. In doing so, I will suggest that it is perhaps through the subversion or abandonment of one of these broad categories that metafiction’s future may be assured (and additionally *why* it is vital that this occurs). The two extreme poles of the continuum I would like to propose are those of the ‘burlesque’ and the ‘romantic.’

**3.2.1 Burlesque Metafictions**

Burlesque metafiction perhaps needs less exploration than its companion, adhering as it does more cleanly to ‘traditional’ expectations of metafictional texts as defined in *Narcissistic Narrative* as ‘in some dominant and constitutive way, self-referring or autorepresentational: it provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception.’[[709]](#footnote-709) That is to say, burlesque metafictions focus on fiction and fictional construction as their main subject, that, to paraphrase Birgit and Nünning, reflect on their own status as fiction via self-reflexive utterances in order to foreground reflections on textuality.[[710]](#footnote-710) Burlesque metafictions are, in a definite sense, fictions about fictions – the most commonly recognised element of metafiction itself. For historical examples, one only has to look to some of the ‘golden age’ metafictional texts, such as *Christie Malry, Lost in the Funhouse, A Void, Naked Lunch*, and*, The Unfortunates*, which experiment with form and content to highlight artificiality. The burlesque teases and flaunts its component parts with a knowing wink to the reader, hence the name which, additionally, links these metafictions to the category of burlesque fiction as already established, and which is used to describe parodic fiction. Burlesque metafiction foregrounds formal or structural play, deconstructing key elements of traditional genre and novel conventions in order to signpost such tropes as no longer able to support the weight of contemporary ideological theory. It subverts, often through parody, the traditional form in which it is deployed in an effort to reform the perceived ennui associated with the redundancy of specific novel conventions, as Alter describes:

From such [a postmodern] radical scepticism about the relation between language and truth, there are two possible practical consequences. One may throw up one's hands in despair and abandon the enterprise of the novel in the recognition that all writing is lying and writing fiction is lying raised to the second power. The one obvious alternative is parody. [...] The parodistic novel, exploding the absurdities of previous literary conventions as it unfolds, effects a kind of dialectic refinement and correction of lying, edging us toward the perception of certain truths about the manipulation of language, about character, about human nature, perhaps even about the kind of social world we inhabit.[[711]](#footnote-711)

A noble goal with, perhaps, an ignoble reputation, as such endeavours are often shelved as merely ‘experimental’ fiction, too parodic or purposefully difficult to allow the reader entry (see criticism of Gass’s *The Tunnel*). Alter’s description of self-conscious texts too aligns with the aims of burlesque metafiction, in which, from beginning to end, ‘through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention.’[[712]](#footnote-712) Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* is a prime example of this, although we may travel further back to Hogg’s *Justified Sinner*, which deliberately problematises fictional creation and the appropriation of narrative as a central plot concern. *Don Quixote, Sixty Stories, The Name of the Rose, Pale Fire, The Crying of Lot 49, Vampire City, The Mist*, these are all examples of burlesque metafictions which emphasise artificiality to comment upon fictional concerns. Typographical experimentation is a key signifier of the burlesque, akin to the exposing of the burlesque dancer’s garter, if you will, and provides a legacy link from the likes of Johnson’s *Albert Angelo* (1964), famous for having holes in the pages, through to such contemporary examples as Douglas Coupland’s *Jpod* (2006) and *Horrorstör* by Grady Hendrix (2014). *Jpod* immediately plays with typographical conventions, printing the copyright information in landscape, rather than portrait, before filling the first few pages before the first chapter of the novel with excessively sized text seemingly counting towards the beginning, followed by five margin-to-margin pages filled with seemingly random business advice which soon devolves into dollar signs and the words ‘ramen noodles’ repeated until the beginning of the novel. The beginning, while not typographically experimental, foregrounds the metafictional nature of the text by instantly reminding the reader of the presence of the author: The first line of dialogue has an unnamed character exclaim that they feel ‘like a refugee from a Douglas Coupland novel,’[[713]](#footnote-713) providing the reader with a knowing allusion to the text’s own fictionality as the character is, indeed, within a Douglas Coupland novel, refugee or not. As Scholes identifies of fabulators, the forerunner moniker for traditional metafiction, they are characterised by ‘a sense of pleasure in form,’ emphasising ‘qualities of art and joy,’[[714]](#footnote-714) and such descriptors easily apply to the parodic, burlesque metafictions so prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, but which see a significant decline as the form enters the post-postmodern period. The burlesque metafiction is the most commonly recognised metafictional form, composed from Hutcheon’s covert and overt metafictional forms; the burlesque metafiction either placing with fictionality, structure, or language as their content's core, as in the covert examples of *Christie Malry, Pale Fire, Jpod* and *T50YS*, or internalise, structurally, their own self-reflective commentaries, as in *Willie Masters, A Void, If on A Winter’s Night a Traveller,* and *Everything is Illuminated*. [[715]](#footnote-715)

**3.2.2 Romantic Metafiction**

While these burlesque metafictions delight in titillating and teasing their readers, flashing the methods of their construction with knowing winks and playful nods, the romantic metafiction is a particular extreme of this continuum with an altogether more emotional, human, agenda than has hitherto been linked to metafictional practice, but which can nonetheless be traced back as far as *Tristram Shandy*. Romantic in their treatment of the grandeur of the world at large, with idealised views of humanity, the romantic metafiction foregrounds emotional or moral issues through metafictional means, and while such concerns are often overlooked in critical reception of metafiction as a whole, evidence for this form of metafiction can be traced back to Scholes’ description of the proto-metafictional fabulators:

In using the word "Fabulator" to designate certain modern writers of fiction, I mean to emphasize these qualities of art and joy, of course. I also hope to make the word suggest other, related qualities [...] suffice it to say that modern fabulation, like the ancient fabling of Aesop, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy.[[716]](#footnote-716)

Scholes’ identification of the way in which metafiction returns towards actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy speaks of the more moral, emotional concerns of specific metafictions. One need only return to Sterne’s black page within *Tristram Shandy* for an example of this, as metafictional subversion is turned toward representing the un-representable; the black page is a failed attempt to comprehend death, an attempt nonetheless, but a metafictional concern tied directly to a more emotionally resonant objective (how we mourn and grieve) than mere print play. Lovecraft’s *The Unnamable*, too, serves as an early example of romantic metafiction. By alluding to the author himself, Lovecraft is able to foreground his own ideals regarding the generation of fear for the purpose of release from the ‘daily treadmill,’ to find the ‘greatest pleasure’ in fiction which may remove the self from ‘the hackneyed patterns of actual existence.’[[717]](#footnote-717)

If we were to designate one novelist as exemplar of the burlesque, B.S. Johnson would be the potential leader of the mode. His works focus on form and novel conventions, with metafictive techniques serving to foreground the artificiality of the texts, the outmoded nature of the typical novel conventions. If we were to repeat the same exercise but as applied to the romantic, it is without a doubt that Kurt Vonnegut Jr would reign as novelist supreme. Vonnegut’s fiction, as Scholes attests, is easily identifiable as emotionally, or morally, centric:

[Vonnegut’s novels are] helping, in Joyce's phrase, “to create the conscience of the race.” What race? Human certainly, not American or German or any other abstraction from humanity. Just as pure romance provides us with necessary psychic exercise, intellectual comedy like Vonnegut’s offers us moral stimulation - not fixed ethical positions which we can complacently assume, but such thoughts as exercise our consciences and help us keep our humanity in shape, read to respond to the humanity of others.[[718]](#footnote-718)

In *Slaughterhouse Five* such metafictional techniques as the repeated inclusion of the author, the subversion of traditional novel chronology, and the inclusion of the prologue-esque section detailing the novel’s creation, all force the reader to confront not only fiction’s failings, but the inability of art to process and properly represent the atrocities of humanity. *Breakfast of Champions*, too, can be seen to actively try to prevent ‘even a temporary abandoning of human experiential responses,’[[719]](#footnote-719) as Hutcheon argues of metafiction as a whole, while still utilising much the same metafictional techniques as in *SH5,* though here with included authorial drawings to repeatedly remind the reader of Vonnegut’s presence and continued manipulation of the novel. Indeed, Vonnegut foregrounds an emotional resolution over that of plot resolution at the end of the novel, appearing as a character within the novel to speak directly to Kilgore Trout and offer him transcendence and freedom:

“I am approaching my fiftieth birthday, Mr. Trout,” I said. “I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sort of years to come. […]. I am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career. […] Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are *free.* […] *Bon voyage*,” I said. I disappeared.

[…] I somersaulted lazily and pleasantly through the void, which is my hiding place when I dematerialize [from the fictional world]. Trout’s cries to me faded as the distance between us increased. […] Here was what Kilgore Trout cried out to me in my father’s voice: “*Make me young, make me young, make me young!*”[[720]](#footnote-720)

Vonnegut’s text, and by extension the majority of his oeuvre, foregrounds emotional, moral, and human issues through metafictional practice, often disrupting narrative tradition and convention to allow the authorial agenda a stronger connection to the potential reader; Vonnegut’s arguments, employed allegorically through plot but often appearing as stated by a representation of himself, reach the reader all the clearer through the broken narratological levels disrupted by metafictional devices. Such a technique, the use of metafiction to knowingly disrupt the fictional premise and create a distinct emotional resonance with the reader, is a common motif of romantic metafiction, though does err somewhat towards the centre of the continuum and burlesque techniques. The intent in romantic metafiction, however, is not to criticise fiction in these texts, so much as to use the inherently flawed form to establish a knowing relationship with the potential reader and, in doing so, aid the emphatic relation between reader and text (or reader and author).

One manner in which this is achieved is through the use of the metafictional device of self-referentiality in terms of form, where novels refer to the creation of other works, themselves, or merely the power of the written word in order to signpost their moral or emotional arguments. In both *Gretel and the Dark* and Patrick McGrath’s *Spider,* for example, the protagonists each attempt to rewrite their lives as a means of resolving seemingly horrific past events (concentration camp experiences and the murder of the protagonist’s own mother, respectively). Both texts foreground the act of story-telling as a creative, rebellious act, exposing their narratives as flawed retellings or creations not to comment upon the inability of fiction to affect the lives of those involved, but instead to suggest an emotional capacity for healing, of the self, of trauma, inherent to fiction. *S*, too, utilises metafictional techniques to further human connection with the novel, as opposed to the traditional argument of metafiction as alienating the reader and ejecting them from the text. Here, the marginalia narrative of the commentators, in actively critiquing the text, highlights the artificiality of the document in question, though this only compounds the arguments about fiction as a subversive, often covert, tool for societal change that the text presents. *Time’s Arrow,* too, adheres to this convention of the more romantic metafictions. While clearly commenting on the convention of linearity within the novel form through its reversal of typical forward chronology, the text does so in order to present the antagonist within as a human attempting to recover from his terrible pasts, though the acts themselves are ultimately condemned as so vile as to justify the protagonist’s endless cycle through the same life.

Perhaps the clearest comparison to delineate the romantic from the burlesque can be seen in the juxtaposition of *The Unfortunates* and *Nox*. While both, ostensibly, appear as experiments on the novel form, highlighting the artificiality of their fictions by presenting them as books within boxes, *Nox* and *The Unfortunates* differ entirely in purpose. The latter text, a definitively burlesque affair, uses this main metafictional device of the unbound book within a box to force the reader into a meta-level awareness of the novel itself, the artefactual nature of the object emphasised through their tactile experiences engaging with the text. *Nox*, a romantic metafiction, uses the same techniques, though these are utilised in order to express a more sentimental purpose; the authorial desire for clarity in death problematized in *Nox*, through the use of scraps of paper, disseminated elegies and poetic discussion, does not find the same treatment in *The Unfortunates*, which treats death as a mere plot point and means of examining the ways in which we process narrative.

Romantic metafiction uses techniques of fictional critique to destabilise the fictional and draw the reader into the sentimental, emotional argument of the text, while the burlesque destabilises for the sake of de-stability, warping conventions to question their relevancy to current paradigms and societal values.

