

Deconstructing the Twin Realities: Stephen King’s use of Metafictional Systems in “Secret Window, Secret Garden,” “Umney’s Last Case” and *The Dark Half*

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Introduction

Stephen King may be perceived as a popular novelist; however, this paper focuses on the idea that King could be considered a postmodernist author on the basis of the use of metafictional elements as key components in some of his fictional writing. A vast majority of critics perceive King only as a writer, who twists and pushes the boundaries of reality and, on the basis of this, creates literary fiction using the basic elements of Gothicism. But if King’s work is put to the test and measured against the concept of metafiction, the results may surprise. Furthermore, for the purposes of establishing Stephen King as a metafictional writer, his works of art analyzed below are measured against one of the most prototypical academically acclaimed metafictional writes in the world, Paul Auster.

What King does in his fiction is not just the mere active reconstruction of objective reality, but rather, it is the reconstruction of literary fiction itself. In her study *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh poses a question: “Is telling stories telling lies?” (87) Metafictional constructs operate on the principle which allows fiction to cast serious doubt on the reality of the fiction itself. In other words, it blurs the boundary between two universes, namely, fiction and reality. Metafiction, therefore, destabilizes the traditional relation between fiction and reality by allowing fiction to permeate the firm barrier which has been established amidst this interplay of real vs. fictional. What emerges from this interconnection is a blurry composite constructed of twin realities. In addition, Waugh suggests that the two worlds are codependent although not entirely equal in their importance. It is so because while objective reality could exist independently of the fictional universe, it is not attainable vice versa.

This article deals with the fact that Stephen King not only reweaves reality but also deconstructs fiction. In terms of Waugh, the reality which is the truth becomes level with fiction which initially, as non-metafictional literature exhibits, bares the properties of the lie and, in King's hands, becomes the truth. King, as well as other postmodernist writers, in some cases, explores and what is more important to this context undermines his own position as a writer. He does so by the means of metafiction. In combination with his unique talent to pierce the veil of human consciousness to find phobic pressure points where fear, as one of the strongest human emotions, lies, his metafictional writing becomes somewhat different.

King completely ignores traditional forms of metafiction and instead of them he offers his readers entirely singular metafictional systems. Ranging from fused traditional forms of metafiction to entirely unorthodox and novel ones, King achieves not only the complete reinvention of the genre of horror fiction but of the novel itself. It is because his approach is so non-traditional and is quite disjointed from postmodernist literary conventions, that new terminology has to be introduced into Waugh's traditional forms of metafiction (the self-begetting novel, surfiction and fabulation being the most prominent ones). This chapter analyzes three of King's most prototypical metafictional novels which fall into three distinct categories, namely psychogenic metafiction ("Secret Window, Secret Garden"), transpositional metafiction ("Umney's Last Case") and corporeal metafiction (*The Dark Half*).

All of these three novels operate on postmodernist literary conventions but they principally differ from one another, hence the categories. What they have in common though, is that they all deal with reality and fiction, truth and 'lies,' and they do that by addressing both as one and the same. Because writing comes from truth, as Stephen King emphasized when delivering his acceptance speech to the The National Book Foundation's Medal for *Distinguished Contribution to American Letters*, by saying that "we understand fiction is a lie to begin with. To ignore the truth inside the lie is to sin against the craft, in general, and one's own work in particular" (King, "Stephen King"). What King very aptly points out is that, while he acknowledges that literary fiction is grounded in imagination it operates on principles of truth which are grounded in reality as perceived by the author.

This very statement which predicates that there is truth within the medium of fiction is the reason for Stephen King's decision to have written these three unique, horrifying and strangely rational, yet becoming pieces of writing. As he puts it, "I never truckled, I never lied. I told the truth. And that's always been the bottom line for me. The story and the people in them may be make-believe but I have to ask myself over and over if I've told the truth" (King, "Stephen King").

Psychogenic Metafiction

In the preface to one of King's most complex psychological metafictional pieces "Secret Window, Secret Garden", he comments on the process of making not only this particular novelette, but also the construction of fiction in general. He declares that he got the idea for this novelette when looking out of an upstairs laundry room window and seeing a small abandoned garden. He quickly makes the experience into an elaborate metaphor by saying that

It's an area [the garden] I see just about every day...but [this time] the *angle* was new. The phrase which occurred to me was, of course, the title of this story. It seemed to me as good a metaphor for what writers – especially writers of fantasy – do with their days and nights. Sitting down at the typewriter or picking up a pencil is a physical act; the spiritual analogue is looking out of an almost forgotten window [...] a window which offers a common view from entirely different angle [...] an angle which renders the common extraordinary. The writer's job is to gaze through that window and report on what he sees. But sometimes windows break. I think that, more than anything else, is the concern of this story: what happens to the wide-eyed observer when the window between reality and unreality breaks and the glass begins to fly? (King 2)

For King, the act of writing is an art, but what is more important here is the statement which King tries to make, not only of this story, but of the art itself. What King emphasizes here is that the window, therefore, the writer's psyche constitutes a lens through which reality is perceived. The truth becomes a lie when it is engaged and explored in written discourse. The question he poses at the end completely destabilizes this traditional literary notion and explores deeper concerns. When a window, i.e. the writer's psyche breaks, the consequences are potentially destructive, which is exactly what the theme of "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is about.

