University of Sarajevo

Faculty of Philosophy

English Language and Literature Department

John Barth's *Chimera* as metafiction

(*Himera* Johna Bartha kao metafikcija)

FINAL DIPLOMA PAPER

Candidate: Sanita Delić   **Mentor**: Associate Professor, Sanja Šoštarić, Ph.D.

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Contents

1. Introduction

Cultural, political or social restrictions imposed on human beings are the result of many conflicts of principles which arise as we persistently refuse to fight against that which oppresses us. Additionally, we impose new restrictions and censor ourselves in order to feed the oppressing forces as we put up with the world as we see it, mainly due to inherited family or social values, national or religious narratives, and tradition in general. Are our identities, as well as various social phenomena, ideologies and concepts, just creations of us who perceive and bring them into existence together with their meanings? If we believe that they exist independently of humans who think about them, do we choose to live in ignorance by accepting them as facts that are natural and self-evidently true? The shift from the epistemological to ontological approach towards that which exists changes the world of a postmodernist author who attempts to demystify and challenge the possibility of humans to completely discover, uncover and fully comprehend the world as it is.

As postmodernist literature has become a battlefield where the mission of a novelist, philosopher, literary critic, theorist, historian and scientist collide, the new life has been breathed in the production of literary works in the second half of the 20th century. Theorists generally distinguish between two major phases in the development of postmodernist literature – the early postmodernism (1960s and 1970s) and the late postmodernism (1980s and 1990s). The first phase is usually characterized as radically experimental, whereas the second is more oriented towards describing the culture of the period in a less intrusive way. This thesis will focus on the early phase of postmodernist literature in America, more specifically on John Barth's novel *Chimera* (1972) as one of its main representatives. *Chimera* is a novel which points at the postmodern hybridity in both form and content. John Barth creates a tightly intertwined postmodernist network of metafictional elements and social critique through an ironic depiction of metanarratives that have been stubbornly supported for a long time, since the period of ancient Greece. Although this novel pretends to be a grotesque monster whose body consists of the parts of three different animals (namely, lion, goat and snake), it actually strives for a structural perfection. It is subdivided into three novellas: "Dunyazadiad", "Perseid" and "Bellerophoniad". These novellas are loosely connected, but their lengths and order create a spiral-like shape of the

novel that becomes an organic-looking composition which embodies the rules of the Golden ratio (which forms the foundation for many classic works of art and architecture). While choosing an Oriental fairytale and ancient Greek myths as the starting points of his stories, Barth rejects traditional realist conventions used for covering up the fictitious quality of a text and exchanges them for those techniques that highlight fictionality instead, expanding on and radicalizing the earlier modernist project, increasingly abandoned as obsolete by postmodernists of Barth's generation. Thus, Barth goes into the very core of the chosen myths, recontextualizes, playfully reinterprets and changes them from within. Through metaphorical comments and ironic arguments, the very act of writing is problematized, which is why *Chimera* is usually understood as metafiction in the narrow sense. The position of a postmodern author who seeks for the originality of his expression, revision and reappropriation of traditional genres, as well as mixing-up of fiction and reality, are only some of the unavoidable postmodern features of the three novellas.

In order to better present the position and importance of *Chimera* and its voices hidden by the official historical narratives, this thesis will provide information on the circumstances that influenced the general shift in thought in the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the first part of the thesis focuses on general characteristics and main ideas related to the phenomenon of postmodernism, including the slippery meaning of the much debated prefix "post-", as well as on cultural and philosophical factors that contributed to its very existence. Since it is highly important to delve into the philosophical background of postmodernism, this part also discusses how the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche influenced postmodernist thought, that is, how his historicist approach to analyzing concepts such as the Truth/Facts, Knowledge and Morality contributed to the general ideas developed in postmodernist literature. The theoretical section also explores relevant aspects of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, such as his concept of *language-games* which was highly influential for analyzing language as the medium through which we interpret the world as we know it. Of course, the theoretical section on postmodernism would not be complete without a short review of basic poststructuralist ideas that radically challenged the conventional understanding of language.

After this short philosophical and linguistic overview that brings language to the center of attention, we will discuss the main features of postmodernist literature that provoked a divided opinion among the critics who were confused by all the changes, and thus offered the best they could to define this new movement in the literary circles. We will discuss its main ideas, techniques and styles which differentiate it from its modernist parents and realist grandparents – i.e. how postmodernists responded to the literary tradition. Early postmodernist literary works were very eccentric, and thus characterized by their stylistic and formal experimentation. In my opinion, it was to be expected that this new type of literary production would rapidly gain both its supporters and enemies, and that is why this thesis will explore the ways in which both negative and positive approaches to it contributed to the act of defining postmodernist literature. This approach is perfectly in tune with postmodernism's own tendency towards observing the world as a sum of various interpretations/perspectives that create reality we perceive. Likewise, this suggests that the literary scene in this period was a complex one, as it resists any precise categorization, and it is nearly impossible to make a credible list of all the critical, theoretical, literary and cultural arguments and definitions that accompanied the process of determining what postmodernism really means. There were numerous attempts to characterize this new era as a negative one, and this side of the story will be presented through several important reflections given by well-known literary critics and theorists of that period, such as: Harry Levin, Irving Howe, John Gardner and Fredric Jameson. Negative approach will be contrasted with more affirmative opinions provided by the critics who were optimistic towards postmodern experimental innovations, and they include: Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, John Barth, Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale. This theoretical basis will provide insights into both formal and stylistic techniques used by postmodern authors who were faced with the difficult task of writing fiction after modernism. The attitude of postmodern authors towards traditions of realism and modernism illustrates the state of literary scene in the second half of the 20th century, when artists and writers acutely felt that it was practically becoming impossible to produce original works of art by adhering to the established rules. This artistic "exhaustion" will be discussed in the following chapters, and will be seen through a lens of John Barth who used this term to describe the state of literature and the position of artists whose consciousness was profoundly affected by the changes after the Second World War, and later on by consumerism, and several social and cultural movements in the 1960s. Blindly following the patterns of their predecessors

could no longer be the goal of postmodern authors, who thus started to playfully present old topics in a new light, while using metafiction as their favorite tool enabled them to combine formal games with discussion of serious political, social and cultural issues and practices. Metafiction, also known as self-reflexivity and self-referentiality, will be explained, as well as various views and meanings of this term provided by theorists such as: Patricia Waugh, Robert Scholes, William Gass, Linda Hutcheon and Larry McCaffery. This section includes a discussion of the term "historiographic metafiction" and of its significance (at least for postmodernists) for understanding the world we live in, by way of revealing parallels between literature and historiography, or more widely, between literature and ideology.

After presenting the theoretical background and describing the wider cultural and social atmosphere and conditions in which *Chimera* appeared, the thesis offers the analysis of *Chimera* in two separate subsections. The first analytical subsection will examine novellas in *Chimera* as metafiction in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. as a literary work which can be described as "fiction about writing fiction". This discussion inevitably includes questions such as: what it means to write (original) literature, the position of a postmodern author in the specific historical and cultural moment of the late twentieth century, the use of tradition for the purpose of writing, the peculiar predicament of literature in the late 20th century, and postmodern author's self-irony as well as his/her ironic stance towards the critics and authors irrevocably trapped in the past.

Discussion of the work's metafictional dimension further includes an investigation into aspects, themes and features which justify classification of *Chimera* as historiographic metafiction, i.e. as a broader type of metafiction engaged in questioning and redefining of cultural myths and stereotypes of old. Therefore, the second analytical subsection primarily focuses on Barth's deconstruction of patriarchy and traditional gender roles, very much in line with the feminist sentiment of the era. The analysis argues that the author assumes a pro-feminist attitude by giving voice to women who had been victimized and silenced by patriarchy, that is, by rewriting official historical and cultural narratives from the female perspective. In this part, the thesis demonstrates Barth's postmodern intertwinement of the cultural and the political, of text and context, namely his obvious engagement with ancient narrative forms, primarily the ancient Greek myth (of Perseus) and the frame story of the Oriental fairy-tale, for the purpose of revealing their ideological background that is patriarchy. In so doing, Barth suggests there is no

ideologically or politically neutral literature, and he undertakes the task of unmasking that veiled political (patriarchal) context of ancient narrative forms through his postmodern remakes of these forms which are never only formal experiments in different kind of story-telling, but always also artistic visions of cultural, social and political alternatives closer to the twentieth century, in this case Barth's feminist rereading of tradition as opposed to patriarchy of ancient myths and stories.

2. Postmodernist theory

An attempt to precisely define what postmodernism is turns out to be just another impossible voyage – the harder we try to pin down postmodernism, the more it slips away from our hands. Hence, as literary scholar Bran Nicol argues in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, "postmodernism is a notoriously slippery and indefinable term" (Nicol, 2009, p. 1). The term was coined in the 1940s and was originally used to "identify a reaction against the Modern movement in architecture" (Ibid). Its usage is wide since it has managed to infiltrate itself in various fields of studies and disciplines, e.g. "social theory, cultural and media studies, visual arts, philosophy, and history" (Ibid). However, it is interesting to note that, even though the term postmodernism appeared in many theoretical and literary circles, the first person who was accountable for its widespread use is a historian Arnold Toynbee; later, after taking over this term, American critics such as Ihab Hassan and Harry Levin promoted it further (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 12). In his work *A Study of History* (1934 – 1961), Toynbee uses the term postmodernism to describe the last phase of western culture, from the year of 1875 to the period in which he lived; this last phase, according to Toynbee, is characterized by overcoming the concept of the national state and the tendencies towards global collaborations (Ibid). It is also important to observe the fact that the term postmodernism was understood in multiple ways, which led to numerous debates and conflicts of opinion among the critics, who attempted to either define it, or to give their opinion on the new phenomenon that appeared in the socio-cultural domain.

Many argue that the mid-twentieth century proved a particularly suitable terrain for the development of postmodernism as a social and artistic phenomenon, especially after the evident changes in thought which moved scientific and cultural world after the two World Wars. The conventional approaches towards life, art and science were insufficient to depict new experiences, emotions and perspectives. Furthermore, the society was undergoing various complex processes that affected everyday life, such as "the development of mass communications and a media culture", "the rapid modernization of much of the non-western world", as well as "international marketing, telecommunications, and intercontinental missiles" (Cahoone, 1996). The production and the control of information became "the hallmark of

economic life" in this period, and these radical changes made the transition to "a new 'post-industrial' society" (Ibid) inescapable. The diversity and complexity, which were now unavoidable in all spheres of life, gave rise to new ideas and created significant upheavals in social, cultural and aesthetic production. Generally speaking, postmodernism refers to the entire historical era that comes after modernism, and it is characterized by radical skepticism towards ideologies associated with previous eras, and therefore all systems which exercised too much power through various economic and political institutions.

2.1 What does "post-" in postmodernism mean?

The very term "postmodernism" is debatable and confusing, as the prefix "post-" points at multiple meanings. On the one hand, postmodernism might simply imply chronological succession insofar as it may refer to the movement which comes after modernism and "implies the end of modernity and the beginning of something new" (Castle, 2007, p. 144). On the other hand, postmodernism may denote cultural and artistic sensibility with specific relation to modernism, where it can suggest either the continuation of modernism, that is modernism's mature phase, or it may signal "a counter-movement within the modern itself" (Ibid). However, the significance that lies behind this term extends beyond its historical/temporal relation to the previous period or chronological order, as it presents a general shift in thought. Before we focus on thinkers who theorized about literary postmodernism, which, according to American cultural critics and commentators, presented a "new sensibility" (Nicol, 2009, p. 1) in this field, it is important to make a distinction among three important terms: postmodernity, postmodernism and postmodern. While "postmodernity" refers to the way in which the world was changed in the latter half of the twentieth century, driven by the rise of technology and life shaped by the information spread by (dictatorial) media, "postmodernism" (as well as the adjective "postmodernist") refers to "a set of ideas developed from philosophy and theory and related production" (Nicol, 2009, p. 2). "Postmodern" refers to "a set of aesthetic styles and principles

which characterize literary production in this period and which are shaped by the context of postmodernity and postmodernism" (Ibid).[1]

2.2 Influences on postmodern literature: Nietzsche and Wittgenstein

In this new epoch, language, truth and knowledge are looked at from radically different perspectives which challenge previous beliefs in the rule of reason and order, so that "in philosophy, in the arts, in science, in political theory and in sociology, postmodernism challenges the entire culture of realism, representation, humanism and empiricism" (Ermarth, 2011). Postmodernism seeks to demystify the fabricated nature of reality as we know it, as it playfully accepts chaos and the inability of humans to grasp the essence or even to know anything outside the language: "reality is always already manufactured, an ideological illusion sustained by the matrix of postindustrial capitalism and media culture" (Nicol, 2009, p. 13). If everything we know is knowable through language, we come to realize that there is no meaning that is a given and that language itself is an unreliable tool. This unreliable tool is unstable by definition, because the meaning depends on its use and on historical context/circumstances. The Truth with capital "T" (in other words, metaphysical Truth) is rejected together with the possibility to grasp it, because a privileged language which would uncover the real nature of the world does not exist. At this point it is useful to highlight two philosophical teachings that have influenced and anticipated this kind of postmodern thinking: Friedrich Nietzsche's historicist approach towards the analysis of particular ideas, such as traditional Western religion, philosophy and morality; and Ludwig Wittgenstein's theories on language, especially those that belong in his later phase.