**4. Conclusion: Abandon the Dancers**

While this identification of two forms may be somewhat novel in and of itself, it does beg the question of why – why bother to continue to critically consider a form which seems to have witnessed a slow decline towards abandonment altogether in the post-postmodern age.[[721]](#footnote-721) The future of fiction, seemingly always under threat at the beginning of new historical and social epochs, must be safeguarded through adaptation; as the socio-political ideologies of cultures shift, literature must shift to accommodate this or find itself finally falling into the form of obsolescence repeatedly predicted of the form. Raymond Federman, too, attests to the once-more threatened state of literary endeavour and the need for the survival of literature:

in the face of the great turmoil that the world is today, literature, rather than being in transition with the new century, is in danger - serious danger - of becoming ineffectual and obsolete, in serious danger of extinction. Therefore, it is essential and urgent for those who still believe in literature, those who still practice literature, those who still produce books, to confront this crisis and this danger, and assess the possibilities still available to literature in order for it to survive. In other words, it is urgent for literature to take a stand so that it can continue to be in the world and do what it has always done: capture the world, represent the world, explain the world, clarify the world, re-invent the world. It is urgent for literature to take a stand, even if it is The Last Stand of Literature.[[722]](#footnote-722)

Federmen foregrounds the urgency of a new literary response to the emergent challenges of the post-postmodern period, suggesting that literature may in some manner augment our understanding of social ideologies through capturing, representing, explaining and clarifying the world. A grand ideal of the novel’s purpose, perhaps, but one shared by Scholes, who links fiction with the essential upkeep of our ‘imaginative well-being:’

The students of sleep have discovered that dreaming is necessary to the well-being of the human organism, and perhaps to the higher animals as well. it is not that our dreams teach us anything; they are simply a means of expression for us, a nightly cinema in which we are producer, director, all the actors, and all the audience. […]

I do not think that fiction is a substitute for dream, but I think it must work for us in a similar way. It must provide us with an imaginative experience which is necessary to our imaginative well-being.[[723]](#footnote-723)

Literature, as essential to human well-being as sleep in its ability to maintain a healthy, imaginative well-being through representation and re-invention of the world, deserves to survive into the metamodern era, though something needs to change in the ideology of the form for it to avoid Federman’s predicted ‘Last Stand’. Metafiction may be the very tool by which this is achieved. While, Currie argues, metafiction ‘once seemed to announce the death of the novel,’ appearing as a decadent response to the novel’s ‘exhausted possibilities,’ it may in truth fill the form with an ‘unlimited vitality,’[[724]](#footnote-724) for, as Hutcheon notes, self-reflexive fiction may be the ‘salvation’ of the novel as a mimetic genre, through the application of internalised critique of the form.[[725]](#footnote-725) Metafiction is a ‘borderline discourse,’ placing itself between the poles of critical and fictional creation and ‘far from being some marginal no-man’s land,’ Currie suggests, ‘this definition gives metafiction a central importance in the projects of literary modernity, postmodernity and theory which have taken this borderline as a primary source of energy.’[[726]](#footnote-726) Metamodernism proposes just such a theory, taking the borderline between modernist and postmodernist attitudes and suggesting an oscillation between and through them. In effect, metafiction is situated perfectly to both explore the current epoch, oscillating between the distinct ideological poles of the metamodern moment through burlesque irony and romantic sentimentalism or authorial sincerity, but also aiding in the essential metamodern impulse to engage with attempts to abandon the postmodern in search of something new. As Alter highlights, an essential characteristic of the self-reflexive novel is the flaunting of naïve narrative devices, ‘rescuing their usability by exposing their contrivance, working them into a highly patterned narration.’[[727]](#footnote-727) Metafiction may serve yet to replenish the naïve narrative devices of the postmodern, or to highlight them as atrophied ideological experiments best expunged from further literary endeavour; metafiction converts perceived negative values of ‘outworn literary convention’ into the ‘basis of a potentially constructive social criticism.’[[728]](#footnote-728) If literature is under threat and challenged by the changing of societal desire, then metafiction thus becomes a means by which it may rise to the need of such desires through self-conscious criticism and subsequent rejection of outmoded concepts.

Metafiction has always been fiction about fiction itself, aiming to explore ‘the way that literature’s slice-of-life slices into our own lives,’[[729]](#footnote-729) in a manner which extends beyond pure criticism and directly, as Bellipani argues, ‘into the way in which we process and comprehend human experience.’[[730]](#footnote-730) If fiction finds itself lacking in cohesion with societal ideological paradigms, metafiction is the tool by which literature and life may be re-aligned, fiction may be forced into reconciliation with reality: As Hutcheon claims ‘by claiming that it is nothing but art, nothing but imaginative creation, metafiction becomes more "vital": it reflects the human imagination, instead of telling a second-hand tale about what might be real in quite another world.’[[731]](#footnote-731) Hutcheon, here, highlights metafiction’s vitality in reflecting human imagination and the world of the reader, going on to suggest that ‘the course of literary history,’ she writes of the Nineteen-Eighties, ‘is being altered and, as always, it is being altered by the texts, not the critics.’[[732]](#footnote-732) Hutcheon’s comments on the role of metafiction to not only alter the course of literary history through its own embodied, internalised critique are reflective of the current changes in literary theory and cultural reception of fiction as outlined by Federman, wherein metafictional techniques may serve as a form of salvation for the seemingly ailing novel through their re-imagining of outdated concepts. Indeed, metafiction has always engaged with its own textual history in a bid to comment on contemporary culture, as Waugh attests:

Ostentatiously 'literary' language and conventions are paraded, are set against the fragments of various cultural codes, not because there is nothing to talk about, but because the formal structures of these literary conventions provide a statement about the dissociation between, on the one hand, the genuinely felt sense of crisis, alienation and oppression in contemporary society and, on the other, the continuance of traditional literary forms like realism which are no longer adequate vehicles for the mediation of this experience.[[733]](#footnote-733)

Alter, too agreeing with Waugh, describes metafiction’s capability to move outward from the text to the society that supplies the materials for, and dictates the conventions of, literary convention,[[734]](#footnote-734) establishing a critical reception of metafiction as a positive force for change should literary production come under apparent ‘threat’ of obsolescence. Metafiction allows novelists to critique the form in a manner which is able to breathe new life into potentially failing generic modes to further align them with contemporary models of thought and societal values. While the novel is, arguably enough, not in dire threat from extinction – having survived both the dawn of the internet and the entire postmodern period – metafiction is still an essential novel form worthy of surviving into the contemporary period and potentially vital in the metamodern era as a tool of expression. The question remains, then, of how to reprieve metafiction from its reputation as an exhaustive form if the tool is to be taken as necessary to the continuation of literature.

Metafiction itself must change along with the contemporary epoch if it is to remain valid, and in order to do so it must, I suggest, depart overtly from the ties of the postmodern moment, or be seen in the attempt to do so. Currie outright states that ‘metafiction is not the only kind of postmodern fiction, and nor is it an exclusively postmodern kind of fiction […] It is neither a paradigm nor a subset of postmodernism,’[[735]](#footnote-735) yet the core techniques of metafictional practice (typographical experimentation, deconstruction of narrative, surface-only-narratives) are typical of many postmodern texts. If the contemporary zeitgeist is defined by the attempts to transcend the postmodern then, again, metafiction should aim to align with such ideological desires and, in order to do so, abandon the more burlesque elements of its form while emphasising the metamodern possibilities inherent to the mode, as signposted by Julie Levinson:

In a metafictive work, we are, at turns, pulled centripetally inward by the plot and centrifugally outward by the narratological musings that overlay the events being narrated and thereby acknowledge the artifice of stories. We are simultaneously caught up in the narrative experience and exposed to the ruses of that experience and its questionable correspondence to what it intends to signify.[[736]](#footnote-736)

Levinson highlights the dual nature of metafictive works which, despite the potential postmodern alignment, may easily be transfigured from a seemingly impossible duality to a metamodern both-neither, in which both statements oscillate between applicability and impossibility. Metafiction, as a form, is inherently suitable to ideas of metamodern oscillation, as previously stated, yet able to support the metamodern ideals of sincerity in what David James identifies as a ‘reassertion of integrity in the face of postmodern tactics of mischievous self-dissection,’[[737]](#footnote-737) and a desire for movement, with certain contemporary metafictions ‘working through and beyond the postmodern’[[738]](#footnote-738) to attempt to practice ‘self-reflective texts that still maintain a forward impetus.’[[739]](#footnote-739) Metafiction is able to support these metamodern ideological explorations, see *Nox* for a prime example, yet the mode continues to decline in terms of literary production. To change, metafiction must, as I have said, attempt to remove the more postmodern elements from itself while maintaining thematic integrity. The form must abandon the dancers, if possible, resolve to refrain from the production of burlesque metafictions that the more romantic metafictional texts may be formed and prosper. An easy proposition to posit, but harder to achieve in practice. A new metafiction must emerge, if the form is to survive, one which recognises the self-aware status of itself and which takes as the main subject for subversion those techniques of metafiction which tie into burlesque and postmodern practices, instead promoting the essential, sincere romantic metafictions which may continue to support the contemporary zeitgeist.

Initially I had conceived of this as a form of ouroboric fiction, that is to say, meta-metafiction in which the now established tropes of metafiction are turned inward upon themselves, the snake ever eating its own tail/tale. ‘Ouroboric,’ however, has as much palatability and sustainability as, in terms of vernacular, fabulators. Meta-metafiction is similarly as clumsy and ungainly a term as post-postmodern. Instead, this new form of metafiction which subverts the traditional practices must fall under another name[[740]](#footnote-740) – Sacrifiction. Taken from the Latin sacra, for holy, divine, detestable and impious, the word also links to sacrifice, as the text must self-sacrifice part of its own form. Sacrifiction is that which would otherwise be titled meta-meta, the meta-level commentary upon metafiction. Of course, no such example of a text exists at present, though there are texts emerging in the metamodern moment with sacrifictional tendencies. The aforementioned *Nox* takes the artefact nature of *The Unfortunates*, turning the argument against the recognition of the failings of the literature to represent life and death effectively, instead suggesting the need for literature in our attempts to understand such emotional concerns. Similarly with *The Haunted Book*, Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*’s spiritual successor, the same metafictional techniques are used, but to foreground *why* we read, not *how* and suggesting the potential inconsequential nature of format in opposition to emotional function. Metafiction must adapt to survive in the metamodern moment. Though the form is well suited to the metamodern paradigms of oscillation between innumerable poles, postmodernism, modernism, irony, sincerity, convention, freedom, through the duality of the burlesque and romantic sub-genres of metafiction, it too must attempt to break free of the legacy of the postmodern if it is to survive and continue to augment the traditional aim of fiction: that being to aid humanity in appreciation and understanding of itself. Whether as a true reflection, or a warped mirror, metafiction is the tool to aid fiction in this function, and deserves more recognition than merely ‘a poignant hybrid of its own theoretical foe, realism.’ After all, metafiction is still, and always has been, fiction. I end with the wise words of William Beulow Gould, narrator of Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish*, whose sentiments, I hope, are taken up by metafictional artists for years to come:

To make a book, even one so inadequate as this wretched copy you now read, is to learn that the only appropriate feeling to those who live within its pages is love.

Perhaps reading and writing books is one of the last defences human dignity has left, because in the end they remind us of what God once reminded us before He too evaporated in this age of relentless humiliations – That we are more than ourselves; that we have souls.[[741]](#footnote-741)

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NOTE ON THE AFTERWORD

DR WADE J. ARAPAIMA

Southward’s conception of ‘sacrifiction’ – self-aware and self-correcting metafiction for the metamodern era – never truly saw significant artistic recognition during his time, in part due to the tyrannical reign instituted by the man himself and the subsequent loss of the original *The Book of Levi* manuscript. It does, however, perhaps deserve attention now that we have moved beyond the limitations and terror of such a reign, signposting as it does a hitherto unrecognised side of Southward as literary artist and social critic. To that end, my fellow colleague Arcot Clerval Osbeorn attempted to formulate an argument for *The Book of Levi* as a significant literary work whose publication could have instigated a discussion of the merits of the oft maligned metafictional form in the new metamodern period. Unfortunately, Osbeorn never finished his afterword, disappearing before the publication of this manuscript, which I found hidden in the recesses of a disused fireplace in his old family estate. The afterword Osbeorn had scrawled was something of a disaster, truth be told, shambolic and frequently falling into the kinds of prosaic nonsense which one may see scribbled in the footnotes of the essays produced above (as I sign of my esteem and admiration for my colleague, I have included these footnotes, only to preserve the specific eccentricities of the man and that the reader may see him in the same light as I so often did). In deference to the poor critic’s last wishes, I have here reconstructed and reproduced his argument, necessarily augmenting it somewhat only where needs be, that the reader may get the general gist of his (believable or not) argument.

To my dear, revered Osbeorn, may this afterword serve as the capstone of your lengthy career and reputation. The better man, as you so rightly asserted at the offset, has surely won.

W.J.A

AFTERWORD

DR ARCOT C. OSBEORN

Sacrifiction, so the bygone tyrant named his fictional form. Metafiction which takes itself as source of parody and generic play, pastiching and subverting the conventions of the self in order that atrophied limbs, putrid flesh, may be severed from the body – the corruption removed that the organism as a whole may thrive and survive. Sacrifiction was never formally recognised in Southward’s time, much to the chagrin of such critics as myself, yet it still seems that the great tyrant himself produced a literary example of the practice; as Poe’s *The Raven* is to *The Philosophy of Composition,* so too is Southward’s *The Book of Levi* to *The Dark History of the Novel.* The intellectual critic, of broad and sound mind, should realise the inherent value in this early Southwardian novel, though I wish to take some time following my initial reading of both *The Book of Levi* and the accompanying essays, to broadly explore the ways in which Southward attempts to flesh out his formulated ‘sacrifiction,’ alongside his thoughts on the state of the post-postmodern period.

Southward’s text is rife with postmodern elements, yet often explored in a manner inconsistent with the apparent intent of original postmodern paradigms. Of course, the most prominent, and obvious, technique is that of postmodern fragmentation, evidenced particularly in the Daniel narrative’s broken, uneven and typographically unique pages. Within the Levi narrative, such fragmentation finds expression in the generic shifts between prose and script form, alongside the more fragmentary end sections wherein Levi finds himself seemingly transported from location to location. So-far-so-postmodern, true, but their effects differ from the standard practices of the postmodern in terms of desired effect. We shall looki first, then, at the Daniel narrative, in which a fictional version of a young Southward slowly comes to terms with his own status as fictional construct written exclusively for the purpose of authorial catharsis. Southward famously retold the factual events which inspired this story at his inauguration, in which a pair of drunken youths failed to stop their car when approaching a T-junction and collided with another car coming the other way, a car containing the majority of Southward’s nuclear family. Here, this story is transposed onto another fictional narrative, though a self-aware one which actively resists Southward’s historiographic attempts; Daniel struggles throughout his narrative with the attempts of the apparent author to transpose a separate, terrible reality upon him. Daniel, it is clear, is to become a fictional prison for this version of events – the ‘D’ locked into the infinite mirrors of Daniel, the worst possible reality in which the outcome of this true crash was the direst. This narrative, with its constant lapses into different genres, palimpsestual nature, and typographical experimentation, appears as a distinctly postmodern narrative – foregrounding the surface of the fiction, the nature of the fictional as constructed and depthless. Yet, there is something seemingly sincere in Southward’s intent here. Affecting a particularly post-postmodern stance, the text utilises these postmodern techniques to first foreground a kind of postmodern depthless narcissism, before shattering this in the final moments of the text and Daniel’s acceptance of his fictional fate as sacrificial Southward in a moment seemingly ripped from the final pages of a Vonnegut novel. Such a move, too, speaks of Southward’s perceived notion of a dystopian resignation, in which the individual realises the seemingly inevitable trend of their world towards a negative-envisioned future. Daniel becomes aware that his end is upon him, that there is no happy ending for him, yet finds purpose and meaning in his unavoidable fate.