In the context of metafictional practice though, the metaphor deepens even farther. The sole fabric of reality is called into question. Therefore, we could transform King's question into the following form: What happens to an observer when the barrier between reality and literary fiction is either thin or simply disappears? This is also one of the themes which are hidden within the story itself.

The observer becomes the reader who, if he or she realizes the truth behind the fiction, comes to question not only the plot or the stories' characters but the written artifact itself. The reader thus notices the connections, the pressure points which draw objective reality into the work of fiction which destabilizes and undermines the fiction itself, which renders it obsolete. The fiction then becomes a hybrid,

a metafictional text, which has the properties of both reality and fiction alike. The readers' realization that the story has strong ties not only to particular objects of extralinguistic reality but also in reference to itself as a work of fiction is the art of metafiction par excellence. And it is exactly what King in this novelette does.

"Secret Window, Secret Garden" explores the psyche and the psyche-induced actions of a mentally traumatized writer called Morton Rainey. The mental trauma which his main character endures is induced by Rainey catching his beloved wife in bed with her lover, with whom she, after filing for divorce, engages in a romantic relationship. The story begins several months after this incident with Morton Rainey living alone in a lake house in Maine. At the beginning of the story the main character is visited by the antagonist of the story called John Shooter, who immediately accuses Rainey of plagiarism and claims that he has stolen his story and the only thing he wants from Rainey is for him to fix the ending to his story. Rainey automatically rejects the accusation. It turns out that Rainey's story called "Sowing Season" and Shooter's story called "Secret Window, Secret Garden", are nearly identical, after which Shooter proposes a three day ultimatum. If Rainey can deliver proof that he has written the story before Shooter, than he backs off. During the three day period, the protagonist is under a great deal of stress motivated by Shooter. Shooter's attacks gradually escalate and are realized by him killing Rainey's cat with a screwdriver, burning down his former house as well as killing his friend and handy man. What is particularly noteworthy is that the handy man is the only one who went by when Rainey and Shooter were having a conversation outside the lake house and subsequently claimed that Rainey was there by himself. After the death of the handy man, it becomes apparent that something is amiss in the story. Shooter has a conversation with Rainey where he acknowledges that he is only a reflection of his psyche: nothing more than a mere manifestation of his disturbed unconscious mind. It turns out that Rainey's psychological trauma has run a lot deeper than he was willing to admit to himself. The anger and frustration resulting from his inadequacy in maintaining a functional relationship with his wife has taken its toll and caused Rainey's malformed psyche to invent a whole new persona – John Shooter.

The character of Shooter is constructed very elaborately. He is an embodiment of memorial fragments which had been transferred from Rainey's consciousness and embedded deep within his unconscious mind. Shooter is an older man with a southern accent, who comes from Mississippi and he wears a dark hat. Shooter is a combination of literary and cultural references, past and present events and acquaintances experienced and met by Rainey. He serves as both a blessing and a curse to him. Since Rainey's superego, his conscience, is incapable of acting on his unconscious id (in this case his aggressive urges), he invents a persona to do the bidding of his clearly prevailing id for him. Throughout the story, Rainey identifies with Shooter only partly at first, mainly through the medium of written discourse, which plays a key role in the development of the protagonist's psychological breakdown. Towards the end of the novelette, Shooter fully takes

over Rainey's conscious mind and attempts to kill his wife and her lover. Rainey's consciousness basically subsides into the depths of his own psyche. The apparition of Shooter becomes the driving force behind Rainey's actions. It could be asked why, in case Shooter is a manifestation of Rainey's subconscious mind, does he torture him so much. In other words, how come Rainey's subconscious mind allows his other persona to act aggressively against himself?

Calling forth another persona seems to be a preemptive action. It appears to be so due to the fact that the subconscious mind is the paragon of mental health and protection. Although in Rainey's case, it becomes counterproductive. It has to create the other (Shooter) and destroy the original one. So, the aggressive behavior of the other towards Rainey is an attempt of the subconscious mind, however unsuccessful, to harden the latter's mental defenses while giving way to the overeager id. The ineffectiveness of this subconscious action and the need for unity of mind results in the prevalence of the other – in Darwinian terms, the fittest, who Shooter in this undoubtedly is, survives.