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[1] This means that postmodernity simply refers to the historical period of the late 20th century marked by specific social, political, economic, psychological, scientific, cultural etc. changes, while postmodernism is a narrower term which denotes intellectual and artistic production of the age. It includes both "theory" (e. g. philosophy, poststructuralist linguistics, anthropology, cultural studies, or the multidisciplinary mix of those) and art (film, literature, architecture, painting, sculpture, comics etc.). The latter difference, according to Nicol, is marked through the specific use of adjectives: we speak about postmodernist philosophy or postmodernist theory, but about postmodern fiction or postmodern cinematography. On the other hand, many theorists ignore such neat distinctions, and this thesis will use the adjectives postmodernist and postmodern more liberally.

Many argue that Nietzsche is one of the earliest precursors to postmodernism. He is renowned for having incorporated a historicist method in his works. The historicist thinkers are best described by the famous philosopher Richard Rorty as those who "have denied that there is such a thing as 'human nature' or the 'deeper level of the self'" (Rorty, 1989, p. xiii). Rorty further argues that their strategy has been to insist that "there is nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human" (Ibid). Thus, Nietzsche is famous for his rejection of the true world and "any structured, 'objective reality' deemed to exist independently of human concerns, judgments and valuations" (Cooper, 2003, p. 830), which is a direct critique of the Western culture, from Plato to the end of the 19th century. The implication that facts we can imagine and perceive in any way are created by the context, that is, man-made, marks the moment of intellectual liberation from universal, undisputed "facts" in the traditional sense: the latter are being wiped out or, at best, subject to skeptic interrogation. This breakaway with the tradition was becoming possible with the growing affirmation of the individual and the subjective as the only acceptable approach to reality, at the expense of the universal and the objective. Nietzsche argues that there is "only a perspective 'knowing'" and that "facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations" (Cooper, 2003, p. 834). In his famous work *The Will to Power* (1901), Nietzsche also argues that the "truths" humankind has come up with have no other purpose than to act as an answer to everyday struggle for the survival as a species. Even science, usually considered as a discipline that relies solely on logic and proof, and therefore synonymous with accurate and highly objective approach, is put under harsh scrutiny by Nietzsche and labeled as just another perspective/interpretation of fallible human beings (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 324). Thus, logic, just like Knowledge and Truth, serves some human interests, and it is "only a reflection of how our minds work, and has nothing to do with objective knowledge or truth" (Robinson, 1999, p. 18). Besides his perspectivism, Nietzsche is a precursor to postmodernism as a harsh critic of all undisputed values, for example of narratives and ideologies deeply rooted in Western society. Postmodernist writers shared his radical skepticism towards the intellectual past, which resulted in the redefinition of old topics and in the introduction of new sets of questions altogether. The way out of the traditional norms and values lied in the creation of oneself, and not finding it in some essences and metaphysical realms. Another important influence on postmodernist literature in particular is Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), where he questions the values of traditional morality, especially

those of Christianity and Judaism. He argues that morality is nothing else but the result of social and cultural circumstances in the given time and place, and that it is not something outside human beings, something transcendent, as the tradition claimed and wanted us to believe. He singles out religious morality because it had a great impact on humanity for centuries as it presented itself as the absolute and the only scheme according to which people are to behave:

> The ascetic ideal has a *goal*—a goal which is universal enough that all other interests in human existence, measured against it, seem small and narrow. It interprets times, people, and humanity unsparingly with this goal in mind. It permits no other interpretation. No other goal counts. It rejects, denies, affirms, and confirms only through *its own* interpretative meaning (—and has there ever been a system of interpretation more thoroughly thought through?); it does not submit to any power; by contrast, it believes in its privileged position in relation to all power, in its absolutely *higher ranking* with respect to every power—it believes that there is no power on earth which does not have to derive its meaning first from it, a right to exist, a value, as a tool in its own work, as a way and a means to its own goal, to a single goal. . . Where is the *counterpart* to this closed system of will, goal, and interpretation? Why is this counterpart *missing*? (Nietzsche, 2009, p. 123)

The problems exposed in this excerpt are enormously important, since these are some of the issues that are brought to the center of attention and observed meticulously in the postmodernist works. Nietzsche warns us of the danger that arises if we become slaves to only one interpretation of reality. The absence of pluralism in thinking and defining the world itself is dangerous – if one ideology is dominant for a long period of time, its roots become deep and imbedded in future narratives which are usually taken into account as something natural and not created or fabricated through various discourses. Certainly, Nietzschean interpretation of *power relations* has had a great reach and has found its application in the subsequent periods (including our age), since the ideologies that govern our lives in all aspects are usually those that exercise great power. There is no doubt that postmodern authors, in an attempt to answer these very questions, have established themselves as the *counterpart missing*. Echoing Nietzsche's worry when it comes to the absence of the plurality in "this closed system", postmodern authors have used a number of techniques to expose that which seems to be dominant and powerful naturally. Thus, those who were oppressed by dominant ideologies get the right to speak for themselves, and in that way, official historical narratives are challenged, rewritten and retold by their counterparts, namely by multiple, previously silenced voices that create a *bricolage*, a new story made up from the diverse perspectives.

Another important philosopher who had a great impact on postmodernist thought is Wittgenstein, especially with reference to the later stage of his thought. He claimed that we actually create our world/reality through language, and in his influential work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he wrote the well-known phrase "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein, 2010, p. 74). Although Wittgenstein rejected almost all of his ideas from *Tractatus* in the later stage, this single thought has permeated his entire work. He claims that, as we turn to language, we are given a chance to understand and analyze mistakes we have made, mistakes which derive from our blind belief in the absolutes. In postmodernist literature we come across similar ideas, in the sense that, following the examples of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, postmodern authors problematize and challenge well-known patterns of thinking and acting that have traditionally been served as absolute truths. These ideas were fueled even more with the later work of Wittgenstein, namely with the concepts of *language-games* which sought to reject fixed meanings and in turn they stressed that language is used in multiple ways where the same word or sentence can carry different (and ever-changing) meanings in different situations: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 20). Therefore, language is a game which is produced by humans and played according to the rules deemed appropriate at a particular time, which means that this game changes its rules in accordance with the given circumstances at different times. Additionally, Rorty highlights that:

> The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that. (Rorty, 1989, p. 6)

When we analyze the language we use, we should be able to see all the mistakes that have been made through insistence on various narratives grounded in our social practices and worldviews. Only through language was humankind capable of creating fixed meanings and ideas of our world throughout different epochs, simply because language did not exist before humankind. The logic is: if we are creating our reality with language, and, in that way, we are making an order out of chaos, we are responsible for privileging one set of words (accepted stories) above the others. By doing so, we are creating dominant ideologies that later on rule the world. Very often we are not in a position to understand what is happening in the present, and then we protect ourselves by creating the illusion of safety which rests on apparently logical or

plausible answers, e.g. we routinely employ our defense mechanisms and blame evil (metaphysical, external) forces for our own misconceptions.

2.3   Influences on postmodern literature: poststructuralism

Furthermore, postmodernist view of language was importantly influenced by the work of poststructuralists. Poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jean Baudrillard or Julia Kristeva further problematized the meaning, separated the real world from the realm of language, and challenged and revised the well-known and previously unquestioned structuralist theory by Ferdinand de Saussure, while at the same time they built upon it. Structuralism distinguishes the sign from the referent, but poststructuralism "goes a step further: it divides the signifier from the signified", which means that the words are constantly deriving the meaning from each other, and this repeats endlessly, because "earlier meanings are modified by later ones" all over again (Eagleton, 1996, p. 111). What is important for this view is the assertion that the language is arbitrary because of the unstable nature of signification. Also, there is no such thing as pure sign, because in each sign we can find something that is left from the previous signs, or there is some space left for embracing the parts of some new signs, *ad infinitum*. According to poststructuralist theorists, the process of signification is not stable, and a sign should be able to be reproduced many times, which leads to the conclusion that the same sign tends to change its meaning in different environments and in different periods. If we observe a sign by what it does not represent, it is very hard in the end to conclude the true essence and the meaning of it. However, the absence can point to the existence of a sign, and poststructuralists argue that the absence of a sign is also a sign. Language is imprecise, and we can notice that one signified can appear to have more than one signifier, and that sometimes numerous signifiers have only one signified to which they all refer. As this playfulness of signification goes on in various directions, we are constantly tricked and sentenced to miscommunication and misunderstanding or, as postmodernists would put it, we are given the freedom of interpretation. We cannot help ourselves but wonder what the first pure signifier that fully referred to the pure signified was (i.e. the first pure sign from which all other signs derived their meanings), the first hoop to start the chain of signification that is being upgraded even nowadays. If we imagine perfect conditions, Eagleton suggests that there would

be some kind of a "transcendental sign" which has to be above the whole system of language and thought, something that would stand for "the meaning of meanings", whereas all the other signs would revolve around it while reflecting its essence obediently (Eagleton, 1996, p. 113-114). Unfortunately, if we continued this line of thinking, we would enter the reign of metaphysics and the absolutes once again.

In the same way as the language is used to convey the meaning of what surrounds us, it is also used for mind control and indoctrination by those who stress the significance of certain words in order to magnify a particular meaning, thus creating, or better constructing, ultimate truths in the so called "objective reality". Language becomes a text that speeds up the process of the reconstruction of the world, which results in the construction of the new hyper-reality, the one that is really hard to recognize as such and fight against. The new socially and culturally constructed "reality" is primarily created thanks to the "metanarratives", as Lyotard terms "grand stories which structure the discourses of modern religion, politics, philosophy, and science" (Nicol, 2009, p. 11). Poststructuralists (and postmodernists) seek to undermine and deconstruct such metanarratives and challenge the binary oppositions inherent to metanarratives. In doing so, they acknowledge that a pair of terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning partly undermine each other as we "begin to unravel these oppositions a little, demonstrate how one term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 115). For instance, terms such as "man" and "woman" are two mutually exclusive terms for a male-dominated society, where "man is the founding principle and woman the excluded opposite of this" (Ibid). Thus, woman is perceived as the "other" of man and is usually portrayed as less valuable in relation to the male first principle. However, poststructuralists point out that these differences could be partly undermined, or they could be shown partly to undermine each other, by acknowledging that if a sign is the image of what the opposite sign is not, it becomes "an essential reminder of what it is" (Ibid). Hence, removing one of the paired opposites alters the other's meaning, as both are defined in relation to each other. Poststructuralists challenge the dominance of one opposite over the other, and, to go back to our example, the term "woman" may not be so drastically different from the term "man", simply because the first "inheres within the other" (Ibid).

Each ideology "seeks to convert culture into Nature" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 117), but the very effort put into presenting ideology as natural reveals its artificiality. Hence, the only healthy sign, according to Roland Barthes, is the one that purposefully draws attention to itself as

artificial (Ibid). Nicol also argues that "poststructuralism favors a creative approach to interpreting the literary or artistic text that demonstrates how its meanings are always multiple and deferred rather than fixed" and that all of this is "in tune with the 'postmodern' approach to interpreting texts" (Nicol, 2009, p. 6).

Postmodern philosophy frequently corresponds with poststructuralist ideas, insofar as it denies any fixed meaning, arguing that it is impossible to bestow a definite meaning to any particular event or concept. Furthermore, postmodernists emphasize that the world as we know it does not operate according to the rules of cause-and-effect relationships, and that everything we witness is contingent.

However, after this brief overview of theories and philosophies that were very influential for postmodernist literature, we will finally turn to that literary battlefield where various studies and disciplines communicate, clash and collide, but successfully co-exist. Thus, the next chapter will discuss the ways in which these and similar ideas and broadly theoretical concerns were reflected in postmodernist artistic techniques, literary devices and styles, and then transformed into eccentric and oustanding literary works.

3. Literary postmodernism

New perspectives developed by postmodern theory had a great influence on the production of literary works in the second half of the 20th century. Although many authors practically applied postmodernist tenets in their fiction, or created fiction which more or less directly reflected postmodernist sensibility, the breakaway with the past was not accepted easily. As the confusion over postmodern literature intensified in the literary and critical circles, either because of the difficulty to accept postmodern innovations, or because of the strange and paradoxical nature of postmodern fictional worlds, this new literary phenomenon soon gained both its enemies and supporters.