Within the Levi narrative we too find this form of dystopian resignation, though again it emerges as more of a resignation of fate. Levi, ultimately, recognises that he is doomed to repeat his mistakes with each reading of the text, never to progress or change the awful fate of his family. Levi’s narrative sees many such postmodern techniques paraded to the potential reader as standard practice before an eventual subversion into a more post-postmodern register. Rather than any one specific technique, the entire of the Levi narrative, the over-arching purpose behind the fiction, is that of a post-postmodern push; in a move similar to how Southward describes *Lunar Park*, Levi’s narrative is one of postmodern exhaustion, in which the techniques, tropes, and ideological experiments of the postmodern are shown to be outdated, or unable to entirely (or indeed even partially) resolve the issues of the individual. Levi is an archetypical postmodern hero – in some manner self-aware, fiction orientated, self-obsessed, perhaps mad, irreverent in his actions at points and able to manipulate his own narrative, or at least attempt to do so. Yet, ultimately, it is his postmodern choices and experiences which are revealed as the key to his downfall, with the final disclosures of the text revealing that his life is a fictional lesson, an attempt by the author to demonstrate the need to move beyond the postmodern.

Of course, the post-postmodern drive in *The Book of Levi* not only defames and transcends the postmodern practice, in Levi and Daniel’s narratives respectively, but also evidences a more metamodern sensibility. Primarily, one sees the metamodern influence in the oscillatory nature of both narratives. Daniel’s swings between postmodern genre parody and modernist subversion of traditions, while Levi’s oscillates between typical postmodern conventions and modernist sincerity of intent. In truth, it seems this latter point, the sincerity of intent, which demarks *TBoL* as a specifically metamodern text. Both narratives are designed with a sincere post-postmodern push, an authorial clarity of intention that transcends the desire for surface while acknowledging it, an oscillation that suggests a depthiness of the novel as a whole; purely surface, fictional, as the characters are, there is a seeming purpose behind the action which begs an emotional response from the reader. In the Daniel narrative it is his self-sacrifice which seems metamodern in its sincerity, knowing that the sacrifice is meaningless and fictional, but believing in it nonetheless and forging ahead. The Levi narrative, meanwhile, seems at first to deny the metamodern sincerity – a flippant, if melodramatic, postmodern narrative in which Levi must discover his author or destroy his character, yet we soon move beyond this, with Levi’s narrative turning into a dark look at the problems of the postmodern, showcasing a sincere desire to transcend that evidently malign societal structure of feeling.

Of course there is something of the metamodern New Sisyphism, as proposed by Southward, about these narratives: two characters, each doomed to repeat their lives endlessly in an infinite (jest) loop, rolling their respective rocks of their hills only to see them roll once more to the bottom. Both Levi and Daniel, ultimately, accept the absurdity of their roles as fictional straw men, in line with Southward’s Sisyphean model, attempting to find meaning from within the mundane. Notably only Daniel, the character who *transcends* the postmodern rather than *epitomises* it, is able to fully grasp the absurdity of his existence in time to gain some form of depth of connection over inherent meaning. Indeed, Daniel seems to readily accept the meaninglessness of his existence as a whole, if doing so should form a deeper personal connection with the multitude of selves that emerge in both the generic narratives and within the repeated infinite mirror image. Levi, meanwhile, is mired in the narcissism of the search for self-meaning, unable to attain Camus’ moment of reflection between the heights and depths of the Absurd negation of the everyday. Levi still searches for an individual purpose as tied to a grander scheme, the, albeit correct, belief in a pseudo-God like figure able to control his actions and environments. His quest to understand this figure, whom he believes to be the architect of his own destruction, denies him the same Sisyphean transcendence achieved by the protagonist of the Daniel narrative.

Finally, Sacrifiction. Destined to go forgotten in the annals of literary historical research, yet an interesting concept nonetheless. Metafiction, Southward posits, had by the beginning of the 21st century reached a point in which it had become so ubiquitous as to have accumulated a series of tropes and pseudo-genre expectations. These tropes often tied the metafictional form to the bloated, rotting carcass of the postmodern, and it was these ties that Southward sought to severe with the Sacrifictional text, *The Book of Levi*.

In terms of the primary Levi narrative, Southward takes several key metafictional techniques as the basis for subversion and parodies them through absurd repetition and representation. The author-as-character trope, seen in such earlier metafictions as *The Mist* and *Slaughterhouse Five*, is taken to an extreme in Levi’s narrative, as he is shown to believe himself the author of the apparent author of his own life’s story; Levi believes that *The Book of Levi*, as he finds it, is written by his inchoate fictional character, Daniel Southward. Levi believes that the very author of the text the reader holds (and by extension their inhabited ontological level) is a fictional construct. Of course, this metafictional technique is further complicated and compounded by the brother-narrative, in which a fictional Daniel Southward too believes himself to be the author of *The Book of Levi*, though Levi’s influence is noticeably lesser in this narrative. This labyrinthine author-character dichotomy becomes further complicated by the inclusion of a prefix-narrative to the Levi narrative, in which a young house keeper named Meghan hosts a writing competition between two brothers, with the texts they produce bearing strange similarities to the two main narratives which book-end the Meghan sections.

All this, of course, serves to complicate the authorial nature of the text. The question constantly pervades of who is writing whom, playing with the metafictional authorial conventions in a manner that suggests a distinct metaleptical blurring between the ontological levels of the Levi narrative, Daniel narrative, Meghan narrative, and that of the reader themselves. Ultimately, Southward’s text does not take what could be argued to be the postmodern stance of refusing to answer such a question, revelling in the ambiguity, but instead takes a hard swerve into the definitive by having his fictional characters reveal their knowledge of Southward himself, the true author of all narratives. In such a manner, the text demonstrates a rather metamodern sensibility, foregrounding the author himself from within the postmodern tradition in an attempt to emotionally engage the potential reader. Breaking the barrier between author and reader in order to draw them closer together. Thematically, this is also served by the emergence of something approaching a mono-myth that becomes increasingly present within the text, that of Daniel and Levi, the latter often dying while the former laments. In the Daniel narrative proper, Levi, his brother, has died in the initial crash, while in the genre sections he appears in spectral, unseen, or suspicious forms, a role that sees a reversal in the Levi narrative. The monomyth seems to be of an individual controlled by a missing other, a haunting intrusive figure who, though often physically inaccessible, nonetheless commands the individual irrefutably in some manner, yet who brings only pain to their life. *The Book of Levi* is then, in its very essence, a ghost story. A ghost story, though, in which the haunted individual cannot, or will not, comprehend the figure beyond death which compels them to question their own existential nature. A ghost story hidden within a myriad and multitude of genres. A ghost story with no true ghosts. A truly metafictional undertaking.

*The Book of Levi* also contains two examples of texts within Southward’s continuum of metafiction, though not necessarily the extremes by which the continuum is defined. Closer in scope to the Burlesque, we have the Levi narrative, with its flaunting of convention for the sake of parody and play, though always with a metamodern oscillation back to modernist sincerity of experimentation. While, conversely, The Daniel narrative falls closer to the Romantic extreme along the continuum, delivering metafictional tropes and techniques in an effort to engage the reader emotionally with the authorial intent, and again oscillating in that oh-so metamodern fashion between this attempt and postmodern typographical and formal disruption. Southward’s own admission that we, as readers and writers, should ‘abandon the dancers’ is clearly represented through the less than satisfactory ending, for the protagonist to say nothing of the reader, of the Levi narrative in which this more postmodern style of fiction is seen as inadequate, as leading only inward to itself repeatedly, though there is a small hint of a more romantic metafictional motif in the assumed allegorical nature of Levi’s cyclical existence. The lesson being, naturally enough, that this state of affairs leads us nowhere, while the more romantic metafiction of the Daniel narrative resolves with peace and catharsis, with personal purpose and the realization of the Sisyphean ideal: meaning in an Absurd universe.

In closing, I think most of this sisyphism in particular. Southward’s text and his analytical essays are defined by their desire for meaning beyond the everyday, while always mitigated by the knowledge that the universe is essentially absurd. In Southward’s writing there is no grand purpose to existence defined by some benevolent figure or force, rather meaning and purpose are created and formed individually in the interpersonal relations one weaves around oneself. That close comfort blanket of comrades who keep one sane when times become rough, and whom one may rely on to re-form the piecemeal collection of shattered shards of ego after such calamities befall us far too often in this vast, indifferent universe. His creative writing seeks to outline the problem and explore it, while his critical theorems seek to give definition and guidance in a world seemingly without end, even after the great disasters that are sure to come.

When I originally found these papers, Southward’s documents and his novel, there was also included a dog-eared and clearly much beloved hand-written sheet of paper along which Southward seemed to have reproduced a lengthy speech. The passage is from a pre-Southwardian film, records of which no longer exist, but which seems to have been important to the tyrant in some manner. One must imagine Southward glad whilst reading these words for him to have included them with these documents, though I daresay a gladness tempered by the repetition of the issues raised within both the speech and his own writings (just under eighty years later). An oddity, truly, given the terrors to come shortly after, but I include it here in the hope that it may affect you, dear reader, as it so dearly, and clearly, affected that once young, once naïve, man, who must have cherished these words, once, in happier days.

One must imagine Southward happy.

ARCOT C. OSBEORN

EPILOGUE

NOTE FOUND WITHIN THE ARCHIVE

I’m sorry, but I don’t want to be an emperor. That’s not my business. I don’t want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone, if possible: Jew, gentile, black man, white. We all want to help one another; human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness not by each other’s misery. We don’t want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone and the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way. Greed has poisoned men’s souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.

The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men, cries out for universal brotherhood, for the unity of us all. Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world. Millions of despairing men, women, and little children. Victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people. To those who can hear me I say do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish.

Soldiers! don’t give yourselves to brutes! Men who despise you, enslave you. Who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder! Don’t give yourselves to these unnatural men! Machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don’t hate – only the unloved hate. The unloved and the unnatural.

Soldiers! Don’t fight for slavery! Fight for liberty! In the 17th Chapter of St Luke it is written ‘the Kingdom of God is within man,’ not one man, nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people, have the power. The power to create machines. The power to create happiness. You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure. Then in the name of democracy let us use that power, let us all unite! Let us fight for a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future, and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfil that promise. They never will! Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people! Now let us fight to fulfil that promise! Let us fight to free the world, to do away with national barriers, to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men’s happiness.

Soldiers! In the name of democracy, let us all unite!