The practice on metafiction in this novelette is apparent in several places and it can be found in several different forms. First of all, this story is a kind of a meta-metafiction because the primary metafiction is realized through the character of Rainey being a writer, which in itself is the undermining of the author's status as the looming shadow presence who has subtly presented dominant power over his fiction. What is more interesting is the mixture of varieties of metafiction which King very carefully and deliberately uses in this novelette.

What further destabilizes the narrative is King's mastery of the 3rd person narration which is in no way omniscient as it is a custom in this type of storytelling, but it rather adopts the position of the 1st person narration. The hybridization of the two most common types of narration results in a uniquely claustrophobic atmosphere. While the reader follows the account of Morton Rainey's life from the point of view of third person, at the same time, he/she also suffers from the narrow viewpoint which is characterized by the story revolving only around the character of Rainey. Furthermore, the reader is given only the information from the outside world, which encompasses objects of extralinguistic reality. The outside world in this story is not only predicated on objective reality but rather Rainey's conscious thoughts as well. The thoughts of the main character are presented alongside objective reality, thus rendering them a part of this reality. All of the metafictional aspects of this story are bipolar, Platonic constructs; therefore, they are comprised of two distinct worlds. In this case, it is the world which Rainey's consciousness experiences as well as the consciousness itself. The other world constitutes the seemingly dormant and narratively implicit subconscious mind of Rainey and Shooter as well. Regarding the employment of hybridization in narration in this particular novelette, the metafiction can be also seen in the property of the written discourse reaching out to the reader, who cannot do anything but identify with the main character. In other words, the world of truth and the world of lies merge together into one reality.

Above all metafictional aspects, the most important issue which this story brings forth is the question of reality itself. As it was mentioned above, metafiction is grounded in the theory that there is only one real world which is comprised of two equally true realities, namely extralinguistic reality and literary fiction. These two worlds coincide and exist side by side and from time to time interact through the act of reading. What King achieves in “Secret Window, Secret Garden” is a kind of a nebulous state of reality, where dreams and reality merge into one world where they interact. The two worlds are represented by Rainey’s subconscious (the center of dreams) and conscious mind (the center of the perception of reality). In the course of the story, Rainey tries to remember several of the events and objects of the extralinguistic reality which are somehow tied to his unconscious invention of the persona of Shooter. These memorial fragments are hard to recall because “his memory of the event [is] quite foggy” (43). Memories are very important aspects of this story. The protagonist gradually begins to question the authenticity of his own recollections. “Mort took no notice, confusing her [his wife’s] real voice with the voice in his mind, which was the voice of a memory. But was it a true memory or a false one? That was the real question, wasn’t it? It seemed like a true memory” (46). The confusion which the protagonist feels here is a representation of the real and the textual world overlapping and starting to form a bridge between the two. Shooter, as an invented persona of a writer, and Rainey start to become one and the same. Until the end of the story Shooter is only a part of the non-textual discourse but it slowly becomes apparent that he is a part of the written discourse as well. When Rainey is visited by his estranged wife towards the end of the story, what he hears in his conscious mind is the first line of Shooter’s story “Secret Window, Secret Garden”, which is basically the same as his story – “Sowing Season”: “She had stolen his love, and a woman who would steal your love when your love was really all you had to give was not much of a woman” (99). This is the point of the story when not only John Shooter and Morton Rainey become one whole persona but it also becomes clear that both stories transform into one. The textual information presented in the story seeps into Rainey’s reality, therefore, reality within the fiction, which further complicates and mystifies the clear-cut boundary between truth and fiction within this narrative, i.e. the fiction as such. And because this form of metafictional practice is generated in the character’s psyche, the term psychogenic metafiction is appropriate.

Another interesting metafictional aspect of this narrative is the layeredness of fiction within the medium of fiction. First of all, there may be found fragments of stories embedded within the narrative structure. But this metatextual information is only the tip of the iceberg. When one looks at “Secret Window, Secret Garden” in terms of metafiction, one cannot omit the looming presence not only of the individual layers of narrations but mainly of the complex matrix of characters who had written the novelette “Secret Window, Secret Garden”. It is as much about the producers of this written discourse as it is about the title of the story itself. Within

the context of this work of fiction, there are five distinct interconnected levels of reality present and they all have a connection to the title of the narrative. Firstly, "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is the name of the story which, as a young man, Morton Rainey plagiarized from his classmate John Kintner. As years went by he forgot about the incident and pushed the memory to his subconscious mind. Later, he published the story under the name "Sowing Season". The narrative then resurfaced in the form of John Shooter and again adopted the name of its former image.