Now that we are able to look at the past from a certain distance, and therefore analyze and compare the most influential literary works from the second half of the 20th century, we can notice some characteristics shared by both early and late postmodernist works. Since the loss of meaning and faith in humanity was ubiquitous after World War II, it is not surprising that postmodernist works are characterized by the tendency to reveal a cynical world of paradox, irony, and nonsense. Many believe that the essential difference between modernists and postmodernists lies in their different attitudes to the world which both saw as meaningless: while the first had endeavored to counter the meaninglessness of universe but an artistic attempt to hint at the possibility of some ultimate order beyond the observed chaos of the early 20th century, the second simply accepted and embraced the chaos of the late century and playfully ironized or subverted belief in any possibility of genuine or definite meaning. This fundamental shift in 20th-century sensibility explains why postmodernists often ridiculed or ironically recast earlier modernist works by parodying standard modernist artistic and literary techniques, even when they echoed them. Postmodern literature typically rejects to acknowledge the difference between low and high culture (which is in tune with the problematic meaning of value – as discussed earlier in this paper), between highly philosophical and simple thoughts, and between high and low genres (e.g. tragedy and comic). In addition, postmodern works regularly confused literary critics of the time by their unusual generic hybridity, i.e. a tendency to blend a variety of genres and forms of writing without any inhibition. Postmodernist interest in fiction, however, was not limited to ideological concerns, but it also manifested itself through a metafictional or self-reflexive form. Metafiction, often singled out as the most favorite weapon used by postmodern

authors, is usually understood as writing about writing which makes the readership aware of the fabricated nature of what is being read (this will be discussed later). Also, postmodernist texts are characterized by a variety of prominent characteristics: unreliable narration; fragmentation; intertextuality and the rewriting of other texts in a new key; dark humor; magic realism; the blending of historical figures and fictional characters; the blending of real-life events and fictitious ones; temporal and spatial games where the chronological development of the plot is disrupted (non-linear narratives); use of both common characters (sometimes caricatures) and mythological, supernatural ones; and direct addressing of the readers who are expected to actively follow what is being narrated and to draw their own conclusions. Rejected as too patriarchal, snobbish, elitist, and even racist or politically reactionary (T. S. Eliot's conservatism in the later years or Pound's fascism and antisemitism), modernism was challenged from the 1960s onwards by new perspectives on cultural identities and personal histories. Among other things, postmodernism brings to the center of attention those identities that were left out from the official white male narratives which had determined both realist and modernist tradition in the Western culture. Furthermore, as an answer to the nineteenth-century realist tradition that employed the practice of *mimesis*, postmodernists reject the literary convention of the all-knowing narrator who leads the readers through the story in the manner of a reliable and objective mediator by providing the detailed transcription of outside world/events in a work of fiction. Realist literature was supposed to teach its readers particular moral and social lessons, such as what is good and what is bad, what makes a good citizen, what is the prescribed gender policy, and alike, while immersing its readers into a fictional world as if it were a mirror-picture of the outside world, the world as we know it, with the action that develops chronologically and confirms the belief in the logical relations of cause-and-effect governing the described events. Postmodern critique of literary realism has usually been associated with the idea that realist fiction has neither the power to shake the social hierarchy, nor to re-examine the influences of different ideologies. Similarly, realist fiction has been perceived as yet another medium by which certain ideologies are maintained and accepted as absolute truths. Thus, Terry Eagleton argues that "fiction may be a potent source of ideology, since one function of ideology is to present a specific situation as though it were a universal truth" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 13). In sharp contrast to such ideological use and abuse of art, postmodern literature insists on fictionality of both art and life: it is not only that literary works deliberately draw attention to themselves as artifacts, as

something fabricated or invented, but postmodern authors demonstrate through their works that fictionality extends beyond literature or art and pervades all existence. Therefore, they often relish in uncovering the fictitious nature of all systems, ideologies and theories.

Even though postmodernist fiction thus paves the way for discussion of much wider social, ideological or political issues, we must not forget that it usually employs metafiction in the narrow sense which is crucially concerned with aesthetic experiment, irony, paradox and play, frequently employing typographic games to suggest that which the words cannot express, or to show both the limitations and potentials of the written word. Although it seems that the worlds opened up by metafictionists are bleak, we must not fail to see beyond them and accept their playfulness which, in my opinion, differentiates them from their modernist parents and realist grandparents. Postmodern playfulness typically manifests itself in radical ontological confusion, that is in radical blurring of fiction and reality, where the outer and the fictional world entwine, where fictional and historical characters appear in both realms, while the author randomly steps in and out of the story.

3.1 Negative views on postmodernist literature

The experimental nature of postmodern works was not accepted enthusiastically by all, especially not by those who still believed in modernist ideas of innovation and progress. Also, there were many literary critics and thinkers who rejected postmodern literature because of its alleged monstrous strangeness and ironic approach. Bran Nicol notices "a peculiar tendency amongst theorists of the postmodern to employ language of mental disorder to describe its effects" (Nicol, 2009, p. 9). He emphasizes several descriptions of postmodernism found in the works of the great theorists of the time: it was described by Fredric Jameson as "schizophrenic"; Kenneth J. Gergen described it as "multiphrenic"; Simon Gottschalk said it was "telephrenic"; Harry Levin thought it was "depressive and nihilistic"; Victor Burgin and A. W. Frank described it as "paranoid"; while Brian Massumi concluded it was "liable to induce in those who live in it 'low-level fear'" (Ibid). These assumptions were also applied to the postmodern literature that stripped the whole world to its very core. On the one hand, some of those negative approaches stemmed from the comparison of postmodernist works to those of high modernism. For example, Harry Levin and Irving Howe saw postmodernist literature as a step backwards in comparison to

the virtuosity of modernist authors. They connected postmodernism to the avant-garde tradition of the early 20th century, often described as too experimental and radical (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 13). On the other hand, intellectuals such as Hugh Kenner, Robert Alter, Gerald Graff and James Mellard saw postmodernism only as an attempt of modernism to keep itself alive, and thus they negated the existence of a separate new movement.

Furthermore, American novelist John Gardner was highly critical of the changes that were taking place in the 1960s and 1970s, as he was worried that the true purpose of art was corrupted through the loss of morality. In his *On Moral Fiction* (1978), greatly inspired by Leo Tolstoy's essay "What is Art?" (1897), he presents postmodernist literature as that which is responsible for promoting moral decay. He argues that "ideals expressed in art can effect behavior in the world" and that the role of an author and his/her work is to set a good and didactic example for the readers, where Good always wins and where the traditional heroic and religious endeavors still get rewarded (Gardner, 1979, p. 29). He argued that postmodernist works confused readers by texts that are "the hardest ones to read and thus the easiest to teach", adding that the opinion of his contemporaries affected by euphoria around postmodernism was irrelevant, since they did "no longer seek truth, or goodness or beauty" but they rather directed "their talents to parody, to role playing, to survival by 'mythotherapy,' as John Barth called it in an early work" (Ibid, p. 54-55). All in all, Gardner perfectly summed up a characteristic view of postmodern authors (and their fiction) shared by highly critical and skeptical scholars and critics of the time:

> They may be not so much a group of post-modernists as a gang of absurdists and jubilant nihilists, and perhaps also a few morally concerned writers whose innovative methods got them trapped in the wrong room. (Gardner, 1979, p. 55)

Among those who rejected postmodernist literature as something weird, sickly, abnormal, disrespectful, devious, nihilistic, mad and aggressive, the most prominent opponent was Fredric Jameson, a post-Marxist theorist who linked the era of postmodernity to the third stage of capitalism. He argued that postmodernism is characterized by "depthlessness" and that the postmodern subject is unable to feel and therefore express his/her feelings. Jameson believed that the continuation and extension of modernist project was the only valuable aspect of a peculiar mixture of high and low culture typical of postmodernism. Likewise, he condemned the absence of any purposeful socio-political activism in postmodernity, and he claimed that people were

becoming even more estranged, without a compass or solution to everyday issues (political, social, ethical, racial, etc.). He described postmodernism as follows:

> We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call Postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts -- such is the logic of Postmodernism in general. (Jameson, 1991, p. 96)

Jameson argues that postmodernist artists have nothing else to accomplish besides going back into the past and making fun of what has already been said. According to the abovementioned excerpt, not only does postmodernism use other texts as its starting point, but it also "cannibalizes" other literary works and creates nothing worth admiration after the period of high modernism. What is to be found in postmodernist works, according to this view, is only a series of styles and texts without any meaningful attempt to solve the problems that manifest through injustice, indifference, even violence, in the late capitalist society. He also highlights the fact that postmodernist approach, reflected in all forms of art, reduces humanity to disoriented individuals devoid of their own identity and purpose. Thus, postmodern literature creates empty and purposeless works which Jameson compares to a pastiche – an "empty parody" which does not even entertain, let alone provide a deeper meaning or message (Ibid, p. 17). He argues that postmodern subjects "tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria", and that there is only one "way 'out' of postmodernist logic through what he calls 'cognitive mapping,' the identification and analysis of all its effects" (Nicol, 2009, p. 11). According to Jameson, postmodern subjects are lost in time and space – they are dependent on reality TV, hyper-entertainment and disorder, and unable to situate themselves in the historical context. Thus, Jameson does not recognize any purposeful application for postmodernist art, and emphasizes its cooptation with the capitalist ideology: even when postmodern authors mention existing problems, they do not give a solution.

3.2   Affirmative views on postmodernist literature

In the 1960s, the early supporters of postmodernist ideas such as Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag and Ihab Hassan welcomed the authors who were ready to take a step forward without solely comparing their works to those of the previous decades, and who were ready to let go of lamenting over that which had started to disappear (i.e. high modernism). For example, Fiedler believed that this new "anti-serious" and "anti-artistic" art had a great potential to bridge the gap between high and low culture, between the rich and the poor, and to offer new solutions to the problems that were transferred through centuries and reached his own time. Fiedler described postmodernist productions as "an art that has given up on representations with essentialist pretensions and instead offers local narratives that are aware of their own provisional status" (Bertens, 2005, p. 38). Sontag was among the earliest critics who noticed a significant shift from content to form, as well as the playful rather than moralizing quality of postmodernist texts (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 15). It is also interesting to note that early postmodern authors promoted postmodernism both in their fiction and in their non-fictional commentaries on the literary scene, and thus they actually combined literary criticism, theory and literature, deliberately abolishing traditional boundaries between disciplines. Writing in these new circumstances was challenging, simply because earlier techniques and styles proved insufficient and inadequate in altered historical and cultural circumstances of the late 20th century. However, as discussed in subsequent sections, what actually happened was not a complete breakaway with modernist and realist traditions. Postmodernists meticulously picked and chose the material which could be refreshed and brought back to life in a new key. In order to better explain this argument, I will turn to the famous American novelist John Barth whose two highly influential essays, namely "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) and "The Literature of Replenishment" (1982), illustrate his ingenious argumentation of postmodernist literary procedure at the crucial moments for the consolidation of postmodernist poetics.

In the first essay, which was later considered to be the manifesto of postmodernism, John Barth describes the literary scene of his own time characterized by "the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" (Barth, 1984, p. 64). The main stimuli to his thoughts should be sought in the tradition which was slowly becoming a burden to the authors

who, like Barth, sought new practices in fiction. Barth refuses to see either modernist or realist tradition as the undisputed achievement which should not be questioned. Despite the lament of those who did not want to move away from the past, authors such as Barth opened up the doors towards the new possibilities. Thus, he describes his own novels, as well as the novels produced by Nabokov and Borges (whose works he greatly admired), as the "novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author" (Barth, 1984, p. 72), where the author overcomes the already "used-up" literature by destabilizing concepts such as originality and authorship. In this way, he completely dismisses realist tradition along with its conventional devices and techniques designed to create a mirror reflection of the "real" world in a work of art. Instead, Barth praises Borges for his virtuosity in making Cervantes' *Don Quixote* alive again in his own version and interpretation and poses questions such as what it really means to write original works of literature. Impressed by the ideas of Borges, Barth concludes that not only is the attempt to write original work of literature difficult, but it is perhaps unnecessary, as postmodernists reuse, rewrite, remake, and reinterpret the already existing texts and themes in accordance with the sensibility of the late 20th century. However, Barth equally criticizes those who blindly follow traditional patterns of writing as well as those who practice meaningless innovation for the sake of innovation, thus creating nonsensical works (which Jameson identified with the entire postmodernist literature). Nevertheless, Barth believed in a bright future of literature, that is, he believed that literature has a future once it successfully overcomes the diagnosed exhaustion of the early 1960s, and the main beacons of hope in this respect, for both his contemporaries and for the future generations of writers, were Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges.

After "The Literature of Exhaustion" provoked a divided opinion among critics (as many considered it imprecise), John Barth decided to clarify and expand it in a follow-up essay "The Literature of Replenishment". In this essay, he highlights important (dis)similarities between postmodernist and realist fiction, that is, between postmodernist and modernist fiction, and comments on the status of literature in his own time. Barth begins this essay by emphasizing the growing popularity of "postmodernism" in the United States in the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Barth, 1984, p. 194). Although at the time the term "postmodernism" was not included in standard dictionaries and encyclopedias, the presence of postmodernism was evident in the academic circles and at American universities, which increasingly incorporated American

postmodernist fiction in their curricula. Dissatisfied with the existing characterizations of postmodernist fiction, Barth offers his own formulations and points out that postmodernist fiction is not disconnected from the literary past. According to Barth, "a worthy program for postmodernist fiction" is actually the "synthesis" of the "antithesis, which may be summed up as premodernist and modernist modes of writing" (Ibid, p. 203). In other words, postmodernist literature connects the literary past and the literary present, as it combines both premodernist and modernist features, yet without completely rejecting or completely repeating any of those. Thus, he does not suggest a complete breakaway with the past, and asserts that his

> Ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. (Barth, 1984, p. 203)

In order to better explain his postmodernist combination of the old and the new, Barth extends his previous list of honorable literary names, and singles out several important authors that contributed to the "postmodernist literary aesthetic". For Barth, postmodernist precursors are Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615), Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767), as well as some nineteenth-century predecessors: Alfred Jarry, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and "the great modernists" such as James Joyce, Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Thomas Mann (Ibid, p. 195). Thus, Barth's ideas of literary innovation rooted in the necessary revision of the past reveal that the "exhaustion" described in his previous essay "is not of language or of literature, but of the aesthetic of high modernism" (Ibid, p. 206). Namely, Barth believed that high modernism was an outdated "program", whose continuation would have perpetuated the very exhaustion that he wishes to overcome.