*The Great Dictator (1940)*

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1. For more, see any of K. Foefield’s essays on the terrible acts perpetrated by this truly despicable human: *Why we no longer read: Southward’s literary ruination, Tabula Southwardsa; the new literary landscape of death,* or even *Pregnant to a Monster; the husband who burnt all the books.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics Of Postmodernism*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hutcheon, *The Politics Of Postmodernism*, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hutcheon, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. X. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. David Ciccoricco, ‘What [in the World] Was Postmodernism? An Introduction’, *Electronic Book Review*, 2016 <http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/what> [accessed 7 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Brian McHale, ‘What Was Postmodernism’, *Electronic Book Review*, 2007 <http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/fictionspresent/tense> [accessed 6 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alan Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’, *Philosophy Now*, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Edward Rothstein, ‘CONNECTIONS; Attacks on U.S Challenge the Perspectives of Postmodern True Believers’, *The New York Times*, 2001 <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/22/arts/connections-attacks-us-challenge-perspectives-postmodern-true-believers.html> [accessed 23 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hirschorn, ‘Irony, The End of’, *NYMag.com*, 2011 <http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/irony/> [accessed 21 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. William Zinsser, ‘Goodbye and Don’t Come Back’, *The American Scholar*, 2011 <https://theamericanscholar.org/goodbye-and-dont-come-back/#> [accessed 21 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Blog Post on “Authenticity?” Ed. Cuero & Hendrinks’, *timotheusvermeulen.com*, 2017 <http://timotheusvermeulen.com/> [accessed 1 January 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2 (2010), 1–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. David Foster Wallace, ‘E. Unibus Plurum’, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13 (1993), 151–194 (p. 183). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Josh Toth, *The Passing of Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Toth, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *ACO: Among the notes I found within Eyestan’s stash was that small heavily stylised bas-relief sculpture of the novel – with the urinal and pipe merging on the cover. The Sculptor, the reader may be interested to know, Southward apparently discovered to be none other than a Scottish literature student named Robert ES Colwan – a distant relation to Southward himself.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Raoul Eshelman, ‘What Is Performatism’, *Performatism.de*, 2015 <http://www.performatism.de/What-is-Performatism> [accessed 22 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Oasis, *Oasis “Star” Cinema Advert* (advertised in British cinema) (September 2015) < <https://www.adforum.com/creative-work/ad/player/34526617/oasis-star-cinema-advert/oasis>> [Accessed 23 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See 20th Century Fox, *Victor Frankenstein “Don’t Skip” Ad Compilation* (YouTube advert series) (November 2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz7HvC-ZTIE> [accessed 21/1-/2017] for one set of examples among many. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Toth, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Mikhail Epstein, ‘The Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity’, in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. by Thomas Epstein, trans. by Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard, eds., *Twenty-First Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In a move, it must be said, that mirrors the manner in which postmodernism itself was spawned as a reaction to other disasters – war, genocide, nuclear threat etc. The cycle continues and history repeats, with each fresh disaster that occurs producing significant shifts in ideological movements across cultures. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Peter Yoonsuk Paik, *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Luke Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2015 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/> [accessed 2 June 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’ [Addendum: at least in the eyes of Kirby]. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Adiseshiah and Hildyard, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lee Konstantinou, ‘Periodizing the Present’, *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 411–423 (p. 413). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle The Postmodern And Reconfigure Our Culture* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2009), p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Angela Watercutter, ‘Sincerely Ours: Glee’s Success Cements Age of Geeky “New Sincerity”’, *WIRED*, 2010 <www.wired.com/2010/09/new-sincerity> [accessed 25 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Kate X Messer, ‘Okkervil River, The New Sincerity’, *The Austin Chronicle* (Austin, 2000) <https://austinchronicle.com/msuic/2000-03-03/76071> [accessed 25 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Watercutter. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. George Chesterton, ‘How Ed Sheeran Became The Biggest Male Popstar on the Planet’, *GQ Magazine*, 2017 <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/ed-sheeran-new-album-divide> [accessed 23 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Perhaps not an overtly postmodern writer, it may be argued, but certainly intertextual in his use of Irish and Folk tales and tropes, to say the least. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Jonathan D. Fitzgerald, ‘Sincerity, Not Irony, Is Our Age’s Ethos’, *The Atlantic*, 2012 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/11/sincerity-not-irony-is-our-ages-ethos/265466/> [accessed 9 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. McHale, ‘What Was Postmodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ciccoricco. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. What happens now, it turns out, has been rather a free-for-all. At the wake of postmodernism, standing perhaps over the coffin, a large selection of critics sighed heavily with relief and swore that this time things would be different. No loose definitions, no airy fractured parodies, no vague suspicion of narratives. No, this time, just pure, clear Post-Pomo! Then, another voice- No, I think you’ll find it’s Pseudo-modernism. Another- No, Metamodernism. No, Neo-modernism. Then, an awful and terribly awkward silence before a fight broke out. *ACO: An interesting footnote, and one which reminds me of my fellow colleague W.J.Arapaima, who has gained a distinct reputation as somewhat of a pugilist at academic conferences, defending his theories with a bit too much vehemence, once could easily argue. Of course, Arapaima has also published some small materials on the Southwardian legacy, some even with some small merit to them. The reader is invited to research such at their own leisure.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Alan Kirby, ‘Successor States to an Empire in Free Fall’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (London, 27 May 2010), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘That is the true joy of altermodernity: the rebirth of the avant garde.’ Jonathan Jones, ‘This Altermodern Love’, *The Guardian*, 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2009/apr/08/altermodernism-nicolas-bourriaud> [accessed 10 September 2017]. “ [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mark Amerika and Lance Olsen, ‘An Introduction, of Sorts’, in *In Memoriam to Postmodernism: Essays on the Avant-Pop*, ed. by Mark Amerika and Lance Olsen (San Diego: San Diego University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ron Sukenick, ‘aVANT-pOP, sUR-fICTION, hYPER-fICTION’, in *In Memoriam to Postmodernism: Essays on the Avant-Pop*, ed. by Mark Amerika and Lance Olsen (San Diego: San Diego University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Brian McHale, ‘Interregnum, 1989-2001’, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 123–170 (p. 135). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Stephen J. Burn, ‘Second Generation Postmoderns’, in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 450–464 (p. 452). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘It’s not a sexy title, but these aren’t pretty times.’ Kyle Roberts, ‘We Are Witnessing the End of Postmodernism and the Beginning of Post-Postmodernism’, *Patheos*, 2016 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unsystematictheology/2016/07/we-are-witnessing-the-end-of-postmodernism-and-the-beginning-of-post-postmodernism/> [accessed 25 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Nealon, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ulrich Beck and Johannes Wiilms, ‘Conversation 1: Postmodernity or Second Modernity?’, in *Conversations with Ulrich Beck*, trans. by Michael Pollak (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ulrich Beck, ‘Varieties of Second Modernity and the Cosmopolitan Vision’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33 (2016), 257–270 (p. 262). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Beck and Wiilms, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Timo Harrikari, Pirkko-Liisa Rauhala and Elina Virokannas, ‘Social Theory and the Second Modernity’, in *Social Change and Social Work*, ed. by Timo Harrikari, Pirkko-Liisa Rauhala, and Elina Virokannas (Oxon: Routledge, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Giles Lipovetsky, ‘Time Against Time, or The Hypermodern Society’, in *Supplanting the Postmodern*, ed. by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), pp. 156–171 (p. 157). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Lipovetsky, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *ACO: One individual with a clear ’excess of self’ is the aforementioned Robert ES Colwan, as is clear from Southward’s notes. The literature student Robert ES Colwan, as Southward interviewed him, divulged that his statue was part of a series produced in some form of mania in 2011. This series, it seems, was based on a delirious series of dreams of a great non-euclidian city ringed by a vast archipelago of islands, that rose like the ragged teeth of a terrible maw from shadowy waters. Southward’s notes from various interviews in what must have been an extended series of interview make frequent references to an Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh resting in D’Rearj, names that caused young Colwan considerable angst by the looks of things. Interestingly, Southward never makes the connection this has to the world-wide mass hysteria of both academics and literary types in the same year that Colwan had his dreams, records of which still remain to this day. Strange that this is not the first reference to D’Rearj I have ever seen, though your usually fastidious editor regrets to inform you that he cannot remember where it was, unfortunately.* [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Billy Childish and Charles Thomson, ‘Remodernism’, *stuckism.com*, 2000 <http://www.stuckism.com/remod.html> [accessed 6 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Childish and Thomson. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Mark D, ‘Mark D’, *stuckism.com*, 2011 <http://www.stuckism.com/MarkD/IndexText.html> [accessed 1 January 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Mark Givens, ‘Remodernism: Inspiration and Honesty in Art. An Interview with Matt Bray’, *Mungbeing*, 2008 <http://www.mungbeing.com/issue\_22.html?page=40#1733> [accessed 6 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Givens. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Childish and Thomson. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Rayond L.M. Lee, ‘Bauman, Liquid Modernity and Dilemmas of Development’, *Thesis Eleven*, 83 (2005), 61–77 (p. 63). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Zygmunt Bauman and Lukasz Galecki, ‘The Unwinnable War: An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman’, *openDemocracy*, 2005 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-vision\_reflections/modernity\_3082.jsp> [accessed 15 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Dolan Cummings, ‘The Trouble with Being Human These Days: Identity by Zygmunt Bauman’, *Culture Wars*, 2004 <www.culturewars.org.uk/2004-02/identity.htm> [accessed 15 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Altermodernism was argued to be evident mostly in the works showcased at its unveiling at the Tate Triennial, suggesting less of a grand era-defining announcement and more a showcase of art which is vaguely tied by a restrictive, rather than ubiquitous, ideology: ‘But Altermodern is also hugely selective in the art it showcases, in the history it writes. For a theory that spurns boundaries, Bourriaud's seems strangely boundaried.’ Charles Darwent, ‘Altermodern: Tate Triennial, Tate Britain, London’, *The Independent*, 2009 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/altermodern-tate-triennial-tate-britain-london-1603717.html> [accessed 15 August 2017].

    ‘Is the term a useful, coherent and critically productive way of describing some new ‘direction’ in modern art, or – worst case scenario – is the work selected only for its ability to serve or illustrate the concept?’ Nickolas Lambrianou, ‘Altermodern - Moverment or Marketing?’, *Mute*, 2009 <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/altermodern-movement-or-marketing> [accessed 10 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ernesto Menendez-Conde, ‘Altermodern?’, *Artpulse*, 2009 <http://artpulsemagazine.com/altermodern> [accessed 15 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Nicolas Bourriaud, ‘Altermodern Explained: Manifesto’, *Tate*, 2009 <www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/explain-altermodern/altermodern-explained-manifesto> [accessed 4 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Christian Moraru, ‘Postmodernism, Cosmodernism, Planetarism’, in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 480–496 (p. 488). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. ‘One of the most striking features of Moraru's inauguration of cosmodernism is the degree to which the phenomenon and experience of the United States serves as a template for recent developments manifestly "beyond (any and all) frontiers" and quintessentially of an off-shore nature’, Henry Sussman, ‘Review by Henry Sussman’, *MLN*, 128 (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Damjana Mraovic-O’Hare, ‘Moraru’s Cosmodernism’, *Postmodern Culture*, 22 (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Moraru, p. 492. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Mraovic-O’Hare. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Eshelman, ‘What Is Performatism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Eshelman, ‘What Is Performatism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Audrey Seah, ‘Theological Aesthetics and Performatism in the Aestheticization of the Roman Catholic Liturgy’, *Obsculta*, 5 (2014), 16–22 (p. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Raoul Eshelman, ‘Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism’, *Anthropoetics*, 6 (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Honourable mentions go to Transmodernism, Neomodernism, Light Modernity, Post-Mortemism [if only for the pun], Para-Modernism, and Planetarism, all of which have thus far less impact than the ‘major’ theories presented above. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Robert Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 132. [*My Emphasis*] [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Robert Samuels, ‘Auto-Modernity after Postmodernism: Autonomy and Automation in Culture, Technology, and Education’, in *Digital Youth, Innovation, and the Unexpected*, ed. by Tara McPherson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), pp. 219–240 (p. 234). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Adina Baya, ‘Post-Postmodernism: Automodernity and Its Relevance to Understanding Contemporary Media Audiences’, *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 71 (2013), 154–159 (p. 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Kirby, ‘Successor States to an Empire in Free Fall’. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Catriona Bonfiglioli, ‘Digimodernism, Review’, *Discourse & Communication*, 7 (2013), 248–251 (p. 248). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Kirby, ‘Successor States to an Empire in Free Fall’. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Alison Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?’, *TLS Online*, 2017 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/> [accessed 24 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *ACO: How prescient these words seem now. Did Southward foresee the end he was to cause, or merely predict the cataclysm to come without realising his role in such? For more on this, see my own ‘Southward Vs Cassandra: Prophecy and rejection in the latter works of our adored tyrant.’ (Forthcoming)* [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. McHale, ‘What Was Postmodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. An interesting side note is the slow degeneration across the seasons of the Candy Kingdom from a peaceful and seemingly eutopian (if not utopian) land, to a totalitarian state run by the tyrannical mad scientist Princess Bubblegum, who experiments on the citizens at various points in order to protect them from themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. ‘Samurai Jack’ (United States: Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2001) Main title theme by Will Adams and George Pajon, Jr., Aku voiced by Mako. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *ACO: This phrase actually echoes that of the Ethno-Archaeological Society of Idaho’s latin motto, which translates to “The past is no protection from the future.” Strangely, Southward seems to have had something of an obsession with archaeology at this point in his career – the notes I found within my great-grand uncle Leigh V Eyestan’s secret cache include, strangely, a meeting this society in 2002, including the translated motto above. Cobbling together the rather ad-hoc series of notes and scrawlings Southward collected on this meeting (his handwriting is a terrible thing to behold in and of itself), shows a seeming obsession with one London, as it was then known, born venture capitalist – William Allan. I have found no other records of this remarkable sounding man, however.* [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. ‘Captain Planet and the Planeteers’ (United States: Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 1990) Main Title and Score by Tom Worrall. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Jill Lepore, ‘A Golden Age For Dystopian Fiction.’, *The New Yorker*, 2017 <www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/a-golden-age-for-dystopian-fiction> [accessed 27 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Lepore. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Charley Locke, ‘The Real Reason Dystopian Fiction Is Roaring Back’, *WIRED*, 2017 <https://www.wired.com/2017/02/dystopian-fiction-why-we-read> [accessed 28 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. There are, of course, outliers to this growing trend – *Reign of fire, Wall-E, Equilibrium, Thundarr the Barbarian* to name but a few– But these are merely continuations of past modes of thought, clearly there is a *growing* concern with the issues outlined here, though it is not a dominating certainty of all cultural output. Yet. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Andrew Hoberek, ‘Epilogue: 2001, 2008, and after’, in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 497–514 (pp. 508–9). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Though such worries do seem eternal to the human condition, one could argue. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Yoonsuk Paik. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Sebastien Charles, ‘For a Humanism Amid Hypermodernity: From a Soceity of Knowledge to a Critical Knowledge of Society’, *Axiomathes*, 2009, 389–400 (pp. 394–5). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Charles, pp. 394–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Charles, pp. 394–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Lepore. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Lepore. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Charles, pp. 394–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. While Torralba ascribes these features to Hypermodernity, the analysis does still form a significant overall examination of contemporary society, hypermodern or otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Francesc Torralba, ‘The Essence and Forms of Fear in Hypermodernity’, *Transfer: Journal of Contemporary Culture*, 6 (2011), 56–67 (p. 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Charles, p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Stuart Jeffries, ‘Risky Business’, *The Guardian*, 2006 <www.theguardian.com/books/2006/feb/11/society.politics> [accessed 21 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Baya, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Climate change deniers and the capitalist-rich may have differing opinions, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Lipovetsky, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Bauman and Galecki. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Bauman and Galecki. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ulrich Beck, ‘Varieties of Second Modernity and the Cosmopolitan Vision’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33 (2016), 257–270 (p. 262). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, ‘Varieties of Second Modernity: The Cosmopolitan Turn in Social and Political Theory and Research’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 61 (2010), 409–443. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Beck and Grande. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Anand Giridharadas, ‘Millennials, Government and Mistrust’, The New York Times, 2014 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/22/us/millennials-government-and-mistrust.html?mcubz=3> [accessed 29 September 2017]. &