The last two layers of narration are especially interesting. At the very end of the story, after Morton Rainey is killed, his wife Amy finds a letter from John Shooter. The letter says: "I am sorry for all the trouble. Things got out of hand. I am going back to my home now, I got my story, which is all I came for in the first place. Yours Truly. John Shooter" (112). When this letter is taken into account, it could be suggested that the story which is being read by the recipient – the reader, is the story which was written by John Shooter as the prime mover of this layered metafiction. Shooter thus takes the place of Stephen King himself and acts as the writer while, Stephen King, being the last and final metafictional layer, only establishes a shadow presence. But we may go a little further. The fact that John Shooter leaves a physical remnant of his presence in the literary world suggests that he himself as the author of the original novelette (the literary world from which all subsequent literary worlds of this narrative emerge) performed a metafictional act by writing himself into the confines of the story.

This narrative is unique in many ways but the most noteworthy is King's ability to blur the boundaries between the reader and the main character, Morton Rainey. The true genius of this piece of writing, from a metafictional standpoint, lies in his ability to utterly and consciously undermine his own status as the creator of this work of fiction by completely destroying the veil between reality and fiction, thus identifying himself with the character of John Shooter. Therefore, Stephen King abides by the general rules of metafictional practice to the letter. By merging two worlds not only in the setting or the plot but by making the characters, reader and the writer one and the same thing – one giant simulacrum, which is no less real than its constituents. The novelette "Secret Window, Secret Garden" ultimately denies the writer any escape from his imagination, which dissolves the line between the real and the imagined rendering the writer the insane God feared in *Misery's Return*, a novel which the antagonist Annie Wilkes forced the main character Paul Sheldon, in King's novel *Misery*, to create.

Transpositional Metafiction

In *Misery's Return* Sheldon writes: "His ideas about God had changed [...] He had discovered that there was not one God but many, and some were more than cruel--they were insane, and that changed all. Cruelty, after all, was understandable.

With insanity, however, there was no arguing” (King, 310). This comment within the context of metafiction explores the multiplicity of worlds within other worlds. In this story King explicitly explores the power which the author exorcises and holds with respect to his creation. What this short excerpt from *Misery* states is that authors stand in a god-like position in reference to the whole literary universe, which encompasses space, time, plot and characters as well. When the fact that through metafiction, the literary universe is perceived equally realistic as objective reality is taken to account, it could be said that writers, as the creators of worlds parallel to this one, automatically assume a god-like status. As one of the best known academically acclaimed authors of postmodernist fiction, Paul Auster writes in his *Travels in the Scriptorium* towards the end of the narrative:

It will never end. For Mr. Blank is one of us now, and struggle though he might to understand his predicament, he will always be lost. I believe I speak for all his charges when I say he is getting what he deserves—no more, no less. Not as a form of punishment, but as an act of supreme justice and compassion. Without him, we are nothing, but the paradox is that we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us, for once we are thrown into the world, we continue to exist forever, and our stories go on being told, even after we are dead. (64)

Firstly, this story is an account of one (and only one) day in the life of the protagonist Mr. Blank, who relives this day over and over again. This excerpt is from the afterword to the story, the existence of which is credited to the name N.R. Fanshawe, a name of the character in another of Auster’s narratives called *The New York Trilogy*. Similarly to King’s implicit positioning of the character of John Shooter into the position of the author, therefore himself, does Paul Auster credit and thus identify himself with his own literary creation, Fanshawe. The literary creations John Shooter and N.R. Fanshawe both assume the god-like position in which the author stands in relation to his own literary work, but at the same time they both stand in a character-like position, as is more than apparent in the excerpt from Auster’s *Travels in the Scriptorium*. The fact that Fanshawe is the explicit creator of this piece and he also refers to himself in regards to Mr. Blank in the first person singular and plural as well, suggests the equality of the status of both as mere literary creations of the prime mover, Paul Auster. There is one interesting element which is not present in King’s novelette “Secret Window, Secret Garden” but is present in Auster’s narrative, and that is the seemingly insignificant status of literary characters in association with the authors themselves. When we assume the position that authors are in a god-like relation to their literary creations, we automatically diminish the status of characters. But as Auster aptly points out in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the characters of stories continue to exist forever.

Therefore, it could be stated that the original position, that characters are inferior to their creators which has been dominant in literature until the emergence of Postmodernism, is nowadays continually reversed. Literary characters thus assume the position of ethereal beings who, although they cannot exorcise power over authors, in many cases, they definitely outlive their original makers. This is a concept which Stephen King deconstructs in another one of his prototypical metafictional pieces called "Umney's Last Case". This short story is analyzed here in detail in parallel with Paul Auster's themes incorporated in his *New York Trilogy* as well as *Travels in the Scriptorium*. It is due to the striking thematic similarities with Auster's writing which King employs in his short story.