In the 1980s, theorists such as Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale also took an affirmative approach to postmodernism respectively, especially towards postmodernist fiction. They attempted to define what postmodernist fiction does and how. The following sections present their respective ideas and theories which contributed to a better understanding of postmodernist approach towards language, history, society as well as aesthetics including its final goals.

Linda Hutcheon, a famous Canadian theorist, greatly inspired by Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, shows a great interest for examination of "language, textuality, power and history" in postmodernity (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 40). In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Hutcheon responds directly to Jameson's (mis)understanding of postmodernist fiction. Hutcheon's argumentation offers a variety of useful and insightful observations. For example, Hutcheon reminds that postmodernism has promoted multiple approaches to problem solving, but that it has also provided more than one perspective on itself, so that we are free to see and interpret it according to our own abilities and desires. Hence, where Gardner and Jameson saw the decline of morality through the relativization of each concept and established pattern, Hutcheon recognizes another opportunity to reconsider and re-evaluate what had already been said. In her analysis, postmodernist phenomenon

> acknowledges the human urge to make order, while pointing out that the orders we create are just that: human constructs, not natural or given entities. […] part of its questioning involves an energizing rethinking of margins and edges, of what does not fit in the humanly constructed notion of center. Such interrogations of the impulse to sameness (or single otherness) and homogeneity, unity and certainty, make room for a consideration of the different and the heterogeneous, the hybrid and the provisional. This is not a rejection of the former values in favor of the latter; it is a rethinking of each in the light of the others. (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 41-42)

In this way she does not look at the present and the past as incompatible concepts, but she rather studies the effects and relations of one towards the other. Just like John Barth, Hutcheon believes that postmodernist literature is not a world for itself, disconnected from the literary tradition. However, she does challenge the intellectual snobbery that rejected to take a step aside and better analyze the situation. Hutcheon warns against oversimplified interpretations of postmodern literature and asserts that the greatest quality of postmodernist works is that they invite multiple interpretations. She emphasizes the usage of irony which has enabled postmodern authors to revisit and re-evaluate various grand narratives and foundational myths of the Western culture which have shaped Western thought and system of values for centuries. On the other hand, she argues that postmodern literature could simultaneously be interpreted as a playful game grounded in metafiction. Furthermore, Hutcheon introduces the term "historiographic metafiction" to highlight critical potential of postmodern fiction which encourages revision of both present and past: a socially engaged outlook on the present and a constructive

reinterpretation of the past. Through historiographic metafiction we come to understand that the actual events described in historical textbooks or in the media are only available to the public through narratives, which are human constructs, susceptible to change and manipulation in order to fit in within desired frameworks and ideologies (more details will be provided later in this paper).

Furthermore, Hutcheon advocates parody and highlights its importance as

a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions. (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11)

Unlike Jameson who believes that postmodernist fiction presents an "empty parody", distasteful and meaningless, even dangerous for the overall social and cultural well-being, Hutcheon believes that it is exactly parody that empowers and allows active and deeper re-evaluations of the concepts we usually accept as something which is a given. This allows for a more detailed revision of all historical and socio-political concepts that are hidden but permeate all types of text. We shall also recall the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that even concepts such as morality are not something that exists beyond language, human mind, or society. In other words, postmodern literature demonstrates that all concepts that we take for granted are nothing else but the result of social and cultural circumstances in the given time and place.

Hutcheon also argues that postmodernist literature is valuable for its "double-coding", since it usually tends to preserve and reflect "both-and" rather than "either-or" quality. Bran Nicol argues that Hutcheon's theory about inherent "doubleness" (Nicol, 2009, p. 32) of postmodern fiction is very useful when it comes to defining the relation between postmodernism and modernism, as well as postmodernism and realism: "rather than regarding postmodernism as an absolute break with modernism or realism, we can argue that it *both* breaks with modernist conventions *and* continues with them" (Ibid). Of course, this goes hand in hand with Hutcheon's own assertion that "postmodernism is paradoxical, for it depends and draws its power from that which it contests" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 120).

Another important affirmative approach to postmodernism is provided by Brian McHale. This British theorist seeks to describe the specific and flexible relationship between postmodernism and modernism by drawing on the concept of "the dominant", borrowed from Roman Jakobson, as a very useful tool in his analysis. According to the definition provided in McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987),

> The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure […] a poetic work [is] a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices. (McHale, 2004, p. 6)

It is important to note that according to McHale a text can contain multiple dominants, and which one will be brought to the center of attention depends on the interpretation, i.e. on the particular set of interpretive lenses through which we approach the text. Therefore, there is never a single meaning of a given text, but rather we are talking about a number of meanings: "In short, different dominants emerge depending upon which questions we ask of the text, and the position from which we interrogate it" (Ibid). However, McHale particularly emphasizes the importance of two different dominants—the epistemological and the ontological, where the first one relates to modernism, whereas the second one relates to postmodernism. In philosophical terms, epistemology is concerned with knowledge, or more precisely, with "enquiry into the nature, sources and validity of knowledge" (Grayling, 2003, p. 37). Also known as theory of knowledge, it seeks to answer questions such as: What is knowledge? What do we know? Can we defend our means of getting knowledge against "skeptical challenge" (Ibid)? Thus, epistemology attempts to define the means by which we discover the world as it really is. Likewise, modernists were primarily concerned with epistemological questions, that is, they sought ways to better understand and organize the already chaotic world, and hoped to find essential meanings that would be available to human beings. On the other hand, ontology is concerned with the nature of being, and it studies concepts such as being, reality and existence. Furthermore, it "asks questions about the existence of particular kinds of objects, such as numbers or moral facts" (Ibid, p. 886). Postmodernists embrace the ontological approach, which reveals their skepticism over human ability to uncover and fully understand the world as it is, i.e. the world which operates independently of our language or perception. Hence, this transition from the

epistemological orientation of modernism to the ontological orientation of postmodernism is important, because it gives way to the "interest in modes of being" (Bertens, 2005, p. 29). In this way, "modernist self-reflexiveness, its urge to question itself and its own foundations in its search for essential, timeless meaning, is replaced by a postmodern view of meaning as inevitably local, contingent, and self-sufficient" (Ibid). Therefore, postmodernist works offer a number of individual worlds whose essence we are never to objectively know, not only because it is impossible, but because it is unimportant and no longer the goal of a postmodern author. Hence, postmodernist fiction creates distinct worlds of ontological confusion, where the registers of fiction and reality intertwine. Postmodernists argue that fiction is fictitious but is no more fictitious than reality. As we employ the ontological dominant, soon we realize that we do not uncover the world as it is, but rather we get to understand that we are the creators of it and that we create it on the basis of our language and/or perception. If we lost the power of cognition and started to observe the world as if it were more than the sum of individual phenomena, i.e. if we highlighted subjective interpretations of the world as objective facts, we would enter the realm of dogmas again. On the other hand, Hutcheon does not posit the end of interest in epistemology in postmodern fiction, but rather asserts the balance between epistemological and ontological concerns. Bertens believes that "Hutcheon's attractive (and immensely successful) model has the great advantage" (Bertens, 2005, p. 75) because it values both the self-reflexive and the historically grounded texts. In this way, postmodernist fiction refuses to pay exclusive attention to its own textuality and becomes more involved in the serious social and political debates of the age.

4. Metafiction

4.1 Metafiction in the narrow sense

Many theorists and literary critics have pointed out the importance of metafiction in postmodernist works. In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh seeks to demystify the term: "What is metafiction and why are they saying such awful things about it?" She defines metafiction as

> a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh, 2001, p. 2)

In other words, metafiction is fiction that is "self-conscious" about its own fabricated nature; it emphasizes its own constructedness and refers to itself as a work of fiction which is by no means a mirror-picture of the outer world. Although the word "metafiction" was coined in 1970, this form of fiction was not an invention of postmodern writers, since its elements could be found in earlier works, such as Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605) and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), and some even argue that its traces could be found in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387). However, metafiction was brought to the center of attention in the 1960s, reflecting what John Barth addressed in the "Literature of Replenishment" as the need of new literature to revisit and revise tradition by foregrounding practices, forms and styles, such as metafiction, which had been at best sporadic in the past.

Metafiction has been the subject of many theorists who wanted to give it different names and meanings (either narrower or broader) in order to better explain what it does in practice. There were several suggestions that were popular in the 1970s: Raymond Federman called it "surfiction", James Rother "parafiction", Mas'ud Zavarzadeh "transfiction", Jerome Klinkowitz "superfiction", and, as often heard, some even suggested terms such as "nonfiction" and "antifiction" (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, because of its qualities that unite the job of a

literary critic and that of a writer, theorists such as Klinkowitz termed metafiction as "critifiction".

This practice was often criticized by conservative critics who primarily objected that fiction about writing fiction was disrupting linear narration. Yet, fiction about writing fiction ("pure" metafiction) is only the most obvious subtype and the most commonly embraced definition of metafiction. Metafiction, understood in this specific sense, chiefly explores the process of writing and how narratives are structured in a way that reminds the readers that what they are reading is just an "artefact" and not the mirror-picture of the real, outer world. Waugh argues that the writing of a metafictional text requires two simultaneous steps: the first one is to write in the manner of realist tradition and to create the illusion of reality, and the second step is to betray readers' expectations and break the imposed illusion by drawing attention to the fiction-making process (Waugh, 2001, p. 6). Furthermore, metafictional text breaks the illusion of reality by enabling a different position of the narrator who communicates directly with the readers. This in turn redefines position of the reader who becomes an active co-author and collaborator rather than a passive consumer of literary content. By thematizing their own constructedness, i.e. their metafictional narrative techniques and styles, self-reflexive works challenge literary tradition, especially that of literary realism. Or, even "more commonly, metafiction parodies the *structural* conventions and motifs of the novel itself (as in *Tristram Shandy*) or of particular modes of that genre" (Ibid, p. 74). In metafictional works, the art and act of storytelling becomes a central theme reinforced through both content and form. Metafictional works typically address themes more or less directly related to the act of storytelling, such as the position of the author, literary-critical and literary-theoretical questions and debates, the relationship between reality and fictional world, and the unreliability of language.

Waugh distinguishes among three main things that metafiction in the narrow sense (fiction on the subject of writing) "does": it subverts traditional literary conventions (Waugh, 2001, p. 11-12); it parodies previous texts, fictional modes and motifs (Ibid, p. 75); and it creates "alternative linguistic structures or fictions" which encourage readers to construct a meaning for the newly created work (Ibid, p. 5). Additionally, she argues that those who were skeptical about metafiction usually misunderstood it, because for them "the exhaustion and rejection of realism is synonymous with the exhaustion and rejection of the novel itself" (Ibid, p. 7).

However, traditionalists were suspicious toward metafiction and believed that it was either too egotist or too autistic to write fiction about writing fiction. In contrast, they demanded a greater focus on elements that create an illusion of reality or believably recreate the life of particular character. Yet, such assessment (intentionally or not) disregarded and misunderstood the previously discussed postmodernist literary sensibility, radically disinterested in a seemingly faithful representation of reality. Even before the term "metafiction" was coined, literary critics and theorists such as Robert Scholes emphasized the importance of self-reflexive writing in postmodernist fiction as a procedure concerned with its own process of creation, i.e. its own narrative strategies and content. Like postmodern authors of his time, Scholes believed that "fiction must abandon its attempt to 'represent reality' and rely more on the power of words to stimulate the imagination", because "nature can never be merely recorded in words, for words are human creations and they inevitably lend their referents a human meaning and human value" (Scholes, 1967, p. 11-12). Yet, Scholes offered his own term "fabulation" for the type of self-reflexive writing that he favored, stressing that fabulation is "a return to a more verbal kind of fiction" which is "a less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative: more shapely, more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, and less concerned with things" (Scholes, 1967, p. 12). In line with John Barth's previously mentioned essays, Scholes recognized the disruptive and subversive potential in the literature produced in the 1960s, and confirmed that its space expanded and outgrew its initial position, thus opening up for discussions about issues from various disciplines other than literature. Practically, Scholes was among the first critics who acknowledged the wider understanding and application of the term "metafiction", one that surpassed the narrow concerns of fiction about fiction by virtue of its self-conscious and experimental treatment of the past, present and their mutual relationship. However, in his later works entitled *Metafiction* (1967) and *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1970), Scholes argued that metafiction is a subtype that should be subsumed under the broader term "fabulation": while "fabulation" referred to a sum of formal, stylistic and thematic innovations used by postmodernist authors to challenge realist tradition, "metafiction" applied strictly to self-conscious fiction concerned with the problems of writing fiction and the relationship between fiction and the so-called reality (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 32).