     C.K, ‘Why America Has a Trust Problem’, The Economist, 2017 <https://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2017/04/verify-then-trust> [accessed 29 September 2017], respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The elderly, the young, the homeless and soon-to-be-deported. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See: Captain America directing the police of New York during the alien invasion sequence of *The Avengers* (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Bauman and Galecki. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. A contestable phrase. Almost nothing of cultural value devalues all previous attempts by artists attempting to break free of the yoke of the postmodern. New ideas continue to be generated, technology does continue to advance for the better – see recent advancements in CAR T-cell therapy, described as ‘the first treatment to truly turn the tables on recurrent pediatric acute lymphoblastic leukemia, one of the most common cancers in children.’ John Heymach and Lada Krilov, *Clinical Cancer Advances 2018: Annual Report on Progress Against Cancer*, *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 2017 <https://www.asco.org/research-progress/reports-studies/clinical-cancer-advances-2018>. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Charles, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2nd edn (Malden: Polity Press, 2012), pp. iix–ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Cummings. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Lipovetsky, p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Baya, p. 158. Note: Not necessarily a change for the positive here, but a reaction to globalisation and standardization that have come to oppress, *(ACO: as will be discussed in the chapters to come.)* Automodernity also, rather depressingly, describes the contemporary backlash against minority rights (p. 67), and while we can increasingly see such a backlash in reports of Trump’s America, one would hope that such rampant racism does *not* come to define the next epoch. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Laura Cumming, ‘The World as a Waste of Space’, *The Guardian*, 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/08/altermodern-tate-britain-triennial-2009> [accessed 15 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. *ACO: Archaic categories now – the ‘U.S’ was the United States of America, now the Western Dandom, while the U.K (United Kingdom) is Pax Dandom as we know it today. Interesting that all it took to unite these separate, yet somehow ‘united’ governments was terror. Dylan Juthapsa makes just such an argument in North West East, Never Southward, a text which I’m sure the reader will be familiar. See also Juthapsa’s How Series (How I learned to Love Southward, How Southward Made Me Mate Me,and the critically acclaimed pseudo-historiographic novel Howe yonder Southward Wynds Blew Stronge Iynto Mine Heart.)* [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. I refer to the United Kingdom referendum of the 23rd of June 2016, the United Kingdom General Election of June 8th 2017, and the U.S Presidential Election 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Luke Smythe, ‘Modernism Post-Postmodernism: Art in the Era of Light Modernity’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 22 (2015), 365–79 (p. 366). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Smythe, p. 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. *ACO: Expanded upon in chapter 2: Southward vs Sincerity* [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Bauman and Galecki. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Raymond Federman, ‘Avant-Pop: You’re Kidding, Or, The Real Begins Where The Spectacle End’, in *In Memoriam to Postmodernism: Essays on the Avant-Pop*, ed. by Mark Amerika and Lance Olsen (San Diego: San Diego University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Christian Moraru, ‘Postmodernism, Cosmodernism, Planetarism’, in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 480–496 (p. 483). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Bartholemew Ryan, ‘Altermodern: A Conversation with Nicolas Bourriaud’, *Art in America*, 2009 <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/altermodern-a-conversation-with-nicolas-bourriaud/> [accessed 15 August 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Alec Abercrombie, ‘The Altermodern’, *A-Lab*, 2011 <http://cargocollective.com/alab/The-Altermodern> [accessed 10 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Beck and Wiilms, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Beck and Wiilms, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Lipovetsky, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Francesc Torralba, ‘The Essence and Forms of Fear in Hypermodernity’, *Transfer: Journal of Contemporary Culture*, 6 (2011), 56–67 (pp. 60–1) Original emphasis in bold. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Lipovetsky, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Eshelman, ‘Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Seah, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Jason Morris, ‘The Time Between Time: Messianism & The Promise of a “New Sincerity”’, *Jacket Magezine*, 35 (2008) <http://jacketmagazine.com/35/morris-sincerity.shtml> [accessed 9 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Hard-Boiled Wonderland, Blue Velvet and the End of Postmodernism’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2010 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2010/09/23/hard-boiled-wonderland-from-pomo-to-metamo> [accessed 14 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Jesse Thorn, ‘A Manifesto for The New Sincerity’, *MaximumFun*, 2006 <http://www.maximumfun.org/blog/2006/02/manifesto-for-new-sincerity.html> [accessed 9 June 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Fitzgerald. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Fitzgerald. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. *ACO: William Allan, the venture capitalist mentioned in Southward’s notes, was not a member of the ethno-archaeological society, but rather described as a ‘sincere-seeming visitor’ in the records.* [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Jonathan Sturgeon, ‘2014: The Death of the Postmodern Novel and the Rise of Autofiction’, *Flavorwire*, 2014 <http://flavorwire.com/496570/2014-the-death-of-the-postmodern-novel-and-the-rise-of-autofiction> [accessed 2 June 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. *ACO: The reader should note that W.J. Arapaima has published on nostalgia for the Southwardian era under the (justifiably maligned) title of ‘Who Cares Anymore? Can we move on?’ Justify, 2152* [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, ‘Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue’, *Poligrafías*, 3 (1998), 18–41 (p. 18). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Simon Goldhill, ‘Look Back with Danger’, *TLS Online*, 2017 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/look-back-with-danger/> [accessed 9 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Lipovetsky, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Lipovetsky, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris, ‘Hypermodernism’, in *Supplanting the Postmodern*, ed. by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), pp. 153–155 (p. 154). [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Hutcheon and Valdés, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Dani Di Placido, ‘2016: The Year We Hit Peak Nostalgia’, *Forbes*, 2016 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2016/12/30/2016-the-year-of-nostalgia/#66949fb97aec> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Carmen Beer, ‘Nostalgia’s Comfort Is Shaping Contemporary Culture’, *Lens*, 2017 <http://flamingogroup.com/nostalgias-comfort-is-shaping-contemporary-culture> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Dungeon Synth deserves a significant study to itself, evoking as it does an imagined fantastic past that has never existed. As Sam Sutherland, host of *This Exists*, explains: “Dungeon Synth is not traditionally nostalgic, backwards looking, no doubt, but to a time that never existed when none of were ever alive. It leaves room for the listener to imagine their own alternate worlds and history, setting the table for a unique and personal interpretation of each and every gloomy sustained note.” – Sutherland, Sam, *Castle Creeps: A Dungeon Synth Primer* [Youtube Video], 20th April 2017 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V5k3EQ1xHA>> [Accessed 10th October 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Mark Fisher, in Polly Evans, ‘Is Electronic Music a Threat to Culture’, *Varsity*, 2017 <https://www.varsity.co.uk/science/11929> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Goldhill. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Hutcheon and Valdés, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Di Placido. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. *ACO: I remember a time when I did not dream of yellow eyes.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Hutcheon and Valdés, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Beer. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Beer. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Goldhill. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Stewart, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Stewart, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Goldhill. *My emphasis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. *ACO: Southward’s childhood is an interesting research topic in and of itself. I do not have the space, nor the energy, to recount much here, but do look up Rothman Shortholme’s’ Why We Need To Start Beating Kids Again’ for a fantastic post-Southwardian argument that, if only for a bit more savagery on the part of his father, Southward may have never come to do the terrible deeds he did. Rather an acerbic title, mind you, but Shortholme was reportedly visiting Scotland when the great Nova-Nova-Scotish-Scott bombs were released, poor fellow.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Jonathan Sturgeon, ‘Why Grow Up? Philosophy for a Generation of Adult Infants’, *Flavorwire*, 2015 <http://flavorwire.com/518420/why-grow-up-philosophy-for-a-generation-of-adult-infants> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Kit Wilson, ‘Sentimental Nihilism and Popular Culture’, *Standpoint.*, 2015 <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/6136/full> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Wilson. To this list we may also add the ridiculously named recent carboot-style-app ‘Shpock.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Diana West in Jamie Glazov, ‘The Death of the Grown-Up’, *OrthodoxyToday*, 2007 <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles7/GlazovGrownup.php> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Glazov. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Erick da Silva, ‘The Infantilization of Society and the Cult of Youth’, *The Ivory Tower*, 2015 <http://the-ivory-tower.com/the-infantilization-of-society-and-the-cult-of-youth/> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Lisa Wade, ‘Power, Mickey Mouse, and the Infantilization of Women’, *The Society Pages*, 2013 <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/08/08/power-mickey-mouse-and-the-infantilization-of-women/> [accessed 24 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Wade. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Allen Marshall O’Brien, ‘The Infantilization of Women’, *Irenicon*, 2011 <http://anirenicon.com/2011/06/14/the-infantilization-of-women-and-a-theology-of-aging-getting-age-wrong-part-2/> [accessed 24 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Anonymous, ‘How “Pokemon Go” Highlights The Problem with Millenials’, *The Brofessional*, 2016 <http://www.thebrofessional.net/resurgence-pokemon-highlights-problem-millennials/> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Martin van Creveld, ‘Infantilization’, *Martin-Van-Creveld*, 2017 <http://www.martin-van-creveld.com/infantilization/> [accessed 10 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Lindsay Holmes, ‘A Quick Lesson on What Trigger Warnings Actually Do’, *Huffington Post*, 2016 <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/university-of-chicago-trigger-warning\_us\_57bf16d9e4b085c1ff28176d> [accessed 24 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Michael Hogan and Ed Cumming, ‘Have Our Cultural Tastes Become Too Childish’, *The Guardian*, 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/23/have-our-cultural-tastes-become-too-childish> [accessed 13 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. This sexualisation is nowhere more apparent than in the pop-music culture of the moment which, according to Kirby, ‘reflects the pedophilic nature of contemporary consumer culture, which perpetually desires - in fashion, movies, TV, adverts, the Internet, songs - to sexualize children.’ Kirby, *Digimodernism*, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Rachel Falconer, *The Crossover Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Falconer, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Falconer, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. ‘The new social movements are simply the result – the concomitants and the products – of capitalism itself in its final and most unfettered phase’ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism : Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Simon Pegg in Huw Fullerton, ‘Simon Pegg Criticises Science-Fiction and Genre Films for “Dumbing Down” Cinema’, *RadioTimes*, 2015 <http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2015-05-19/simon-pegg-criticises-science-fiction-and-genre-films-for-dumbing-down-cinema/> [accessed 13 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Simon Pegg, ‘Big Mouth Strikes Again’, *Peggster*, 2015 <http://simonpegg.net/2015/05/19/big-mouth-strikes-again/> [accessed 13 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Kirby, *Digimodernism*, pp. 134–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. *ACO: Our visitor to the ethno-archaeological society in 2002, William Allan, it seems was only in attendance to ask those venerable members to identify a statuette of unidentifiable greenish stone - a picture of which Southward attached to the notes and which Southward makes frenzied notes about. The Statuette matches that sculpture created by Robert E.S. Colwan, that one inspired by his mad dreams, showing a rough-bound novel with a urinal and pipe blending into one another on the cover.* [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Glazov. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. da Silva. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. The idea of a fear of freedom is not an entirely twenty-first century phenomenon: Erich Fromm also describes just such a fear in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), incidentally linking the feeling of despair over the sudden realization of autonomy to that of a child suddenly realizing its individuality. Fromm’s point here becomes increasingly apt in describing today’s individual, further tying the contemporary freedom of fear with delayed maturation. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Fear of Death, of the strange, of technology, of failure, of freedom, and of loneliness. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Torralba, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Wilson. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Kirby, ‘The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond’. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Sturgeon, ‘Why Grow Up? Philosophy for a Generation of Adult Infants’. Sturgeon also agrees with Susan Neiman in characterizing the millennial generation as sharing significant features with the immaturity associated with the Unconditioned, specifically that the current generation cannot distinguish “between the way the world is” and “the way it ought to be,” an interesting assessment that links to the ideas of a contemporary desire to move beyond the present without understanding how as discussed earlier. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Wilson. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Immanuel Kant, ‘Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?’, *The Foucalt Reader*, 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Kant. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. *ACO: A move, incidentally, that one could well attribute to the nostalgia drive as discussed in this chapter.* [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. *ACO: ‘The Post-postmodern Problem.’ See Chapter 1: Southward vs Society in this volume or, for the adventurous reader, W.J. Arapaima’s series of essays ‘Selfish Southward: Narcissistic References in the works of the Hated One.’ Though, I do believe that my own chapter should provide greater value, as the reader may judge.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Dirk Siepmann, ‘Academic Writing and Culture: An Overview of Difference between English, French and German’, *Meta*, 51 (2006), 131–150 (p. 142). [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. *I see you shiver with antici….*  [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study in Metamodernism’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 87 (2015), 55–67 (p. 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Vermeulen, Timotheus, in Rosi Braidotti, ‘The Humanities in Europe Interview Series - Timotheus Vermeulen’, *Centre for the Humanities Utrecht University*, 2015 [Youtube Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5b\_6D3xxdzQ> [accessed 19 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2015 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/06/03/misunderstandings-and-clarifications/> [accessed 26 June 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. (Forthcoming) Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Art Criticism and Metamodernism’, in *The ART of Critique/Re-Imagining Professional ART Criticism and The Art School Critique*, ed. by Stephen Knudsen (Chicago: (forthcoming) The University of Chicago Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Seth Abramson, ‘Metamodernism 101’, *Medium*, 2015 <https://medium.com/just-words/metamodernism-101-8cdb8563e0> [accessed 30 October 2017] (My emphasis in italics). [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Abramson, ‘Metamodernism 101’. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Abramson, ‘Metamodernism 101’. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. *ACO: William Allan asked the attendees of the 2002 ethno-archaeological society meeting to identify the stone, though none seemingly provided enough detail to satisfy him. Southward here appends a rather fanciful tale, straight from Allan’s own autobiography, which may prove interesting to scholars (your editor regrets that he is unable to fathom some of the details of these scraps of Southwardian memorabilia at present and humbly begs for aid).* [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Hard and Soft’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2011 <https://www.metamodernism.com/2011/03/16/hard-and-soft/> [accessed 6 May 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, pp. 5–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Jorg Heiser, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘What Is Metamodernism?’, *Frieze*, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dH6zJULTVgQ> [accessed 19 October 2017] (My transcription). [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Art Criticism and Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. It is prudent at this point to point out that Vermeulen and van den Akker do not consider all neoromantic works as metamodern nor vice-versa: ‘Our argument in the 2010 essay [...] was not that metamodernism can be reduced to New Romanticism, nor that what is generally referred to as New Romanticism is exclusive to the metamodernist structure of feeling. [...] In other words: a number of works recognized as New Romanticism exemplified the metamodern structure of feeling.’ Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Abramson, ‘Metamodernism 101’. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Seth Abramson, ‘What Is Metamodernism?’, *Huffington Post*, 2017 <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-is-metamodernism\_us\_586e7075e4b0a5e600a788cd> [accessed 30 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Abramson, ‘What Is Metamodernism?’ [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Luke Turner, ‘The Metamodernist Manifesto’, *Metamodernism.org*, 2011 <http://www.metamodernism.org/> [accessed 30 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Philip Damico, ‘An Introduction to Metamodernism’, *The Metamodernist*, 2017 <https://themetamodernist.com/2017/02/18/an-introduction-to-metamodernism/> [accessed 30 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Editorial, ‘New Romanticism’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2010 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2010/08/09/new-romanticism/> [accessed 2 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Square Enix’s constant teases of a *Final Fantasy 7* remaster certainly can be said at this point to be a prime example of vapourware. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Sharon Schembri and Jac Tichbon, ‘Digital Consumers as Cultural Curators: The Irony of Vaporwave’, *Arts and the Market*, 7 (2016), 191–212. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Schembri and Tichbon. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Schembri and Tichbon. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Schembri and Tichbon. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Sam Sutherland, ‘Could Vaporwave Be the Future of Music’, *This Exists*, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WNrjWSJwf8> [accessed 2 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. *ACO: Many were left feeling ‘unfullfillable’ in the wake of the Southwardian collapse, a topic taken up with much vehemence and scholarly accuracy by Professor Traum Dystus, whose tireless efforts interviewing the radioactive poor were recently recognised by the Global Academy with a substantial reward and the publication of his book ‘Boo-Who? Post-Southwardian cries and crimes.’* [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Art Criticism and Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, pp. 65–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, pp. 64–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. *ACO: See Chapter 1 in this volume. Incidentally William Allen, then, it seems, was part of a large party of venture capitalists who set sale for some of the darkest reaches of the North Pole, chasing rumours of vast oil frozen miraculously in the ice there. Instead, Allan found himself alone at some point in the harsh northern clime, and witness to a cult of all-male Esquimaux ritually abusing and killing all manner of captured women and children of the non-Esquimaux blood. The sight of their odd chartreuse eyes as they murdered these innocents, is of particular note, given Southward’s own famously yellow irises. I seem to see them everywhere around me at the moment, reflections of yellow eyes.* [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. *…pation* [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. To paraphrase Jenny Rowell, ‘The Selvage of Incoherence’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2014 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2014/03/25/the-selvage-of-incoherence/> [accessed 13 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Alison Gibbons, ‘“Take That You Intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 87 (2015), 29–43 (p. 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. A potentially metamodern double-bind in and of itself here: the awareness of my own status as an early-career researcher and the belief in the argument to be presented. I find myself swinging between Modern idealism and Postmodern cynicism, with a desire for this work to be taken seriously and perhaps built upon in direct competition with the cynical criticism from more senior academics that is sure to follow. Still, all academic critics must feel this when suggesting a new argument, no? Finding themselves stuck between their own belief in the value of the work that they have researched contrasting with the knowledge that it is an ultimately flawed human endeavour perhaps useful only as a career stepping-stone, or far too academically minded to make a true difference to society. An attempt, nonetheless, despite itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Sara Helen Binney, ‘Oscillating Towards the Sublime’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2015 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/04/02/oscillating-towards-the-sublime-2/> [accessed 30 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. The majority of current criticism on metamodern literature is found online, specifically on the website established by Vermeulen and van den Akker themselves as a platform for explorations of the metamodern (metamodernism.com). Though, it should be noted, a critical collection of essays surrounding the metamodern, and its potential effect and representation within literature, is forthcoming in the form of *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after postmodernism*, edited by Van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Vermeulen. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Binney. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Brendan Dempsey, ‘[Re]construction: Metamodern “Transcendence” and the Return of Myth’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2015 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/10/21/reconstruction-metamodern-transcendence-and-the-return-of-myth/> [accessed 30 October 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Patrick Ness, *The Crane Wife* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2013), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Nadine Feßler, ‘To Engage in Literature’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2012 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/05/29/to-engage-in-literature/> [accessed 13 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, pp. 304–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, pp. 151–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. *ACO: For more, see Southward’s thoughts on the return of the sublime, as posited in his essay on 21st century Gothic in Chapter 3: Southward vs Sublimity.* [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, pp. 141–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. E.B. Hudspeth, *The Resurrectionist: The Lost Work of Dr. Spencer Black* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2013), p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Hudspeth, pp. 69, 79, 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Hudspeth, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Hudspeth, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Hudspeth, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. *ACO: It can also be noted that Black’s early medical career emphasises this all the more; he seeks to find an underlying meaning behind the seemingly random and unpredictable genetic mutations present in his patients – often those born with either less or more limbs than usual. His desire to explain this is clearly symbolic of a desire to add some form of explanation to random and seemingly cruel acts of nature. Meaning against the meaninglessness, depthiness against depthlessness.* [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘The New “Depthiness”’, *e-flux*, 2015 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-new-depthiness/> [accessed 14 July 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Hudspeth, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Eliza Granville, *Gretel and the Dark* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014), p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Granville, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Granville, pp. 282–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Granville, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. *ACO: Some Children have begun knocking on my door recently as I collect my thoughts and these notes together. If it were not for having recently read Storngjaw’s ‘Keep the Children safe: re-romanticism in the wake of post-southwardianism,’ I would be rather tempted to chase such énfant térribles down.* [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Granville, p. 357. Admittedly here the discussion of the role of narrative, and in particular books, forces a metafictional meaning onto such discussions, as in *The Crane Wife*, yet the points remain as valid for discussion of the metamodern as of the metafictional. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), p. 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Paul Kingsnorth, *Beast* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Dempsey. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1973), p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Binney. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Dempsey. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Binney. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Hudspeth, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Hudspeth, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. *ACO: Implausibly, however, William Allan records how he slaughtered exactly fifty-two of the strange Esquimaux cult, though the last of which he cornered and, surprisingly, found spoke perfect English. Wounded, this last cultist told terrible secrets to Allan. Secrets that Southward, for some reason, was incredibly excited about – his handwriting becomes maddened, underlining and slashing in dark red ink across the records. Particularly highlighted sections detail how the cultist revealed that they were sacrificing to appease await the return of a monstrous being called Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh, a small statue of which Allan would later remove from this man’s clothes and present before the society. Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh, the ancient god of extreme nihilism and devastation, is prophesied to rise only when specific celestial spheres align and a prophesied period of (comparably, presumably) nihilism and terror comes to a complete end.* [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Ness, *The Crane Wife*, pp. 247–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Feßler. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Vermeulen, ‘The New “Depthiness”’. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Camus used masculine pronouns throughout his work which I will de-gender here for the sake of the argument, after all Camus’ work is about the human condition, not the manly condition. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Justin O’Brien (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2013), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Camus, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Camus, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. A potentially important distinction: the capitalised Absurd is this contradiction or divorce, the recognition of the meaninglessness of life in contrast with the desire for movement, while the absurd, without capitalisation, is merely the former of the contradiction – the recognition of the absence of any profound reason for life, the insane character our daily agitation, the uselessness of suffering, and the primitive hostility of the world. In recognising the absurd and one’s own desire for meaning, one enters the Absurd condition. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Camus, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Camus, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Camus, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Camus, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Camus, pp. 44–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Camus, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Camus, pp. 48, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Camus, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Camus, p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Camus, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Camus, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Camus, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Camus, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Despite the potentially male-centric nature of the original essay. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Camus, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Granville, p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Camus is often misquoted as having stated that ‘individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning.’ A sentence which never appears within *The Myth of* Sisyphus, though the sentiment of the phrase does echo the argument of the essay from which it is most frequently misquoted. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Camus, p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Hereafter *Oscar Wao* [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Gibbons, ‘“Take That You Intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Díaz, pp. 321, fn.33. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Díaz, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Díaz, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Díaz, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Díaz, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Díaz, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Díaz, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Díaz, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Díaz, pp. 334–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. *ACO: Arapiama, incidentally, has become somewhat renowned for his lower-a-absurd claims about other, far more respected academics who have written greater volumes of work than himself. Absurd indeed.* [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Feßler. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Díaz, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Díaz, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Díaz, pp. 330–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Patrick Ness, *More Than This* (London: Walker Books Ltd, 2013), p. 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Ness, *More Than This*, pp. 413, 477, for two examples among many. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Ness, *More Than This*, p. 477. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Charles Elton, *Mr. Toppit* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 196, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Elton, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Elton, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. As revealed by Laurie’s mother at the end of the text, Rudy, her father, sexually abused a young child by teaching her a ‘game’ which revolved around the Hiawatha poem as precursor to abuse, a poem that Laurie not only seems to later associate with – her repetitions on page 58 – but also suggests that her father may have played a similar game with her earlier in the text: ‘he had other names for her, Princess Poodle or Princess Peach, and sometimes he made up names that sounded as if they came from *Hiawatha*, like Princess Alamita.’Elton, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Elton, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Elton, p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Elton, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Elton, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Elton, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Elton, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Elton, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Elton, p. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. *ACO: Strange that Southward’s novels have not dipped in popularity following the end of his reign, though Netom makes an interesting argument in her recent monomyth ‘Southward isn’t so bad! Honest!’ for the continued reading of the tyrant’s works, despite having lost both her eyes to the Enforced Sublimity tests.* [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Elton, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Elton, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Elton, p. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. ‘Metamodernism is the very imperfect placeholder, I guess, the label for the new language that we are trying to develop.’ Timotheus Vermeulen in Braidotti. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Gibbons, ‘“Take That You Intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, pp. 31–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Gibbons, ‘“Take That You Intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Feßler. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Alexander Wolff, ‘The Privilege of the Sponge’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2012 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/10/23/the-privilege-of-the-sponge/> [accessed 13 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. D James and U Seshagiri, ‘Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution’, *PMLA*, 129 (2014), 87–100 (p. 93). [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Damico. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Jeroen Popelier, ‘Duel Is Not a “Gimmick”’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2012 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/02/03/duel-is-not-a-gimmick/> [accessed 13 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. ‘Optimistic Nihilism’, *Kurzgesagt*, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBRqu0YOH14> [accessed 6 December 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. *ACO: At the 2002 meeting of the ethno-archaeological society, Southward focuses particularly on one professor William Channing Trapp who, according to all sources, was a bit of a lush. In his drunken state at the meeting he apparently eagerly and repeatedly interrupted Allan’s tale of how he retrieved the Esquimaux statue, with his own description of a small band of ‘devolved, humanoid beings’ down in New Orleans who worshipped a similar looking idol, though they believed it to be a slumbering God somewhere in the world. This Unnameable God, Trapp reportedly stated, was kept sedate by the frequent release of nihilistic and warlike psychic waves that inspire dread in humans of a specific form of bitter intelligence, or creatives. Southward’s notes end here, but not before reporting that Allan returned to the Arctic once more never to return, though famously texting his wife with a cryptic message about chartreuse watchers in the eldritch darkness surrounding them all. After this, all contact was lost.* [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Utopia, Sort of’, p. 58 Original Emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Vermeulen, ‘Hard and Soft’. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Elizabeth MacAndew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. *ACO: Southward playfully parodying his own earlier published works here, in their reliance on somewhat terrible ‘shock’ opening sentences meant to hook the reader.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Fred Botting, ‘Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines and Black Holes’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 277–300 (p. 298). [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Maria Beville, *Gothic-Postmodernism : Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*, ed. by Theo D’haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. *ACO: Also within Eyestan’s cache of Southwardian treasures was a small newspaper clipping from a 2011 New Zealand newspaper, reporting the discovery of a floundering ship, the Meghan, crewed only by bloody bodies and single live crewman – second mate of the lost ship the Maya, Timmy Vermeulen.* [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. The introductions to Daniel Olsen, ‘Introduction’, in *21st-Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels since 2000*, ed. by Daniel Olson (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 2011), pp. xxi–xxxiii; Joanne Watkiss, *Gothic Contemporaries: The Haunted Text* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) as two examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 2nd edn (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996), ii, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. *ACO: This editor, for one, finds it somewhat ironic that certain (shall we say) FISHY academics refuse to comment on their infantile behaviour at conferences, despite their university stating that it has a no-tolerance attitude to violence. My eye has never properly recovered, either, and it was entirely unprovoked. If one can’t handle criticism, then one might be in a rather ironically titled profession.* [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. David Punter, ‘The Gothic - A Lecture’, *SOG59’s The Horror Vault*, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdgDoT8LJaM&t=1709s> [accessed 11 November 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. *ACO: When asked to elaborate on this metaphor with regard, perhaps, to a Derridian analysis of hauntology, Southward is reported to have said the following (though it is to be taken with a grain of salt, as all Southwardian quotes should be at the point following the destruction of the records): “Must we always flay Derrida’s poor corpse for quotes? Beat sentences from his oeuvre like so much dust from a shirt, or flies from the feast? Must we continue to disturb that grave, marred as it is – by now – with a thousand filthy finger prints of academics determined to not let that great brain rest? No? Well… damn.