"Umney's Last Case" follows the story of a private eye in L.A., called Clyde Umney who on a completely ordinary day walks to work. During the walk he notices several unsettling changes in the environment which occur in events, places and characters in a previously perpetual state of existence, such as the newsboy standing on the street corner every day not being there, his favorite bar being closed, an elevator attendant having to retire after many years of service in the building where Clyde has his office and many more. After stepping of the elevator at the floor where his office is located, he gets inexplicably agitated at a group of painters painting the lobby. After a short squabble he learns that the building's owner, called Samuel Landry, has given the order to repaint the lobby. Oddly, the name of the owner seems to be unknown to Clyde. The final straw is when he discovers that his secretary, Candy Cane, has left him a letter of resignation. In other words, Clyde's relatively eventful yet monotonous life becomes dominated by chance, which is a concept previously alien to him. The phrase "confusion, confusion, nothing but confusion" (King 843) is being frequently repeated throughout the narrative. It becomes the central theme of the story. Shortly after arriving at his office, he is visited by a man. Clyde's reaction takes him by surprise when he states:

I was scared out of my mind. I've faced blazing guns in the hands of angry men, which is bad, and daggers in the hands of angry women, which is a thousand times worse [...] I have even been tossed out of a third-story window. It's been an eventful life, all right, but nothing in it had ever scared me the way the smell of that cologne and that footstep scared me. 'Clyde' a voice said. A voice I'd never heard before, a voice I nevertheless knew as well as my own. (845)

Furthermore, Clyde grows a lot more concerned when he notices the appearance of the man sitting in his office. The man in the chair has features which very closely resemble Clyde himself and as it turns out, the man looks exactly like Clyde apart from the age difference. The latter appears to be the spitting image of Clyde. After this unsettling encounter the two men talk a little

longer. The tone of the narrative abruptly shifts when the true purpose of the story becomes apparent as is demonstrated by one of the most important subchapters found in the story. The title of this subchapter seems to be speaking for itself.

This fifth subchapter is entitled “Interview with God” (847) which is an interesting and quite apt choice of words because the man visiting Clyde introduces himself as Samuel Landry. Landry gradually takes over the conversation and states that he is the creator of Clyde and the world Clyde inhabits, in other words, he is a writer. It turns out that Clyde is the main character in a moderately successful detective series. Trying to persuade Clyde that he is telling the truth, Landry immediately presents several arguments, after which the former tries to attack him out of frustration. Landry assumes domination over the literary character and stops Clyde’s advance by typing the actions of his character into his laptop. This finally satisfies Clyde’s skepticism. Landry then comes clear over the real reason for plunging into his own creation – his literary world. As it appears, Landry’s life in reality has not been so kind to him. His son has died and consequently, he and his wife got divorced. Furthermore, Landry suffers from shingles, which is an incurable and painful disease. Thus the true motives of Clyde’s maker begin to take shape. Landry familiarizes Clyde with his intentions in assuming his place in the literary world, where he believes he can be truly happy. Then without asking for Clyde’s consent Landry assumes the position of the private eye, Clyde Umney and Clyde’s consciousness is transferred into reality, therefore, Samuel Landry’s body.

This elaborate form of metafiction is a combination of two traditional and one hybridized example of metafictional writing, namely the self-begetting novel, surfiction as well as the aforementioned hybridized form of metafiction previously described in the novelette “Secret Window, Secret Garden” – the multi-layered metafiction. It is so because of the transposition of characters, parallel worlds and of power interiorized within the position an author holds over his writing.

Primarily, what is particularly striking about this short story is the complex and explicit manner in which King handles metafiction when it comes to the transpositioning of two worlds – the “real” and the imaginary. As the character of Landry points out “writers very rarely plunge all the way into the worlds they’ve created, and when they do, they end up doing it strictly in their heads, while their bodies vegetate in some mental asylum. Most of us are content simply to be tourists in the country of our imaginations” (King, 862). What King very clearly asserts here, is that writers of fiction, up until recent decades, had mostly set clear-cut boundaries between reality and the world of imagination and at best perceived the merging of literary fiction and reality as falling into the pit of insanity. To illustrate, here is an excerpt from the famous novel by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra called *Don Quixote*: “Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind” (48). As King points out, writers are reluctant to reveal themselves and their art to the general public but he shows that even demystifying literature by self-consciously

drawing attention to the imaginary to raise its status and degree of reality, can produce very interesting and complex literary artifacts.