Furthermore, Linda Hutcheon argued that the critical focus on metafictional devices enabled new insights in literary theory, reception theory, as well as the theory of the novel. She

assigned another name to metafiction, calling it "narcissistic" fiction, and stressed its paradoxical nature which allowed it to appear meaningless and meaningful at the same time. However, she did not mean that

> postmodernism is oppositional or dialectical, but that it is *double* or contradictory, that is comfortable with doing two opposing things at the same time or representing both sides of an argument at once. (Nicol, 2009, p. 16)

 Likewise, Hutcheon pointed out that metafiction incorporated theorizing about itself, and offered comments on its own narrative, techniques, styles and themes, producing works which thus "also contain, however, in their self-consciousness, their own self-criticism" (Hutcheon, 1980, p. 144). She also argued that metafiction changed the role of a reader who suddenly becomes both co-creator of fiction by virtue of his/her own interpretations, and, at the same time, a persona detached from the narrative which obsessively draws attention to itself and creates an impression that the reader is not important at all. Thus,

> in narcissistic fiction, the problems and joys in the act of shaping language and experience are part of the content. The reader can somehow participate in the novelistic heterocosm and still share in the personal struggle of its creation. There is always a certain tension between involvement and self-awareness in the act of reading, and self-conscious fiction only dramatizes this tension within the work itself. (Ibid, p. 150)

Therefore, as a product of the author's imagination and his preconceived themes and strategies, metafictional text playfully engages its readers who (un)willingly participate in the writing process.

John Barth's *Chimera* is a perfect embodiment of the abovementioned themes. Therefore, subsequent analysis of *Chimera* illustrates how its three novellas function as "pure" metafiction and elaborates on the typical themes, concerns and narrative devices associated with this type of metafiction. *Chimera* demystifies literature by pointing to its status as an artifact. It reveals itself as a set of the author's narrative strategies that in no way reflect outside world. Instead, the act of writing and storytelling is brought to the centre of attention, which enables further analysis that covers Barth's own experimentation with both content and form, his engagement in commenting such themes as the power and limitations of fiction, as well as the author's/narrator's strengths and weaknesses. Also, this thesis will explore *Chimera* as metafiction in the narrow sense

through the analysis of its specific and eccentric structure, as well as the position of its author who tells his story in the critical moment, when he fights for his own professional life and the life of literature which is his most important occupation. The analysis includes metafictional discussion of literary-critical and literary-theoretical themes metaphorically represented through lives and heroic adventures of the protagonists in the three novellas. A prominent literary-theoretical issue discussed in the same section is *Chimera*'s continuity and discontinuity with the literary traditions of both realism and modernism. Finally, the analysis of *Chimera*'s metafictional strategies addresses how the novel anticipates negative comments by more conservative critics who were quick to conclude that postmodern authors either "pointlessly waste our time, saying and doing nothing" or "celebrate ugliness and futility, scoffing at good" (Gardner, 1979, p. 18). As a response to such assertions, *Chimera* demonstrates how its "monstrous" experimentation enables multiple interpretations and how its alleged "ugliness" ironically embodies the principle of the Golden ratio, i.e. ideal proportions.

4.2   Metafiction in the broader sense

Theorists of literary postmodernism have frequently pointed out that postmodern authors expanded the meaning of metafiction, as they did not stop at writing works that corresponded only to the definition of "pure" metafiction. In fact, as they thematized the very process of writing, postmodern authors delved into the nature of language that shapes reality, i.e. the world as we know it. They pointed at our tendency to always organize our reality into a coherent whole, where the events could be logically connected and explained. With a general shift in thinking in the second half of the twentieth century, postmodern authors focused on subjective perceptions of reality, narrowing the possibility of understanding the world as it really is. Thus, postmodern authors explored the intertwinement of their fictional worlds and the so-called reality. By blurring the distinction between fiction and facts postmodern authors emphasized similarities between these "worlds", but they also demonstrated that all systems of knowledge created by humans have been created in a process which in many aspects resembles the fiction-making process. This also means that postmodern authors have been interested in demystifying indoctrination by ideologies or grand narratives, for example by showing how human beings

become victims of their own ideologies when they accept them as absolute Truths. Thus, postmodernists point at the fabricated nature of our own reality and at our perception which is always mediated by language we use. However, aware of the fact that language depends on its use in the specific historical context, postmodern authors unmask the privileging of one set of words and assumptions over the other. In so doing, they illustrate the ways in which the perception/knowledge of the world is shaped in accordance with the worldview of the power holders, i.e. those who assume greatest (institutionalized) power. Through glorifying one system/interpretation/narrative over the other, people create ideologies which in turn govern their lives as something that exists above and independently of them. Thus, when postmodern fiction functions as metafiction in the broader sense, which is often the case, it contains recognizable socio-political dimension in the sense that postmodern authors challenge and relativize ideologies (e.g. religious, cultural, and political) and expose their fabricated nature. Ultimately, they show that our reality is constructed in the same manner as the fictional works. Thus, this type of fiction deconstructs previously unquestioned Truths, including powerful ideas and narratives which govern and shape lives as an external and seemingly unquestionable force that defines desirable norms and rules of acting and thinking. Unlike metafiction in the narrow sense which focuses on diverse issues related to the very writing process and/or literary theory, metafiction in the broader sense is more politically and socially engaged as it exposes the ways in which ideologies are constructed and demonstrates seductiveness of ideologies, even when they go against the very nature of those indoctrinated by them.

Thus, in the collection of essays entitled *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970), Gass asserted that "metafiction" should not be understood too narrowly, i.e. only as fiction about writing fiction, and suggested that the term should be expanded to encompass a postmodern tendency to dissolve rigid boundaries between fiction and other disciplines and fields of studies, such as philosophy, natural sciences, historiography, anthropology, etc., simply because all of these disciplines share a common "medium" of language (Gass, 2019, p. 24). Thus, Gass confirmed postmodern anti-realist attitude by claiming that a work of fiction cannot (and should not) be a mere reflection of the outside world, but should be the world in its own right, an imaginatively constructed place: "he (the novelist) now better understands his medium; he is ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows, more often now, that his

business is to *make* one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is a master – language" (Ibid).

Furthermore, in *The Metafictional Muse: The Work of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and William H. Gass* (1982), Larry McCaffery argues that the definition of metafiction must include all types of works that pay particular attention to the creation of all kinds of fictional systems that "are examined primarily as *meaning systems* or semiotic codes through which our culture creates a sense of order and stability" (McCaffery, 1980, p. 76). In his interpretation, postmodern fictions not only "tended to present themselves self-consciously as invented entities and insisted on the fact that all forms of art are merely another of man's subjective creations" (Ibid), but pointed at the subjective nature of all known concepts, systems and ideologies. According to this view, the narrow definition of metafiction as book-about-the-writing-of-a-book simply is not enough, because a genuine "metafictionist hopes to deliver his readers from outmoded or unduly restrictive modes of thought" (Ibid). In his attempt to define the features of metafictional works, Larry McCaffery distinguishes among four subtypes of metafiction and argues that these subtypes are rarely employed separately but are usually combined within the same work of fiction. Namely, impatient with precise classifications and divisions in both art and life, postmodern authors usually employed more than one subtype in their works to the effect that their "writing about writing" was usually supplemented with broader topics that go beyond the mere theorizing of the relationship between the work of art and the world. Consequently, postmodern fiction addresses a number of themes at the same time and this allows multiple interpretations. Besides "pure" metafiction, McCaffery thus addresses metafiction in the broader sense, i.e. metafiction which explores and demystifies constructedness of both literary and non-literary fictional systems.

Furthermore, Waugh argues that

Any text that draws the reader's attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes – whether 'literary' or 'social' – artificially construct apparently 'real' and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently 'natural' and 'eternal'. (Waugh, 2001, p. 22)

Thus, metafiction in the narrow sense is usually accompanied in postmodern fiction by metafiction in the broader sense of the word where authors challenge and re-examine fictitious nature of various grand narratives presented as natural facts (which is also the feature of John Barth's *Chimera*). Metafiction in the broader sense emphasizes the fabricated nature of our reality as well as the process of its construction by means of discourses which are embraced by the masses not as language-games, but rather as unquestionable and absolute Truths/Facts. Postmodern authors usually employ this subtype of metafiction in order to unmask ideas and ideologies which were unchallenged in the past, and thus remained influential in the second half of the 20th century. Inspired with the possibilities that metafiction offers, these authors underline both fictitious nature of fiction and fictitious nature of all ideological systems and narratives (e.g. religious, political, socio-cultural) which serve the political and cultural interests of the institutions/individuals in power. Thus, grand narratives that postmodern authors attempt to demystify and ironize are exposed as mere constructs designed for a particular cultural or political interest. In this sense, postmodern authors playfully and indirectly through irony, paradox and parody challenge and deconstruct grand narratives that oppress and silence the powerless. For example, they challenge the alleged superiority of men over women, of whites over non-whites, of the rich over the poor, of heterosexuals over homosexuals, and alike. Therefore, postmodern literature acts as a subversive response to the injustice that operates in a society perpetuated by the old and unquestionable Absolutes: "Metafiction thus converts what it sees as the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of a potentially constructive social criticism" (Waugh, 2001, p. 11-12).

Bran Nicol singles out Patricia Waugh as the theorist who made "the crucial link between postmodernism as a socio-cultural phenomenon" and "postmodernism as an aesthetic practice" (Nicol, 2009, p. 35). Nicol emphasizes Waugh's assertion that "we experience the world as mediated through a range of discursive and narrative constructs, especially from culture, media and advertising" (Ibid). Therefore, metafiction is there to "remind us that narration is a form of *media*" or that "the media relies upon the techniques and effects of narrative", which leads us to conclude that "fiction is fictional, but no more so than reality" (Ibid, p. 39). Thus, Waugh suggests that metafiction encourages constructive social criticism.

4.2.1 Historiographic metafiction

Historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon, is used for works of fiction that incorporate metafiction for specific purpose, namely for questioning the relation between theory, historical fiction and official historiography. Many postmodern authors (such as Robert Coover, Ishmael Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, or Thomas Pynchon) have focused on historiography in order to reveal its fictional nature and to demonstrate that our knowledge about past events is unreliable because of our tendency towards subjective interpretations of the events, the inability to fully comprehend the outside world, and the non-fixedness of meaning. Thus, postmodern works which operate through the subtype of historiographic metafiction focus on abolishing traditional views of history as objective science by demonstrating essential similarity between the writing of history and writing of fiction. Historiography, Hutcheon argues, is not fundamentally different from fiction, because "textuality is reinserted into history and into the social and political conditions of the discursive act itself" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 81). Likewise, in his famous work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White argues that historiographers use similar narrative techniques and devices as writers, and he says that in his theory he "treats historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (White, 1973, p. ix). He also explains the method by which events from the past are fused into a coherent story simply by combining "a certain amount of data, theoretical concepts for explaining these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past" (Ibid). In other words, the actual events described in historical textbooks or in the media are only available to the public through narratives, which are human constructs. Thus, once the past is textualized, it is written down, narrativized and presented as an ultimate truth consisting of objective facts, its narrative (and therefore provisional) nature carefully masked. While the link to the subjective interpretations of the events remains hidden, a coherent historical metanarrative emerges in their place and the illusion of order is created, supported by our own desire for logical connections and narratives about (national, religious, political, social, cultural) history which make sense.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon claims something similar, when she states that historiographic metafiction:

> refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 93)

Historiographic metafiction, therefore, attempts to subvert and question the grand narratives which are unquestionably accepted as the reality by the masses. It also demonstrates that metanarratives can be dangerous, in the sense that they are "a form of ideology which function violently to suppress and control the individual subject by imposing a false sense of 'totality' and 'universality' on a set of disparate things, actions, and events" (Nicol, 2009, p. 11). Importantly, historiographic metafiction thus deconstructs these seemingly "natural" facts and apparently undisputed official history through a narrative form which is "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay(s) claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 5).

In this way, the hitherto repressed narratives gain more power to express the otherized and silenced side of the (hi)story and such narratives typically give prominence to the voices of the socially marginalized by the grand narratives of patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy and/or capitalism: the voices of women, of the colonized racial Other, of the homosexuals, or of the poor, thus allowing for redefinition of standardized narratives that lay an exclusive claim to "reality" and "truth". In other words, postmodernism values individual, localized stories which Lyotard calls "little narratives" (*petit récits*), because, unlike grand narratives, they "do not attempt to present an overarching 'Truth' but offer a qualified, limited 'truth,' one relative to a particular situation" (Nicol, 2009, p. 12). Postmodernists attempt to replace all-encompassing narratives by thematizing significance of the distinct human experiences that offer multiple and individual "truths".

Subsequent analysis of Barth's *Chimera* in the section "*Chimera* as historiographic metafiction" will highlight the novel's engagement in re-examination and redefinition of cultural myths. More specifically, the analysis will address Barth's demystification and revision of the

grand narrative of patriarchy. By suggesting that there is no ideologically or politically neutral text, Barth uses the ancient Greek myths of Perseus and Bellerophon and the frame story of the Oriental fairy-tale to demonstrate his point: he goes into the centre of the chosen traditional stories to uncover their ideological background, which is patriarchy, and to rewrite them in the feminist key. By giving voice to the silenced and oppressed side of selected stories, Barth undermines patriarchy, reshapes traditional gender roles and abolishes gender stereotypization. The task of subverting patriarchy is primarily assigned to strong female characters: they are responsible for "re-education" of male protagonists whose self-realization necessarily includes the recognition of female perspective. By changing the original stories, Barth incorporates new values characteristic of the late 20th century which reflect a social model based on gender equality.