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Botting, p. 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Steven Bruhm, ‘Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 259–76 (p. 260). [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Punter, ii, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Botting, p. 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Botting, p. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Botting, p. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. *ACO: A tad poetic here, one freely admits.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Bruhm, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Beville, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Julius is born in 1835 and the events within the text follow him as a ‘youth’ though his age is never specifically stated. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. *ACO: Timmy Vermeulen, the sole survivor found about the Meghan, reported to authorities that his ship the Maya – a small pleasure yacht – was blown off course by an unusual and malignant storm. They eventually found clear waters, but were there attacked by the heavily-armoured crew of the Meghan. Vermeulen and crew fought the other crew for their lives, boarding the other ship and repelling their attackers, though losing the Maya in the process. Commandeering the Meghan, the crew discovered an uncharted archipelago of islands in the vicinity of co-ordinates of 47°9′S 126°43′W. With the exception of Vermeulen and another man, everyone else died upon the island, though Vermeulen was unable (or refused) to tell authorities or the press how he came to be in the situation he was found in.* [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Patrick McGrath, *Ghost Town* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005), p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, pp. 185, 186, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, pp. 204–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. McGrath, *Ghost Town*, p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Sue Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Chuck Palahniuk, *Haunted* (London: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Palahniuk, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Palahniuk, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Richard Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014), pp. 8–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. The criticism of postmodern produced by Flanagan’s representation of Hammet and the tourists is one not entirely novel to the Gothic. Famously, Bret Easton Ellis’s Patrick Bateman, protagonist of *American Psycho*, revels in materialism in a way encoding the character with the postmodern moment, and so subtly links Bateman’s psychopathy with the postmodern mode. His appearance in Ellis’s *Lunar Park*, then, becomes that of a postmodern haunting as the prodigal emblem of postmodern Gothic returns to haunt the contemporary. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. *ACO: It should be noted here that Southward’s original manuscript has been heavily damaged and defaced by vandals who broke into my home at this point, and so your editor has taken the bold decision here to splice in a section of a still-intact Southwardian MS, (The Scunthorpe Missif). The elongated section here detailing the use of framing in Gould’s Book of fish was previously published in The Dark Arts Journal Vol.1 Issue 1, and since spliced into here as the argument was, reportedly, much the same, though apparently made with the excessive vim, vigour and passion that defined his latter writings.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Flanagan, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Flanagan, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Flanagan, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. Flanagan, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Flanagan, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Flanagan, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Flanagan, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Flanagan, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. *ACO:* [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Flanagan, pp. 88, 130, 445–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. *ACO: My contemporaries may be wondering why I have yet to mention the ‘highly influential’ works of Wade Arapaima , fellow Southward scholar and writer of such ‘great’ works as ‘Southward Against History: a detailed recount of the Southward Atrocities,’ ‘Southward and Me: an interview with the one,’ and ‘Southward made me a better lover.’ Such works, if the intrepid reader is interested, are still available, I’m sure, in all good discount shops, second-hand stores and from other ‘reputable’ publishers.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Flanagan, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Flanagan, p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Robert Hood, ‘Making Fish Out of Men: Gothic Uncertainty in Gould’s Book of Fish by Richard Flanagan’, in *21st-century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels since 2000*, ed. by Daniel Olson (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 2011), pp. 258–269 (p. 267). [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Hood, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. Flanagan, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. This being the original intention of the book as seen in the 1st edition, 2002, and subsequent hardback edition published the same year, though the 2014 re-print curiously decides to remove these replicas. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Flanagan, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Flanagan, pp. 125–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. *ACO: Southward’s notes too mention the sailor of the Meghan and the Maya, Timmy Vermeulen, though it seems he became obsessed with chasing the man down, even going so far as to stalk the man to his native Sweden and there discover that he was too late. In the time it took Southward to track the second mate down, it seems Vermeulen had taken to drink and, at a local bar, find himself at a disadvantage against two Esquimaux seeming sailors, who dispatched of the poor man most horribly with meat hooks.* [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Flanagan, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. *ACO: End of transcript splice.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Flanagan, pp. 402–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. John Burnside, *Glister* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), pp. 1, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Burnside, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Burnside, pp. 29–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. Burnside, p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Burnside, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. Burnside, p. 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Burnside, p. 1,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. Burnside, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. Dan Simmons, *The Terror* (Reading: Bantam Press, 2007), p. 866. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Creature of the spirit world designed to do a specific purpose as ordained by the creator-god [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Inuat peoples. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. Simmons, pp. 868–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. Simmons, p. 865. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn* (and other clichéd references). [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. ‘Whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polypheme cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. Briden looked back and went mad.’ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, *HPLovecraft.com* <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/cc.aspx> [accessed 29 December 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. In which Lovecraftian heritage is discussed, pastiched, parodied and made light of, all from a position of affection. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Simmons, p. 917. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Soul [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Simmons, pp. 935–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. *ACO: Southward’s notes on Vermeulen are more diary form at this point and his information on the man’s death come straight from Vermeulen’s widow, a woman described as strangely knowing, but somehow repulsive and ocean-smelling, though this may have been Vermeulen’s house itself – by the sea as it was and, Southward takes pains to note, perpetually chilled inside, though the widow wrapped up warm in some form of seal furs.. Southward notes her eyes, in particular, as a very light and strange shade of green, bordering on the yellow. Vermeulen’s wife gives Southward a manuscript left to her by her late husband, another artefact contained within Eyestan’s cache.* [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Olsen, p. xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. Olsen, p. xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Albert Sánchez Piñol, *Cold Skin*, trans. by Cheryl Leah Morgan (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2006), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. Piñol, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. Piñol, pp. 27–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Perhaps the epitome of postmodern parody of Lovecraft comes from Terry Pratchett’s Discworld series, in particular the ‘Young Men's Reformed Cultists of the Ichor God Bel-Shamharoth Association’ from *The Colour of Magic* (1983) [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. Piñol, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. *ACO: They won’t let me sleep! Every time I do I hear those wet footsteps approach my porch again, that terrible knocking at my front door, but nobody ever there… nobody.* [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Notably, Robertson also picks up on Hogg’s use of left to denote evil, as seen in most descriptions of Robert’s position in the text, though, here, Robertson writes of Mack’s left arm ‘toying with’ him for many years (255) before it, ultimately, delivers the ‘coup de grace’ of collapsing under him and forcing him to fall into the gorge in which he meets the devil. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Sarah Murchison, ‘Echoes, Connections, Continuities: Bill Winnyford, James Robertson, and James Hogg in The Testament of Gideon Mack’, *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*, 5 (2017), 1–20 (p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. Murchison, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Robert D. Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’, *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 282–90 (p. 282). [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. MacAndew, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. *ECO: See Chapter 2: Southward vs Sincerity in this collection*. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. David Punter, *The Hidden Script: Writing and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Plc, 1985), p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. Bruhm, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. J.B. Aspinall, *Sycorax* (London: Peter Own Publishers, 2006), p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. Aspinall, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Alice Thompson, *Pharos* (London: Virago Press, 2002), p. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Thompson, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Andrew Michael Hurley, *The Loney* (London: John Murray, 2015), p. 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. Hurley, p. 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. Hurley, p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. Punter, *The Hidden Script*, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. Zlosnik, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. Punter, *The Hidden Script*, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. Patrick McGrath, *The Wardrobe Mistress* (London: Random House, 2017), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. McGrath, *The Wardrobe Mistress*, p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. Punter, *The Hidden Script*, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. And further emphasised by the production of a ‘re-mastered, full colour edition.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. Bret Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
569. Tom Waters, ‘Interview with Bret Easton Ellis’, *Acid Logic*, 2005 <http://www.acidlogic.com/bret\_easton\_ellis.htm> [accessed 15 July 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
570. Ellis, p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
571. Christiane Blot-Labarrère, ‘A Letter Ending the Affair’, in *Take Care of Yourself*, ed. by Sophie Calle (France: Actes Sud, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
572. Editorial. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
573. *ACO: Vermeulen’s manuscript speaks of the journey of the Maya crew aboard the commandeered Meghan, and their journey towards the nearest land-mass, which turned out to be a small circle-shaped archipelago of islands. D’Rearj, I know you must be thinking, my fellow academics, did Vermeulen turn back, did he see the terrible stare of those yellow eyes, from mirrors, from water, from windows, peering at him constantly? No? No. Little did they know the waters they sailed, unable to choose an island. Vermeulen’s account becomes somewhat obscure at this point (and so annotated by Southward that it becomes difficult to read).* [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
574. As an aside, it is worth noting, too, an important contemporary formulation as proposed by Sianne Ngai – the Stuplime. The Stuplime, very roughly speaking, occurs when the self comes into contact with the extreme boredom or tedium involved with an ‘encounter not with the infinite but with finite bits and scraps of material in repetition:’a ‘the accumulation of visual "data" induces a similar strain on the observer's capacities for conceptually synthesizing or metabolizing information. The fatigue of the viewer's responsivity approaches the kind of exhaustion involved in the attempt to read a dictionary,’ and a sublime response occurs in response to the self’s inability to process such massive, boring amounts of information.b Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. (a)271, (b)263. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
575. Helen M Dennis, ‘“Questions of Travel”; Elizabeth Bishop and The Negative Sublime’, in *Poetry and the Sense of Panic. Critical Essays on Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery*, ed. by Lionel Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 53–63 (p. 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
576. I am vastly simplifying a complicated philosophical theory here. For a proper, full scholarly analysis, please see Mishra. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. Mishra, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
578. Mishra, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
579. Beville, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. *ACO: Again, I hope the intrepid reader will forgive me for splicing in more of Southward’s previous works here in an effort to replicate the original argument. Of course, I have taken the liberty of somewhat altering, augmenting, and amending his published argument to make it more palatable for the contemporary audience.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. J F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), x, pp. 77–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Ellis, pp. 95–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. At several points in the text Ellis laments society’s impact on his son and the fact that Robby’s life seems to lack any ‘poetry and romance’ (Ellis, p. 113.) Robby too is desperate to escape the Postmodern structures that Bret imposes, but seems unable to do so. We see Robby struggling under the tyranny of his father’s Postmodern affectation, his obsession with materiality, his inherent irony, his depthlessness, all of which cause Robby and other boys of the next generation to flee. Though not specifically commenting on the sublime here, *Lunar Park* does align itself with a desire for post-Postmodernity, seeming to ascribe to the ‘structure of feeling’ described by metamodernism in its yearning for a movement away from Postmodernity, for post-ironic forms and a subsequent return to sincerity. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. Beville, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. Mishra, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
586. Ellis, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. Ellis, p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. Ellis, p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. *ACO:My publishers have asked me to suggest that anyone seeking more information on thissSee ‘Fishy Failings and Missed Hooks, by Wade Arapaima. Though for a more in depth analysis, stay here with me.* [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. J.J. Abrams and Doug Dorst, *S* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2013), p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. Abrams and Dorst, p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. Abrams and Dorst, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. Abrams and Dorst, pp. 338–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. Abrams and Dorst, p. 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. *ACO: I will concede that Arapaima does have several good points to make about the Southwardian desire for vengeance, though the reader may attempt to discover them amongst the absolute dross of the man’s oeuvre by themselves if they so desire.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Abrams and Dorst, p. 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. Abrams and Dorst, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. Abrams and Dorst, p. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. Abrams and Dorst, pp. 449–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. Full title: Mark Z Danielewski’s House of Leaves by Zampanò with introduction and notes by Johnny Truant [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves by Zampanò with Introduction and Notes by Johnny Truant*, Color 2nd (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 67. For further evidence, see p.660 in the ‘Remastered Full-Color second edition for the painting ‘Another Great Hall on Ash Tree Lane’, in which the distant horizon, seen as a wall to the great hall, could equally represent an enormous, calamitous wave or a mountain range. [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. As *House of Leaves* presents a space which seemingly ‘feeds’ from the fear of those who explore it – the unnerving attempts growing stronger in direct proportion to the fear of the explorers – the ship in *S* initially seems to feed on the laboured efforts of its crew: ‘Every three hours or so, by S.’s crude estimation, an exhausted and slack-jawed sailor struggles through the hatchway onto the main deck, blows his whistle, and replaces another sailor […] who then disappears through the hatch to that deepest portion of the ship. […] Now that S. has seen the entire crew cycle through, he realizes they all seem bluer around the gills when they emerge. And if he’s not mistaken, he’s hearing muted expressions of pain from all about the ship (Abrams and Dorst 57).’ This, coupled with the brief annotation of ‘It’s draining them’ by Eric suggests a vampiric nature to this floating Gothic ruin, that it feeds from the lives which give themselves willingly to the ship. It is an undying vampiric ruin, though one that is not rooted by location. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves by Zampanò with Introduction and Notes by Johnny Truant*, Color 2nd (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. See Zampanò’s description of the ‘Five-and-a-half-minute Hallway’ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, pp. 288–95 (for example). [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. Mishra, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. *ACO: Sailing between the islands, Vermeulen and the others aboard the Meghan seem to have become rather confused, as we all do from time to time. Each time they approach an island it transforms before them into an inhospitable land, with several becoming lava-spewing volcanoes as they near. Or, worse, as they approach one they see bounteous treasures upon nearby island – fresh water, fruit, signs of civilization – yet when they approach these seemingly better islands, they are struck by either better islands nearby, or the apparent mirage-like-nature of the visions they saw. Fools. Fools.* [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. Burnside, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Burnside, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. Burnside, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. Burnside, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Burnside, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. Burnside, pp. 29–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. Mishra, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. *ACO: As an aside, it may be worth noting that our esteemed colleague Wade Arapiama still lives in his childhood home and has been reported to suck his thumb during meetings with certain senior members of staff who deserve to be respected, not called Arcot C. Os-boring to their face!* [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. *ACO: So ends Southward’s initial, fleeting journey into sublime experimentation. It is easy to see some of the mistakes made here, some of the poor sentence structure and extended metaphors that fall entirely flat. One must remember his current mental and emotional states as he wrote this rather inchoate piece, as spotty and patchy an argument as an adolescent’s skin.* [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. *ACO: Once more the original MS of Southward’s argument has been lost and thus I take great pains to splice in some small recovered slivers, much augmented by my own conclusions drawn on by this argument alongside others presented.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. Bruhm, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. *ACO: Southward, in a rather human touch, had the following dedication appended to this essay in its original print: “a special dedication to William H. Gass, the father of my field and without whose work I would still be foundering in the darkness and loneliness of a life without the fabulous form he gave name to.”*  [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Wallace, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. David Mitchell, *Number9Dream* (Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001), p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. Taken from the subtitle of Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction* (London: Routledge, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. The *Scream* film series’ (always somewhat ‘meta’ in the popular usage) most recent adaptation overtly referenced its meta nature, a thematic concern also taken over into the recent Netflix adaptation of the series in which teenagers repeatedly reference the rules and difficulties of the horror genre. *The League of Gentleman’s Apocalypse* too overtly fictionalises the creative process, while *Tropic Thunder* presents as a movie about the making of a movie about a fictional account of a Vietnam experience, even going so far as to create fictional adverts that preface the film. *Stranger than Fiction* is perhaps the most overtly metafictional of the film examples given, though, focusing as it does on a character becoming self-aware while his ‘author’ struggles with writer’s block before meeting her character in person. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. Wallace, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. Waugh, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. Waugh, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. *ACO: Fools sailing round islands, sailing sailing, unable to stop, but their cries stirring something else in the waters, something terrible. Gods I wish I could sleep! The knocking! The dreams… I do not want to dream.* [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. Waugh, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Mark Currie, *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (Harlow: Longman Publishing Group, 1995), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Currie, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. Richard Walsh, *Novel Arguments: Reading Innovative American Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. Before we begin, it should be noted that I am being necessarily selective here, focussing on lesser known examples and the more technically significant texts, while signposting the majority of major developments (I am human, after all, fallible, so forgive me, do, if I drop an example, as an accidental, rather than malicious, omission. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. *ACO: Round and round I go, days spent citing, nights spent dreaming – terrors on both fronts, no relief, like men stranded in a ship that must land- must land, but no shore in sight. Or – worse! – too many, too too many, and then how to choose, eh Arapaima, how do we choose then, my old friend, when the waters churn and that voice calls again to us in our sleep? The Dark History of the Novel, indeed. See, Arapaima, ‘Southward can’t be trusted.’* [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Stephen Prickett and Robert Barnes, *The Bible - Landmarks of World Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. I am very aware of the potential proverbial can of worms opened in chronologically dating the *Arabian Nights* text here, but such discussions have no place here. Feel free to correct this tentative version of the timeline to your tastes regarding this text if you so desire, I won’t take offence. – *ACO: For more on this particular footnote and more alike see James Carleriana’s ‘Sassy Southward: Salty Footnotes and other Dick Moves of the Supreme Ruler.’* [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. Marie Stoie, ‘Metafictional Devices and Intertextuality in Tristram Shandy’, *Scribd.com* <https://www.scribd.com/document/364196665/Metafictional-Devices-and-Intertextuality-in-Tristram-Shandy> [accessed 1 January 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, inc., 1960), p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
647. *ACO: And where were they, truly, our sailors? D’Rearj! Gods be damned, D’Rearj! D’Rearj, where repulsive Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh slumbers! The sailors struggle to comprehend the islands, their non-euclidian geographies, their shifting massifs, their duplicitous phantasms! Yet – Yet, friend, I must write while the infernal banging continues – Yet, they were never safe. For terrible Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh, it seems, awoke to them! His vast form blooming like so much foetid waste from the centre of the archipelago, a rotting corpse of a creature, with a thousand strips of rancid skin sloughing from its bulbous corpse-body and into the waves, where a vast array of carrion creatures awaited to devour the remains! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh! Seen in my dreams! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh!* [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
648. *ACO: Arapaima, the scum, mocks me behind my back and assumes I don’t hear. I am significant! I am!* [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
649. Botstein. Leon, ‘Elliot Carter: An Appreciation’, *The Music Quarterly*, 91 (2008), 151–157 (p. 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
650. It should be noted that this history aims to explore some of the more overlooked examples of literary history and so will not linger too long on the more famous examples of literary fiction that dot the genre’s lengthy history too much, but rather focus instead on those less famous examples wherever possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. Julie Levinson, ‘Adaptation, Metafiction, Self-Creation’, *Genre LX*, Spring/Sum (2007), 157–180 (p. 159). [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Unnamable’, *The H.P. Lovecraft Archive*, 1925 <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/u.aspx> [accessed 2 January 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Lovecraft, ‘The Unnamable’. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. *ACO: Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh attacked, enraged at their presence, its terrible chartreuse eyes gleaming as it headed towards the miniscule ship. Vermeulen turned his eyes away in time to see all his crewmates plunge into the obsidian depths of the waves, only there to be devoured by those tentacular carrion beasts swarming the waters and devouring the sailors alongside the mercurial slips of Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh’s flesh. Teeth and tentacles, unnameable forms which I now see nightly in my mind, and always with those terrible yellow eyes. Vermeulen’s account is maddening, though he seems somehow to have escaped the madness, finding himself and his ship outside of the archipelagos ring, which putrescent Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh could not yet escape. D’Rearj, the prison yet to be broken…but for how long?! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh! I hear your calls! I remember the year 2011 when we all heard you! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh! Putrid Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh! He who will burn the world, burn the books, burn the minds! Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh!* [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Nonfictions*, ed. by Eliot Weinberger, trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. Walter Blair, Morris Dickstein and James R. Giles, ‘American Literature’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2017, p. 14 <https://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature> [accessed 1 January 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, ‘Historiographic Metafiction, Thermodynamics and the Middle That Was Not Exlcuded in Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49’, in *Metahistorical Narratives & Scientific Metafictions*, ed. by Guiseppe Episcopo (Napoli: Cronopio, 2015), pp. 149–166 (p. 149). [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. Borys Róg, ‘The Crying of Lot 49 and the Parody of Detective Fiction’, *New Horizons in English Stuidies*, 2017, 59–67 (p. 65). [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 62–76 (p. 64). [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. Barth, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. Barth, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Barth, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. Barth, p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 12–13. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. William H. Gass, ‘Philosophy and the Form of Fiction’, in *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. Gass, pp. 24–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. Robert Scholes, ‘Metafiction’, *The Iowa Review*, 1 (1970), 100–115 (p. 115). [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. Muriel Spark, *The Driver’s Seat* (St Ives: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. As evidenced from the following description: ‘a fully self-conscious novel, however, is one in which from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention.’ Robert Alter, *Partial Magic; The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (London: University of California Press, 1975), p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. Alter, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. Alter, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. Alter, p. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. Larry McCaffery, ‘The Art of Metafiction’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 1995), pp. 181–194 (p. 182). [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Meuthen & Co. Ltd, 1980), p. xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. Waugh, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. Waugh, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. Waugh, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. *ACO: There was a stowaway upon the Meghan, a survivor of Vermeulen’s crew’s culling, who now emerged before Vermeulen (whose hair had, he reports, turned white). Akker, or so he called himself, the stowaway, began to gibber and paw at his erstwhile saviour, claiming that rancid Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh will wake again soon and choose his champion. They had, fools, awoken him too early, and now Xcln’Kcfrolphtulh could break free from the prison of D’Rearj and terrorise us once more through his champion, he of the blood. Vermeulen reports in this same calm tone as he then describes murdering the man. Vermeulen’s manuscript ends with his murder of Akker, and without any remorse for the calamity he brought to the world. They knock, but now I know why. Now I know why. I know. I know. Southward’s own notes say the same – ‘They know, I know, they are coming!’* [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. Alastair Fowler, *A History of English Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. Fowler, p. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. Fowler, p. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. Currie, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. Currie, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. *ACO: Clever word play here from Southward, or ignorant providence? A simple syntactic play – does he refer to the postmodern elements fading from the metafictional form or the metafictional mode itself beginning to fall away to ignominy, as it is historically is known to have done before the Southwardian era.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. *ACO: See Southward vs Sublimity, or even (if possible to find somewhere) a copy of the ancient ‘Defeat is Good for Art’ for Southward’s argument that such a text is metamodern*. [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. Mark Z. Danielewski, *The Fifty Year Sword* (Glasgow: Cargo Publishing, 2014), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. Douglas Coupland, *Jpod* (St Ives: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), p. 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. *ACO: I know. I know. I know because there is one more document in Southward’s cache. Oh, great-uncle Eyestan, how could you? I know now why you took your life and I will surely do the same too. Surely… surely, though the other is telling me not to, begging me and I struggle to resist. The final document is the mad-scrawlings of a clearly deranged Southward - a family tree. Halfway up this tree, a series of question marks – Southward’s great, great, great- grandmother, is ringed with a series of yellow eyes. Eyes with travel down the family line, all the way down to Southward himself and further … God help me.* [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. Alex Clark, ‘In the Hands of Madmen’, *The Guardian*, 2002 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview23> [accessed 31 December 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. So ends the lengthy, and yet somehow also a rather whistle-stop affair, journey through the metafictional landscape leading up to the end of the Postmodern moment and beyond. Of course such a list will always have missed some major, and minor, elements yet such is the fallible nature of all human output. I am sure that there were texts worthy of inclusion here that I have missed, yet the list will surely suffice to create a detailed enough look at the progression of metafiction through the ages, I hope. I ask for your forgiveness in this, as in all things. *|ACO: A forgiveness never given by many.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. *ACO:* *An interesting example of Southward’s restraint when it comes to his beloved metafiction here – early drafts compared the relationship to that of a dying, atrophied postmodern twin conjoined to the threshing, desperate for life, body of metafiction. Such strong images were struck from his work, though, in an effort to allow the form some manner of grace, the essay a certain gravitas. Yet, surely, such are the nuggets of minor joviality that critics love to see in the essays of others, inducing either scoff or smile. Curious, no?* [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. Daniel Grausam, ‘Games People Play: Metafiction, Defense Strategy, and the Cultures of Simulation’, *ELH*, 78 (2011), 507–532 (p. 516). [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. *ACO: See Southward’s ‘The Haunted Dustbin’ for his creative take on metafiction rising from the refuse to take the rightful throne of criticism. Poorly written, yes, but significant still, despite certain FISHY claims that the work is not true Southwardian canon.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. Currie, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
708. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
709. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, ‘Metanarration and Metafiction’, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Peter et al Hühn, 2013 <hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php​?title=Metanarration and Metafiction​&oldid=1924> [accessed 1 December 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. Alter, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. Alter, p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
713. Coupland, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
714. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
715. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 29–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, pp. 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. Lovecraft, ‘The Unnamable’. [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
718. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
719. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. Kurt Vonnegut, ‘Breakfast of Champions’, in *Vonnegut Novels & Stories 1963-73*, ed. by Sidney Offit (New York: The Library of America, 2011), pp. 491–733 (pp. 732–3). [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. *ACO: Further down past great-grand uncle Eyestan, my headache builds and builds, my reflection in my whiskey showing those devilish yellow eyes gazing balefully back at me, down, down, all the way down to another name. God save me. Arcot Clerval Osberon.* [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. Raymond Federman, ‘Critifictional Reflections on the Pathetic Condition of the Novel in Our Time’, *Symploke*, 12 (2004), 156–170 (p. 161). [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
723. Scholes, *The Fabulators*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
724. Currie, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
725. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. Currie, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. Alter, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. Waugh, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Keith Hopper, *Flann O Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist*, 2nd edn (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. Jason Bellipanni, *The Naked Story: Fiction about Fiction* (Mont Vernon: Story Review Press, 2013), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
731. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
732. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. Waugh, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. Alter, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. Currie, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. Levinson, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. David James, ‘Integrity after Metafiction’, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 57 (2011), 492–515 (p. 493). [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. James, p. 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Ian McEwan in James, p. 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. *ACO:* *In the famous painting by E.B. Woodhein, Southward sits with an ink pen in mouth, a blush upon his cheeks as he contemplates the word on a canvas before him. Of course, the phrase was meant with a touch of humour and sincerity, as was his wont, but still he was well known to have been embarrassed about this until the very end of his life, wherein – between screams and blood and knives – he profusely apologised for the word. I sit now in similar pose. The door will not last long against their assaults. If you should happen to find th* [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. Flanagan, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)