The transposition of literary worlds in "Umney's Last Case" is very closely connected to the shift in the status and degree of power of its characters. By entering his imagination, Landry exorcised his power as the God of this respective universe but by swapping places with Clyde, he automatically and consciously gives up the power and transfers it to Clyde, which is a concept very similar to what Paul Auster attempted in the third part of his *New York Trilogy* called "The Locked Room." The story is about the narrator's search for his lost friend Fanshawe, a writer, who after disappearing and leaving his pregnant wife, leaves his life's work and a note explaining his actions to a friend (the narrator). Fanshawe asks his friend to read his work and in case he deems it worthy, he is supposed to publish it. The narrator does so and he himself writes literary criticism about his stories. By falling in love with Fanshawe's wife and by trying to erase every trace of Fanshawe from his life, however unsuccessfully, the narrator assumes his life and effectively becomes the former. It is even speculated that the narrator is the one who wrote the work under an assumed name: "My first response was to laugh. [...] Did people not trust me to tell the truth? Why would I go to the trouble of creating an entire body of work and then not want to take credit for it? [...] I realized that once all of Fanshawe's manuscripts had been published, it would be perfectly possible for me to write another book or two under his name" (Auster, *The New York Trilogy*, 248). To assume someone's life means to become someone else, and just like Rainey becoming Shooter in "Secret Window, Secret Garden" or the narrator gradually becomes Fanshawe in *The New York Trilogy*, in King's "Umney's Last Case," Clyde assumes the life of his creator, Landry. The types of metafiction which are presented in these three narratives differ from one another, yet have one common element. That is, the differentiation of the psyche which can either reconstruct or alienate the self. Furthermore, when Clyde assumes the position of his creator in the "real" world, he immediately starts thinking like the narrator of "The Locked Room." He starts to read and learn how to write in a style which constitutes the mirror image of his predecessor. But because this has been written by Stephen King, who very often introduces horrific elements to his writing, Clyde in the body of Landry decides to make a living hell out of the newly appointed detective in L.A. In other words, Clyde in a position of power takes revenge upon his original creator.

The previously mentioned multiplicity of layers embedded within the metafictional aspects of this story is realized by logical dissimilarities in the textual and physical relation between Clyde and Landry. The first layer or narration is the connection Umney – Landry. Landry appears to be the prime mover when it comes to Clyde but it seems to be untrue. It is so because of Clyde, who is a mere literary character in Landry's twisted imagination, and retains the ability to manifest certain minor thoughts and actions independent of Landry's knowledge. He is, for example, able to resist Landry keeping him at bay by moving

just a little and thinking autonomous thoughts. This undermines the primary assumption about Landry being the one who asserts ultimate dominance over Clyde; therefore it implies a prime source of his partial resistance. While Landry appears to have the status of God in the literary world of Clyde, as the latter points out it is “sort of awful, realizing I had been made by such a bush-league version of God, but it also explained a lot. My shortcomings, mainly” (King, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, 856). Clyde as a creation was made, similar to men, in the image of his maker, but the sole fact that even the creator of the literary world Clyde inhabits is not perfect and all-powerful, undermines his status as the true drive behind the aforementioned world *and* Landry’s world as well. King here very subtly incorporates the notion of another layer of metafictional practice, which is embodied in King himself being the prime mover, who controls the actions of Clyde as well as Landry’s assuming dominance over his character as well. King then toys with his literary conceptions by reversing the roles of both characters thus brilliantly demonstrating the theory of multiple realities implied by metafiction within the fiction itself. Although it could be argued that the freedom exhibited by Clyde is only the result of a careless mistake made by Stephen King, it is highly unlikely on the grounds that when it comes to the main theme of his stories, King very rarely makes even the tiniest of mistakes, not to mention a considerable one like this.

Corporeal Metafiction

The third and last singular form of metafiction employed by King deals with his literary creation coming to life. This literary creation is the protagonist’s pseudonym, which is what is at the core of his metafictional novel. Similarly to King’s *The Dark Half*, in Paul Auster’s “The Locked Room,” the narrator’s thoughts begin to wander and he starts to think about passing his work under the name of Fanshawe, he contemplates the intricacies of using a pseudonym: “What it means when a writer puts his name on the book, why some writers choose to hide behind a pseudonym, whether or not a writer has a real life anyway” (238). These and several other points which Auster during the course of the story uses are being frequently deconstructed by many authors. Writers often use pseudonyms but very rarely comment on it.

In the early 80’s, Stephen King attempted a literary deception, where he published several of his novels under a pseudonym, Richard Bachman. He did this in an effort to extinguish the embers of his uncertainty: he was questioning his literary success and wanted to know which one of two possibilities was responsible for his accomplishment. He basically wanted to know whether it was talent or luck which had been standing behind his huge success as a writer of literary fiction. As King himself states that he has “yet to find an answer to the ‘talent vs. luck’ question” (King, *Thinner*, 2) as Bachman’s true identity as King was revealed

quite soon. As Richard Bachman, King published several novels including *Rage*, *Thinner*, *Blaze*, *The Long Walk* and *The Running Man*. After a short period of moderate success, fans noticed the similarities between the authors. A book clerk from Washington D.C., Steven Brown, discovered the similarities and went to the library of congress and uncovered the truth about the Bachman books. Later, he contacted King's publisher and was then contacted by King himself, who offered him the chance to write an article about him uncovering Bachman's true identity. As King announces in the foreword to his Bachman novel *Thinner*, Bachman "died" in 1985 of "cancer of the pseudonym" (3). There is one more thing worth mentioning, namely that King's pseudonym, Richard Bachman, adopted his own pseudonym which he "had used to write *The Fifth Quarter* under the name of John Swithen" (King, *Blaze*, 4).