5. *Chimera* as pure metafiction

One of John Barth's most experimental works written in his early phase of writing fiction, *Chimera* is usually regarded as pure metafiction, that is, as a postmodern "fiction about writing fiction" or as a work self-consciously obsessed with its own making. As such, this work thematizes important literary-critical and literary-theoretical questions, and brings to the center of attention the nature of fiction and its relation to reality. Another crucial theme in *Chimera* is the very process of writing, which is discussed through numerous metaphors, stories-within-stories, intertextuality, authorial intrusion, and a variety of typographic elements such as diagrams, charts and geometric schemes. On the metafictional level, the narrated adventures and obstacles faced by the protagonists Dunyazade, Scheherazade, Perseus and Bellerophon become perfect metaphors for narrative strategies that postmodern authors employ. For example, each of the central characters' lives represents the ambivalent position of a postmodern author who struggles to break through his/her writer's block and to produce a memorable piece of fiction. In other words, this novel illustrates postmodern author's mission to create a successful work which would simultaneously be a refreshed and revised improvisation of the already existing tales and a metafictional discussion about the writing process involved. Hence, Barth resorts to commenting abundantly on his own narrative strategies, and combines these comments with the discussion of literary and critical issues of his day. He inventively uses all kinds of narrative tricks to uncover the fictionality of his own worlds and to convince his readers that what they are reading is not a mirror-picture of the real life. Thus, we can imagine John Barth and his alter egos (Genie, Polyiedus), who, just like Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, stand above their respective books, real or fictional, and observe the movements of their pencils over the blank pages. At the same time, Barth intentionally raises readers' awareness of the blurred boundary between art and reality by emphasizing the artificiality of his fictional worlds and their constructedness through the untrustworthy medium of language.

Chimera is a perfect example of the novel that explores the position of a postmodern author who narrates his story at a time when all narrative techniques seem to be used up. Through metafiction and parody, John Barth vividly depicts the state of the "exhausted" literature into which he breathes a new life by creating fiction in which form and content do not

exist as separate units, but they rather intertwine. The art of storytelling thus becomes the most important theme of this work, but in such a manner that the theme becomes inseparable from its direct demonstration through formal solutions intended to highlight the potential of words, language games and narrative techniques: "Barth tries to decipher the essence of story-telling through the act of storytelling" (Edelstein, 1984, p. 104).

Obviously, the author's playful return to the past is justified through his affirmation of the new perspectives that have a potential to re-examine narrative possibilities as well as the notion of artistic productivity and creativity. Through his experimental work, Barth attempts to demystify what it really means to write original literary works, setting an example of how a postmodern author can achieve a creative contribution to the "literature of replenishment". As a result, he creates a literary chimera, which pretends to be imperfect and monstrous, but which also stands for a perfect postmodern hybridity of the old and the new. Through this synthesis of the past and the present, literary tradition is rescued from oblivion: thus, revisited and reworked in a new key, it becomes an example of postmodernist literature. This recontextualization, together with the structuring and framing, is achieved through playful but careful selection and reinterpretation of the original elements of three specific myths which are both self-referential and mutually referential. Organized in numerous tales-within-tales, *Chimera* "reflects on artifice, on mortality, on the nature of fiction, on the nature of love, and on the nature of 'reality' (a term Barth almost always uses with quotation marks)" (Edelstein, 1984, p. 102).

Of course, these metafictional games, or, to use Wittgenstein's term, *language-games* would not be so effective without numerous direct metafictional comments dispersed throughout *Chimera*. Author's metafictional comments on the writing process often include metaphors that equate the paths of the heroes to the writing process, and self-reflexive comments which clearly refer back to the work itself as "a novel in the form of artificial fragments" (Barth, 1972, p. 95). There are also frequent references to author's use of certain narrative techniques which leave no doubt as to whether the characters and readers are aware of the fabricated nature of the story. Thus, the author asserts that "the amplitude of the narrative" varies "like the range of the tides" with his own "energy" (Ibid, p. 89) or he refers to his style as "too mannered" (Ibid, p. 80). Metafictional dimension further involves author's justification of his experimental approach: "certain extremism was necessary to the survival of anything radically innovative" (Ibid, p. 31).

Metafictional comments, which regularly approach the text from the outside, intentionally blur the boundary between facts and fiction, that is, between reality and art. Such blending of the two realms is best described by Genie who argues that some fictions "were so much more valuable than fact that in rare instances their beauty made them real" (Ibid, p. 11). Thus, *Chimera* juxtaposes fictional and real world, while, at the same time, it allows the first to build upon the second, and vice versa. In relation to this, Waugh argues that metafictionists answer to social "reality" as they turn inwards to their narrative strategies and techniques, so that

> metafiction sets up an opposition, not to ostensibly 'objective' facts in the 'real' world, but to the language of the realistic novel which has sustained and endorsed such a view of reality. (Waugh, 2001, p. 11)

Indeed, John Barth leaves the conventional language of realism and retreats into the myths to parodically challenge traditional strategies of presenting reality, which in return helps him to overcome his own confusion and the problem with his writer's block. In this way, *Chimera* rises as a perfect "monster", a hybrid whose metafictional form demonstrates deliberate blending of philosophical, social and literary issues. Additionally, in order to completely undermine any traditional reading of the novel, in the last novella Barth introduces various typographic elements which completely break the illusion of reality through stressing the importance of both verbal and non-verbal units that have the potential to carry/construct the meaning: we can find a number of Q&A sessions and diagrams, Aristotle's classification of human actions, a genealogical chart of demigods, *schema* for the typical rise and fall of dramatic action, and "the precious Pattern" which represents a cyclic depiction of the heroic journey.

5.1 Structure as a metaphor for the writing process

Chimera consists of three seemingly independent stories: "Dunyazadiad", "Perseid", and "Bellerophoniad", which, if observed individually, thematize three different myths or stories. However, their significance is better understood only when each of them is viewed as part of a larger story, where their mutual communication and internal connections form the whole with inseparable metafictional and critical layers. Although the novel consists of three novellas of unequal length, apparently suggesting structural incongruence and the lack of writing skills, it

perfectly embodies the rules of the Golden ratio (also known as Divine Proportion). It is a mathematical principle that is commonly found in nature, especially in the spiral-like shape that is visible in the arrangement of leaves, in cones and snail shells, whirlpools and spinning galaxies, etc. Understood as the epitome of harmony and perfection, the application of the Golden ratio is found in the most popular works of art and architecture. Similarly, in the essay "Algebra and Fire", Barth reveals that his *Chimera* is based on the same principles of the Golden ratio. He explains that his aim was to write "a *series* of three novellas: three novellas related both formally and thematically" that would make what he believed was called "a non-summative system", but what his "editor believed could be called a novel and marketed as one" (Barth, 1984, p. 120). Of course, this statement could be understood as one of many postmodernists' attempts to break away with traditional genre division, or as a desire to point out that sometimes we need new words to explain new phenomena. He further explains that his decision to rearrange the sequence of the novellas has led this work to strive for aesthetic perfection, because the *Chimera* novellas are exactly the "manifestations of the Golden Ratio":

> The third of them ("Bellerophoniad," a story about Bellerophon and Pegasus) is as proportionately larger than the second ("Perseid") as the second is larger than the first ("Dunyazadiad," a story about Scheherazade's kid sister) -- that proportion being such that "Dunyazadiad" and "Perseid," combined, equal "Bellerophoniad," pagewise. Expressed formulaically, A:B::B:C such that A+B=C. (Ibid)

Thus, the structure of the novel corresponds to a spiral-like construction whose shape resembles the snail shell with three bends, where the second bend is larger than the first, and the third is larger than the second. As the novel structurally, i.e. formally, becomes one huge spiral which expands outwardly, the motif of the spiral is repeated throughout the entire work and in each novella. For example, there is a reference to Scheherazade's "gold ring worked in the form of a spiral shell" (Barth, 1972, p. 12), the description of Calyxa's navel which "rather than bilobular or quadrantic […] was itself spiriferate" (Ibid, p. 40), the temple murals that openly spiral out, frequent mentioning of snail shells, as well as Bellerophon's assertion that the second half of his life is "a circle rather than a logarithmic spiral" (Ibid, p. 88). Significantly, the spiral usually represents the flow of life which brings about change and progress, as opposed to the circle that symbolizes repetition, futility, entrapment and stagnation, e.g. through protagonists who are literally and/or figuratively moving in circles, or are caught in a vicious circle. Indeed,

postmodern authors desired change in the age when literature seemed to be unable to move forward, i.e. when it was trapped in a circular and repetitive motion, so that Barth's favoring of the spiral over circle in *Chimera* is a metafictional comment on the necessity of literary breakthrough. Necessity of change and improvisation is further demonstrated in the stories of Dunyazade and Perseus. Rather than entirely relying on the past as a model, they learn to build upon the past and move beyond it, while this creative redefinition opens up a possibility of progress and success (spiral-like movement) and stops their moving in circles which manifests as their constant repetition of earlier life choices and moves, the ones prescribed by the old "scripts" of an Oriental fairy-tale (Dunyazade) and the Greek myth (Perseus). In this manner, stories of Dunyazade and Perseus function as Barth's obvious metafictional comments on the necessity of overcoming old literary forms and conventions, even as we may use them as a starting point in the process of postmodern replenishment of literature. Thus, Dunyazade and Perseus (and Barth) go one step backwards in order to go forwards, that is they go back to the past in order to challenge and revise it, which eventually leads to their reward: Dunyazade saves her and her sister's life, while Perseus obtains immortality by being transformed into the samenamed constellation. These two novellas represent successful revisions of tradition, whose narrator-protagonists manage to overcome obstacles by daring to change their respective life-scripts, determined by traditional stories about themselves. In so doing, the protagonists serve as metaphors of the postmodern literary approach, and personifications of the ideas and practices of postmodern authors who take tradition as a starting point only to build upon it and make a change. When looked at from this perspective, it becomes clear why the third novella, "Bellerophoniad", is intentionally unsuccessful both as a story and with reference to the protagonist's destiny. Namely, its protagonist Bellerophon never learns from his earlier mistakes and is therefore doomed to repeat the past over and over again, which is Barth's metafictional comment on the destiny of writers passively devoted to literary tradition. Bellerophon's biggest misconception is his naïve belief that it is possible to achieve success and fame by merely copying someone else's life, in this case, the life of Perseus described in the ancient Greek myth of Perseus, that is, by blindly following the old script provided by literary tradition. The lives and meditations of the characters and their creator(s) contribute to the spiral-like form of the novel, while the form itself reinforces and illustrates the main ideas and themes, which demonstrates that postmodernist fiction abandons traditional distinction between the form and the content.

Through its metafictional layer, *Chimera* sustains its life on a spiral path which draws inspiration from tradition but eventually surpasses tradition, while the old literary patterns are only suggested and not blindly copied, resulting in a work of art whose main structural principle is innovation instead of mere reproduction.

Inevitably, the structure of *Chimera* does not imitate the structure of the selected old stories, but uses it as a framework which needs to be altered. Hence, Barth's intertextuality is one based on improvisation and on direct intervention into the very fabric of the story: the original texts of the ancient Greek myths and of the Oriental fairy-tale do not keep their initial storylines. Unlike modernists, whose purpose was to adjust ancient myths to the modern times, that is, to use them for indirect portrayal of their age (for example, *Ulysses* by James Joyce or *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot), postmodernists recontextualize and change them from within. Thus, in *Chimera*, three stories may begin as traditional myths, or may hint at those myths, but traditional storylines as well as messages and ideas associated with them are changed through numerous symbolic and metaphorical games. For example, Genie appears from the future as a helping hand to Scheherazade, convincing her that literature and storytelling are not monotonous and dead in his present time, i.e. in the second half of the 20th century. Perseus learns about the lives of his victims, and he gains immortality only when he truly listens to them (New Medusa, Andromeda). In contrast, Bellerophon misses his chance to become immortal because he stays faithful to the oppressive tradition which sets up expectations he fails to fulfill (however, his story is even more complex and will be discussed later in this paper). Importantly, Barth's revised stories possess a great amount of irony which deliberately replaces the solemn style of old myths, suggesting that their dignified tone has become obsolete along with their traditional messages and the worldview in which comfort could be provided through the insights into the lives of gods and semi-gods. Thus, both structurally and thematically, the three novellas parody the original texts through an ironic distance that allows for a self-conscious way of writing. Therefore, Edelstein argues that "*Chimera* is truly a meta-novel, a novel about its own creation, a parable and parody of its own coming into being" (Edelstein, 1984, p. 104).