This literary simulacrum led to the conception of one of the most important literary pieces when it comes to the employment of metafiction in King's literary corpus. The forward to King's novel *The Dark Half* is very short and concise but in actuality it speaks volumes. King pays homage to his literary pseudonym by writing that he is "indebted to Richard Bachman for his help and inspiration. This novel could not have been written without him" (1). Admitting the use and inspiration by his own literary creation in itself suggests the involvement of this particular theme which dominates the novel. *The Dark Half* is representative of merging serious postmodernist tendencies with horror fiction and creating a hybridized form of metafiction utterly unique to literature as well as King's own writing.

In contrast to "Secret Window, Secret Garden", which deconstructs the destructive influence writing could have on the psyche of an author, and "Umney's Last Case" which examines the relation between the literary universe and objective reality, *The Dark Half* incorporates the literary universe inside extralinguistic reality by introducing the concept of the horrific other. It also scrutinizes writing as an art of creating and suggests the fragmentation of the self, i.e. of one's psyche when it comes to authors.

The story follows a moderately successful writer Thad Beaumont, who is one day visited by the police who accuse him of murder. Thad has an airtight alibi but the police doubt it very much because it turns out that the murderer left Thad's fingerprint at the scene of the crime. It is also crucial to note that Thad had a twin brother whom he dissolved in utero. After diagnosing him with a form of cancer, the doctors discover some undissolved parts of Thad's unborn brother lodged in his brain. Thad is "a novelist with a dual career, one under his own name as a critically respected but unpopular novelist" (Grace, 63), and another under an assumed name, a pseudonym, George Stark who is the supposed author of a very popular and critically unnoticed crime novels. After enjoying 13 years of success as George Stark, Thad, influenced by a fan's discovery of the similarities between his and Stark's literary style, decides to "out" himself to the general public by staging a "funeral" for his literary double. After this event, two very important things happen. Firstly, the killings which the novel centers on start right after the

funeral. Secondly, the metaphorical killing of his literary pseudonym coincides with Thad getting writer's block. He is unable to write anything but his diary which is mostly written in a very impersonal and saccharin style. One day, Thad is called to the cemetery and sees a hole dug from inside in front of the fictional grave in which George Stark was figuratively buried. Right after that, the killings start. Later in the course of the story, it turns out that the murderer is none other than George Stark himself, a literary pseudonym which comes to life. Stark's figurative burial and his ultimate acquisition of a corporeal form results in a gradually escalating series of murders of people associated with Thad's isolation as writer who no longer depends on the work of his pseudonym. This leads to the inevitable final literary battle in which Stark, as a corporeal entity created entirely out of written discourse, tries to learn how to write from Thad, thus attempting to gain full separateness. Since Stark is a part of Thad, at the end the latter has no choice but to give up his greatest passion which is writing and thus destroying Stark once and for all.

King's statement in the preface of *The Dark Half* clearly determines that his own pseudonym was the source of inspiration for the novel. The metafictional aspect of this novel is very clear and concise. A purely literary creation coming to life is a fully developed hybridized form of metafiction. Combining certain aspects of the self-begetting novel and adding the elements of horror into it results in the creation of an entirely separate form of metafiction, named corporeal metafiction. It is realized through the pseudonym attaining, in spite of his fictionality, a certain degree of reality. Stark, although in corporeal instead of an ethereal state in which literary characters may be found, is nevertheless dependent upon Thad's creative genius. He lives from his imagination. Until his burial, Stark was no less real than he was after that, and he served as Thad's other persona, much like John Shooter was the double to Mort Rainey. When writing as George Stark, Thad has had no control over himself, he:

sometimes believed that the compulsion to make fiction was no more than a bulwark against confusion, maybe even insanity. It was a desperate imposition of order by people able to find that precious only in their minds... never in their hearts. Inside him a voice whispered for the first time: 'Who are you when you write, Thad? Who are you then?' And for that voice he had no answer. (128-9)

By assuming a certain amount of realization that Stark is present in Thad's mind, the latter willingly admits to himself the fact that through the medium of written discourse, his self becomes alienated from objective reality and his self: Thad's psyche becomes fragmented to the point where the other, his dark half, assumes power over writing, but through Thad's imagination. The fact that Thad has no answer for his inner voice (Stark's voice) suggests that he does

not question and only passively accepts his self-splitting. And by subsequently laying Stark to rest, he assumes a corporeal form out of the power of Thad's imagination.