5.2 The role of the postmodern author

Postmodern authors gave up on their all-powerful role, and, instead, their authority was relativized together with the postmodernist relativization of all other literary concepts. Demystifying the role of the author became the key factor that contributed to the fluidity and non-fixedness of meaning in postmodernist fiction, just as it opened up the space for endless and boundless communication between diverse texts from different historical periods. Redefinition of authorial position in postmodernist fiction inevitably called for redefinition of the readerly roles and the text: postmodern authors challenged conventional understanding of the author, the reader and the text in such a manner that all three notions became equally important in the process of literary interpretation. Consequently, the process of deciphering the meaning results in an intricate network of real and fictional worlds which point to different ontological levels from which the author, readers and characters approach the same text. Although it is the author who creates the text with its fictional characters and fictional worlds, the text is open to countless interpretations as the readers are invited to become co-creators in the writing process, i.e. to analyze and comprehend the narrated adventures without relying on the detailed and comprehensive information given by narrator(s). Thus, in *Chimera*, the author from the outer world (Barth) intrudes in the fictional world as he informs his readers that he is in the process of writing the work we have in our hands under the title *Chimera*. However, the author then reverses the chain of events and thus denies himself by stating that the third novella was actually written by the fictional character Polyeidus, and that an author from Maryland (John Barth) is to find it in the future. Furthermore, Barth creates his own alter egos who serve to address a complex and paradoxical nature of postmodern texts, as well as the very process of writing which is both chaotic and organized. However, even when we assume that certain characters are John Barth's alter egos due to the obvious physical similarities between them, the narrator denies this possibility and thus further prolongs the confusion. Thanks to this kind of playfulness, we are presented with several tales-within-tales that operate and exist on distinct ontological levels. For example, the first novella "Dunyazadiad" is written by both John Barth and his character Genie. Although we assume that Barth and Genie are the same person, because they use the same narrative techniques, they are both Americans, and because both of them intervene into Scheherazade's world, i.e. into the well-known frame story of *One Thousand and One Nights*,

from the "future" world of the late 20th century, the author Barth ultimately assumes more power because he is the creator of both Genie's storytelling and of Dunyazade's subsequent improvisation of her sister Scheherazade's tales. In order to further destabilize the illusion of reality in his fictional work, Barth employs two specific metafictional strategies, discussed by Patricia Waugh: the first one involves creation of the convincing illusion of reality (fiction-making), which is then shattered through the use of direct commentary, so that the second strategy (fiction-breaking) negates the previous one (Waugh, 2001, p. 6). Deliberate confusion of ontological levels and further destabilization of clear boundaries between illusion and reality includes the introduction of additional autobiographical elements which, however, never become the main subject of the novellas. Thus, the first step towards the breaking of illusion (or towards the increasing of confusion) involves the information that Genie is John Barth's look-alike: "a light-skinned fellow of forty or so, smooth-shaven and bald as a roc's egg" (Barth, 1972, p. 6). To complete the illusion-breaking feat, Barth resolutely denies any identification of the two of them, simply by demonstrating that they exist on different ontological levels: he as the creator (author), and Genie is the creation (character). There are also justified assumptions that both Perseus and Bellerophon might somehow be connected to the author, insofar as all three of them are in their forties and facing a midlife crisis. However, as we read their stories, we realize that all of them inhabit various (fictional) worlds/stories which have not been precisely defined or demarcated. Consequently, we are confronted with the extreme fluidity of narrated worlds which incessantly oscillate between fact and fiction, and are never clearly distinguished from one another. In line with Hutcheon's "both-and" quality of postmodernist works, John Barth both shows up and disappears from his own novel, either as a voice hidden behind his protagonists, or as an author who is about to find his own text in his native Maryland marshes. Sometimes, though, the author and his characters really speak as one, especially when the conclusions made by fictional characters are understood metaphorically. The world of fiction becomes even closer to "reality" outside the text, and to the readers, with the growing recognition that the moves and actions which ensure Scheherazade's and Dunyazade's survival, as well as Perseus' immortalization, resemble, and occasionally mirror, the life of the author who struggles to find his expression and break through his writer's block. The adventures and situations in which Barth's characters are placed perfectly illustrate both the torturous position of a postmodern author facing helplessness and disorientation and the strategies for overcoming his artistic

paralysis. Thus, *Chimera* affirms itself as a metafiction in the narrow sense, that is, as fiction which metaphorically and with an ironic distance demonstrates problems and possibilities involved in the production of fiction. Barth's revisions of two ancient Greek myths and of the Oriental fairy-tale practically demonstrate Barth's more theoretical postulates elaborated in the essays "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment".

While *Chimera* discusses narrative strategies and styles used by the author in the creation of *Chimera*, it at the same time illustrates the mission of a postmodern author. For example, commenting on the state of literature of his time, Genie states that it is uninspiring and unproductive, which has resulted in his writer's block and made him search for inspiration elsewhere, i.e. in the literary past. Genie laments over deterioration in the 20th century of once-great and inspiring art of fiction, reflected, among other things, in greatly diminished readership: "the only readers of artful fiction were critics, other writers, and unwilling students who, left to themselves, preferred music and pictures to words" (Barth, 1972, p. 6). Contrary to the opinion of conservative critics of Barth's age who devotedly glorified literary merits of high modernism and lamented its decline, through bitter irony, Barth exposes the other, concealed side of literary scene of his age. Genie complains about a bleak literary scene of the 1960s without strong creative figures capable of effecting literary revival. Genie's attitude perfectly portrays cultural circumstances which led postmodern authors in the 1960s to revisit tradition by establishing with it a "double-coded" relationship of closeness and distance, and thus open up a peculiar postmodern dialogue between past and present which flows simultaneously in both directions across time and space.

The passage in which Genie, Barth's alter ego from "Dunyazadiad", introduces the image of a snail whose spiral-like shell serves as mirror-image of incessant progress and innovation vividly illustrates the position of a postmodern author struggling to find a way out of passive repetition of old forms and patterns. Again, the motif of a spiral is used to symbolize the presence of the old in the new (and vice versa) and to further emphasize the inspiring yet paradoxical position of the postmodern author who keeps "one foot in the narrative past" (Barth, 1984, p. 204) and the other in the present. Thus, the image of a snail that in a specific manner creates his spiral-like shell metaphorically depicts the manner in which postmodern author

resourcefully and creatively revisits literary tradition but never completely returns to its established patterns:

> 'My project,' he told us, 'is to learn where to go by discovering where I am by reviewing where I've been -- where we've *all* been. There's a kind of snail in the Maryland marshes -- perhaps I invented him -- that makes his shell as he goes along out of whatever he comes across, cementing it with his own juices, and at the same time makes his path instinctively toward the best available material for his shell; he carries his history on his back, living in it, adding new and larger spirals to it from the present as he grows.' (Barth, 1972, p. 7)

Hence, the postmodern overcoming of tradition equates the path taken by the Maryland snail: when the snail inspects the "best available material for his shell", he upgrades his own life which relies on the chosen materials from various places that are additionally strengthened and unified by "his own juices", just like the postmodern author revisits and revises "best available" works from the literary past and shapes them with his own creativity and imagination. Similarly, the spiral-like shell is correspondent to the process of postmodern revision which is also represented by the motif of a spiral, whose beginning is rooted in the literary tradition, but whose upward and sweeping motion leads to infinity of the new possibilities. However, going back into the past includes a detailed (re)search, since it requires careful selection of traditional material suitable for postmodern revision. Metaphorically speaking, insistence on the enthusiastic research of tradition could be interpreted as Barth's dissociation from trendy authors of the 1960s who were inventing artistically worthless "experimental" fiction just for the sake of experimentation, and who were too frequently put in the same box with postmodernists. In this manner, not only has Barth expressed aversion toward cheap and empty experimentalism, but also undercut simplistic identification of such literary production with entire postmodern fiction by the hostile critics. To use Barth's metaphors, the trendy authors could be represented as snails that do not choose their "material" wisely and carefully, and therefore contribute to the additional draining of the already exhausted literature. Nevertheless, the unfavorable comments Barth anticipated in *Chimera* were not lacking after its publication. John Gardner remarks that in *Chimera* we encounter "a curious oscillation between fascination with the cruel and ugly, on the one hand, and, on the other, an inclination toward mush" (Gardner, 1979, p. 95). As a result, "in all his fiction Barth is tangled helplessly in his own wiring" (Ibid, p. 96). To better illustrate his own attitude towards experimentation and to anticipate such remarks, Barth created

"Bellerophoniad" as a warning against excessive experimentation without meaningful artistic intention. Therefore, this novella is a deliberately failed (and hilarious) parody of postmodern revision of tradition. Having no valuable past of his own to build upon, Bellerophon, ironically, attempts to entirely copy both the heroic past of Perseus known from the Greek myth (tradition), and Perseus' mature life that moves beyond his heroic past known from Barth's "Perseid" (postmodern revision of tradition). Hence, instead of immortalization, Bellerophon's adventures and actions only contribute to his failure. In other words, Bellerophon "attempts an exact imitation of the myth and, instead of becoming a hero, becomes a parody of one" (Waugh, 2001, p. 72).

Furthermore, what seemed to me very amusing from the very beginning of "Bellerophoniad" is the idea that its main protagonist could also be read as a great parody of a traditional author who needs pain in order to be inspired. Many times, Bellerophon complains that he is unhappy because he is happy because happiness and pleasure will never make true his desires to be a great mythic hero worth remembering. Thus, Bellerophon's failure to fulfill the heroic role could also be a metaphor for the old-fashioned author dedicated to clichéistic worn-out conception that the artist must purposefully feed himself/herself with sadness in order to create successful works of art. However, Barth, or rather his failed hero, admits that one of the reasons why this story is unsuccessful is actually because:

> it's true that Bellerophon's aspiration to immortality was without social relevance, for example, and thoroughly elitist -- in fact, of benefit to no one but himself -- it should be observed that it didn't glorify 'him,' either, since the name he's called by is not his actual name, but a fictitious one. (Barth, 1972, p. 189)

Furthermore, self-reflexiveness, self-criticism and self-irony demonstrated in *Chimera* show that postmodernist texts are not insisting on universal and fixed truths. Although Barth and his characters attempt to demonstrate what it really means to write or create original stories, they at the same times question their own manners and deeds. For example, Scheherazade doubts that she is a good storyteller; Bellerophon believes that storytelling is not his "cup of wine" (Barth, 1972, p. 121), and Perseus is insecure and constantly apologizes for his ideas and intentions. Thus, ironic skepticism towards everything is in tune with postmodernist paradox that postmodern fiction does not spare itself from criticism. We understand that each fictional character is aware of, to use Nietzsche's words, interpretations of the so-called reality, and that

they never instruct other characters, or other authors, for that matter, to imitate their life or literary patterns, but to rather create their own interpretations.

Moreover, it seems that Barth incorporates another component, namely the importance of art on our path towards impending death:

> he meant the treasure of art, which if it could not redeem the barbarities of history or spare us the horrors of living and dying, at least sustained, refreshed, expanded, ennobled, and enriched our spirits along the painful way. (Barth, 1972, p. 11)

This excerpt ironically confirms Gardner's qualification of postmodernists as "jubilant nihilists" (Gardner, 1979, p. 55), however, the meaning of this label in Barth's postmodernist interpretation assumes positive connotations. As previously argued, unlike modernists, postmodern authors accept the chaotic nature of the universe and reject any possibility of completely comprehending and organizing already disorganized life and existence at large.

The mess we witness, especially in the third novella, reflects the ontological orientation of postmodernism that rejects any precise definitions and control, because (as Barth implies) we never get to know the world as it really is. For this reason, we never get to fully distinguish between the protagonist and the narrator in "Bellerophoniad", just like we never fully understand what really happened at the Isthmian Games, or who the voices that tell Bellerophon's decentralized story really are. Consequently, the readers, as Hutcheon argued, are really put in an unenviable position, as they try to actively follow the adventures of the characters and guess the answer(s) to one timeless question: What is the truth?

5.3. Replenishment of fiction through revision of tradition

The central theme that permeates the entire thesis is of course the use of tradition for the purpose of writing postmodernist fiction. In "The Literature of Replenishment", John Barth reminds of a complaint by the scribe Khakheperresenb from ca. 2000 B.C., where the latter mourns because he has arrived on the literary scene too late:

> Would I had phrases that are not known, utterances that are strange, in new language that has not been used, free from repetition, not an utterance that has grown stale, which men of old have spoken. (Barth, 1984, p. 206)

With the inclusion of this passage, John Barth at the same time suggests that the frustration over lack of originality has not been unique to postmodern moment, and justifies postmodernist stance towards literary tradition. It perfectly underlines universal disappointment of the artist over his inability to be completely original, as well as the writer's dependence on the commonly shared medium of language which renders genuine originality impossible, because vast literary tradition seems to have already exhausted all possibilities of expression. Interestingly, this excerpt could also be connected to the poststructuralist claim that the traces of one sign are present in other signs, i.e. that language constantly invents itself in various discourses, but still has one main responsibility – to enable communication. Anyhow, Barth rejects originality as something which is both impossible and unnecessary. Instead, he turns to the literary past for the supply of texts suitable for postmodern modification and revision. What *Chimera* really highlights is the thought that although we all use the same language and address similar issues all the time, we have a number of options and ways in which we are to demonstrate our own creativity. Thus, Genie explains that his plan is not to "repudiate nor to repeat his past performances" that drained his ideas; he rather decides to go "toward a future they were not attuned to and, by some magic, at the same time go back to the original springs of narrative" (Barth, 1972, p. 6). Similarly, other characters from this novel every once in a while remind us that they just present their own unique journeys towards self-realization which is supposed to be achieved by each person differently; they strongly argue that others should not blindly imitate their patterns, or, as Scheherazade puts it: "You have other stories to tell. I've told mine" (Ibid, p. 21).