Another striking aspect of this novel is when Thad sees Stark for the first time and notices his appearance: "They looked nothing alike.[...] Thad was slim and darkish, Stark broad-shouldered and fair in spite of his tan [...] Yet they were mirror images, just the same" (426). Stark, though an embodiment of Thad's brother who was dissolved in utero, bears very little physical resemblance to Thad, yet as Thad notices later, Stark not only looks but also acts exactly how he imagined the protagonist in the Stark novels, *Alexis Machine*, would. When Thad contemplates the possibility of the murdering double being the embodiment of his own pseudonym, he questions his own sanity because "George Stark was not real, and neither was Alexis Machine, that fiction within fiction. Neither of them had ever existed, any more than George Eliot had ever existed, or Mark Twain, or Lewis Carroll, or Tucker Coe, or Edgar Box. Pseudonyms were only a higher form of fictional character" (161). The name Stark was also borrowed by King. It was the pseudonym of a famous writer of crime novels originally called Donald E. Westlake. By creating a character inspired by an actual person, King "farther fictionalizes his fictional fiction" (Grace, 64). He interconnects three worlds and remakes them into one whole – the world of the novel *The Dark Half*.

Stephen King handles life and death of his antagonist in a very similar manner as it was done by Paul Auster in his "The Locked Room." The narrator of Auster's story first assumed Fanshawe's life and then tried to erase every trace of him from his life, but he gradually becomes obsessed with finding Fanshawe and decides to look for him. In the same way, Thad seems to be obsessed with Stark and in a manner akin to the narrator of Auster's story, tries to erase traces of him, but he is unable to do so. Furthermore, this attempt occurs involuntarily therefore there is no proof of Thad's positive reaction to this event which impacts his life in a major way. The same goes for Stark's coming to life. It is also an event which is forced upon Thad and while he wants to get rid of his murdering other, he is also reluctant to do so, because he realizes that getting rid of Stark means giving up writing. This need for writing, thus this "attraction to Stark" is akin to "alcohol or drug addiction" (Meyer 111).

Stark and Thad are both codependent upon each other and this relationship is most strongly realized near the end of the story. Stark is a creature compiled entirely out of words. He is the physical representation of the protagonist of the Stark novels, *Alexis Machine*. But while Stark is unable to exist independently of Thad's imagination, and thus is tied to Thad's ability to write, Thad himself is able to function without him ever writing, because addiction is treatable. It is also because Stark assumes corporeal form Thad's dead brother that Stark tries to achieve autonomy by trying to absorb Thad's ability to write in the same manner in which Thad's absorbed his twin brother in utero. By successfully assimilating Thad's ability to write, Stark could be able to manage independence.

Thus, the medium of writing is presented as a potentially destructive as well as constructive and remedial force. It is the thing which is able to reintegrate the parts of the self which were scattered by the self-splitting of Thad's persona into a coherent whole. However, Stark is unsuccessful and subsequently destroyed but at the cost of Thad giving up what he loves to do most, to write.

The ending of the novel is rather pessimistic. Although Stark is destroyed, the experience leaves Thad utterly distraught because since he has given up writing, his self becomes a whole but he has lost his life's purpose. Thad's inability to write after Stark's disappearance is due to the continuation of his writer's block about which King gives very little indication whether it is broken or not. However, the epigraph of the novel shows a part of Thad's earlier novel. It is a scene in which two lovers part and that ultimately denies a happy ending. But what is more important is that it indicates that Thad no longer possesses the ability to write. This renders the whole concept of writing mute, at least in this case. What King suggests here is that written discourse, wherever it comes from, comprises of "twin realities – the one in the real world and the one in the manuscript world" (201). And losing the world of imagination, the dark half of the self, means losing the ability to write.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was put predominantly on three of Stephen King's archetypal metafictional works of art, namely "Secret Window, Secret Garden", "Umney's Last Case" as well as *The Dark Half*. The deconstruction with respect to his use of metafictional systems was performed by a thorough analysis of the specific instances within the narratives themselves which, in several ways, contributed to the metafictional elements present in the interpreted works of art. King's approach of using the persona of an author as the protagonist of his fiction in all three cases was measured against the work of Paul Auster who, similarly to Stephen King, uses authors as his main characters, however, unlike King, he is in accordance with the traditional forms of metafictional practice proposed by Patricia Waugh. King strays from this postmodernist convention because he employs the elements of horror fiction in his writing. This is the reason for him being pushed to the fringes of academic discourse. Notwithstanding, this article offers a perspective which sheds new light on King's position within the literary tradition. It suggests that King's employment of horror fiction within his writing is not a detraction, on the contrary, it is an asset which enables him to produce truly remarkable and singular pieces of postmodernist writing to which the elements of metafiction are central. The aforementioned narratives are unlike anything postmodernist literature has ever seen.

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