For Barth, originality is not about saying something completely new for the first time, something that has never been said before, but it is rather about creating something through constant revision of the old in a new light. As we have already seen, this idea permeates each of the three novellas, as the statement "the key to the treasure is the treasure" (Barth, 1972, p. 7) echoes throughout. One of many ways to understand this leitmotif is to connect it to the postmodernist idea that formal experimentation is inseparable from the content, i.e. the form is not subordinate to the content (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 103). Thus, the presence of the form in the content, and the content that reflects the form, is the key to applying Barth's concept of literary replenishment. Another way to understand this statement is to read postmodernist works without expectations that the author will be in charge and lead you from the opening scene to the last

one, but the point is to enjoy the journey venturing your own conclusions and analysis. Such redefinition of both the character of fiction and the readerly role highlights the importance of imagination in the interpretation of the given narrative.

Barth's return to literary tradition as a source of inspiration (which is to be revised and not repeated) is supported by his fictional characters in *Chimera*. Although John Gardner describes such return as a mere "survival" by "mythotherapy" (Gardner, 1979, p. 55), Barth's characters vividly illustrate how the practice of "mythotherapy" allows both the author and his/her fiction not only to survive, but also to eventually be content with the final outcome. For example, just like Barth who decided to revisit old myths and tales, Scheherazade "turned to her first love, unlikely as it seemed, mythology and folklore, and studied all the riddle/puzzle/secret motifs she could dig up" (Barth, 1972, p. 5). At the same time, the importance of revisiting tradition in "Dunyazadiad" is only relative to the necessity of its improvisation, as demonstrated through Dunyazade, an embodiment of Barth's postmodern author and one of Barth's doppelgangers in the story, who understood that uncritical copying of traditional narrative patterns was both impractical and unnecessary:

> It's in words that the magic is -- Abracadabra, Open Sesame, and the rest -- but the magic words in one story aren't magical in the next. The real magic is to understand which words work, and when, and for what; the trick is to learn the trick. (Barth, 1972, p. 5)

In other words, she confirms that it is necessary to revise old stories in a new key, and that an extraordinary work is created only by those who have the talent to distinguish between what is worth revising and what is not – only those (writers) who learn to search out and carefully collect the suitable material for their stories, know how to make their words magical. As stated previously, the character of Dunyazade embodies the postmodern author: in the beginning she relies on tradition (Scheherazade) and acknowledges its importance, but in her next move she builds upon tradition and improvises on the old themes, so that she eventually creates a completely new story on the foundations of the old one and manages to save her and her sister's life. Just when she and Scheherezade thought that the only way out of the situation determined by the traditional narrative pattern of the frame-story of *Thousand and One Nights* was the killing of the King and his brother, and their own suicides, Dunyazade dared to rearrange the script and thus saved the story and its characters from "death", which is an imaginative metafictional illustration of postmodern treatment of tradition.

Similarly, in the second novella "Perseid", we are presented with the story of Perseus' life, where we learn that the middle-aged Perseus has two options for how to rejuvenate himself: the first option is to go back to the heroic adventures of his youth (recorded in the ancient Greek myth of Perseus) and repeat his adventures in the same order, whereas the second option is to revisit his past and learn from it, that is, understand his earlier mistakes, correct them and eventually build upon them. However, in the beginning, he chooses the first option, that is, he decides to repeat the first cycle of his adventures known from the original ancient Greek myth of Perseus. In mythology, Perseus gained his exalted status as the epitome of masculinity because of his extraordinary power in slaying dreadful Gorgon Medusa and saving his future wife Andromeda from the sea monster Cetus. In Barth's revision of the myth of Perseus, Medusa is resurrected by Athena as the New Medusa, whose existence is additionally complicated by the cowl she is obliged to wear in order not to hurt/petrify someone. Therefore, Medusa is doomed to a loveless existence, unless she meets a man who loves her unconditionally despite her physical grotesqueness. Only the man who truly loves her would endure her otherwise petrifying gaze. However, Perseus, delighted at the very thought that he could overcome all the obstacles on the way to the New Medusa in exactly the same way as he did in his youth, exclaims: "let a new Perseus be resickled, -shielded, -sandaled, and the rest, to reglorify himself by re-beheading her" (Barth, 1972, p. 52). However, his desire to rejuvenate himself and regain through strength and heroism his former glory and love of Andromeda turns into an ironic depiction of his futile endeavors to literally copy the past. At this point in the story, he is unaware of the fact that the exact repetition of past events cannot bring about change: although the beheading of Medusa did not bring him true happiness and love in the first place, he wants to cling on to his old heroic self-image anyway and thus prepares to kill Medusa for the second time. However, Perseus' defeat is very significant as it gives more space for comparing successful to the unsuccessful path, i.e. the readers are presented with two different approaches towards the literary past. The introductory part about "unpleasant middle Perseus" (Barth, 1972, p. 77) does remind us of the postmodern author faced with a difficult task of writing fiction after modernism in the cultural climate of the early 1960s, shaped by the hostile conservative critics who in their devotion to modernism were extremely skeptical towards experimental metafiction. After an unsuccessful episode at the lake, Perseus wakes up in the center of Calyxa's cave where he is confronted with his own youth and his former heroic triumphs, and this middle point between the old and the new

is where "Perseid" actually begins. Together with Perseus who steps aside to rethink and re-evaluate his former life, we witness a mural which unfolds chronologically back into the past. Although murals were there to celebrate and highlight achievements of heroes, Perseus begins to analyze them more meticulously. Together with our hero, we realize that passive repetition of the past is not a key to progress, and that genuine transformation requires improvisation, which is, of course, another metafictional comment on the necessity of postmodern revision of tradition. Hence, Perseus' self-realization in the story through revision of his own past illustrates similar narrative and artistic self-realization experienced by postmodern authors. Postmodern author is thus equated with mythological hero Perseus who goes backwards to go forwards, and in so doing manages to overcome all obstacles, in Barth's case literary critics such as Gardner who were quick to condemn postmodernist literature. Yet, in spite of Barth's self-criticism, observations and skillful improvisations, Gardner describes him as the author who "can tell stories, but most of the time he doesn't, preferring artistic self-consciousness" (Gardner, 1979, p. 96).

After two successful narrative revisions of literary tradition, where "success" is further underlined by the happy endings for their respective protagonists, the readers are offered "Bellerophoniad", the last, the longest and the most disharmonious novella in *Chimera* which concludes the collection in a hilarious and playful way. It introduces a fictional hero who imitates the life of another fictional hero, while this strategy reflects author's inability to create yet another (original) novella which would not be mere repetition of his own ideas. Indeed, from the very beginning, "Bellerophoniad" was created to become an ironic comment by its own creator. In order to better describe the position of the postmodern authors, their stance towards literary tradition, and the danger of revising tradition by imitating fellow postmodern authors, Barth pretends to be an unskilled author who creates a real mess. Thus, the character of Bellerophon deviates from Barth's own program for the replenishment of literature: Bellerophon's constant repetition of his and Perseus' past sets him up as a metaphor for the would-be postmodern author who believes that postmodern innovation amounts to imitation of others' postmodern innovations. Bellerophon is blind to the revelation exemplified by Perseus' aforementioned process of revision and creative modification of his mythological-heroic pattern, since he does not understand the reasons why Perseus has been rewarded. Instead, Bellerophon resorts to repetition without realizing that Perseus' "estellation" was possible only when he

rejected "the stern discipline of mythic herohood" (Barth, 1972, p. 95). Although the middle-aged Bellerophon has the same goals as Perseus, that is to rejuvenate and immortalize himself, he fails in his mission simply because he, unlike Perseus, does not learn anything in the process, that is, he does not realize the importance of improvising upon one's past. Unlike the postmodern author who brings his own ideas in the process of rewriting literary tradition, Bellerophon is a phony figure who copies someone else's, i.e. Perseus' ideas completely, which, of course, leads to his failure, but also points at worthless fashionable literary experimentation of Barth's time that marketed itself as postmodernism.

As Bellerophon attempts to find ways to adopt Perseus' heroic pattern as convincingly as possible, he chooses to leave his wife and family in his forties because he was "inescapably *content*" and "mythic heroes at that age and stage should become the opposite of content" (Barth, 1972, p. 87). Following his role model, Bellerophon finds Melanippe to play the role which Calyxa played in "Perseid": both women are mistresses and chroniclers of their respective heroes in distress. Unlike nymph and priestess Calyxa who is greatly devoted to listening to Perseus' life story, and whose general way of thinking and openness about sexuality is reminiscent of the feminist discourse of the 1970s, an Amazon Melanippe is generally disinterested and even bored by Bellerophon's complaints, because she "is not conversant with the niceties either of marriage or of narrative construction" (Barth, 1972, p. 90). She is rather bewildered by her hero's pointless chatter, and thus is unable to provide any assistance or consolation to Bellerophon on his path towards rejuvenation/immortalization he aspires to. In fact, Melanippe neither understands Bellerophon's behavior, nor her own role in his life story, and therefore refuses to help him. Jealous of Perseus' "estellation"[2] (Barth, 1972, p. 83), Bellerophon, in a parodic reversal of Perseus' mid-life crisis, admits that he was unhappy because he was happy, i.e. "miserably content, holding his story in his hand" (Barth, 1972, p. 87).

After a series of Bellerophon's hilarious misfortunes and fiascos which are no more than the twisted echo of Perseus' mature "adventures", Polyeidus, Barth's yet another alter ego, gives away that this whole narrative mess is the result of Bellerophon's unresolved past. In Greek mythology, Poly(e)idus is "an Argive seer, a descendant of Melampus who helped Bellerophon to capture the winged horse Pegasus" (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 256). However, in Barth's

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[2] The word is of Barth's own coinage used to describe Perseus' transformation into a star, i.e. his immortality obtained with the help of the New Medusa

remake of the myth of Bellerophon, Polyeidus assumes even more power. He is a shape-shifter and Bellerophon's unreliable tutor who has the power to randomly appear and dissapear from the story. In the process of writing, Polyeidus attempts to find a plausible way to shape Bellerophon's life story, which, according to Melanippe, is "a lie! It's false! It's full of holes!" (Barth, 1972, p. 181). Indeed, original mythological story about Bellerophon is full of inconsistencies which cast a shadow on his heroic achievements. According to Dixon-Kennedy, Bellerophon, son of King Glaucus of Ephyra (Corinth), became famous for his killing of the grotesque monster called Chimera (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 65). However, on his road to becoming a golden hero, it appears that Bellerophon accidentally murders Bellerus, which is "an act for which he fled to Proetus, king of Tiryns, to seek purification" (Ibid). The original myth of Bellerophon also presents him as an anti-hero who becomes a victim of Anteia's lust, however, some sources claim that subsequently she either commited suicide or was "taken for a ride on Pegasus and that Bellerophon pushed her off from a great height" (Ibid). Before her death, Anteia's husband Proetus, sent Bellerophon "to Iobates, his father-in-law and the king of Lycia, carrying with him a letter requesting that the bearer be put to death" (Ibid). However, Iobates rejected to kill his guest and instead sent Bellerophon to fight Chimera, expecting his death. After his accomplishments and successful killing of Chimera, Bellerophon became disdainful and, in his desire to earn a godly status, he rode Pegasus during his attempt to ascend the Olympus. However, furious Zeus thwarted his endeavor and sent a gadfly to sting Pegasus; as a result, wounded Bellerophon ended up roaming across the Plains of Wandering until his death. Since the original Greek myth of Bellerophon is full of confusion, John Barth assigns a new role to Polyeidus: he will rewrite the story which is already full of holes. However, in his attempt to improvise upon the story, Polyeidus highlights narrative holes in the original myth and demonstrates that Bellerophon's story is not suitable for (postmodern) revision and recontextualization. Moreover, Barth re-examines Bellerophon's greatest feat, i.e. the killing of Chimera, and creates a character of Melanippe who additionally emphasizes that Bellerophon doesn't really have an exact story to tell. Thus she instructs him to improve his life, and, if he wants to copy Perseus' heroic pattern, he must first create actual heroic biography, because:

> Maybe this Chimera has turned into a pretty girl again, like Medusa in the *Perseid*. You should check and see if she's It, and if she isn't, kill her for real this time and see if that gets you where you want to go. (Barth, 1972, p. 182)

Melanippe interrogates Bellerophon's capability to be a hero, since her assertions that uncover Bellerophon's past as unworthy of revisiting and revising lead Bellerophon to the state of bewilderment where he no longer knows how to distinguish the truth from falsehood. He admits: "I couldn't speak to explain the difference between lies and myth" (Barth, 1972, p. 182). Aside from Melanippe, there is yet another mistress of Bellerophon, namely Anteia, who also tries to "wake him up" and make him stop lying to himself; thus she says:

> Do you think I *believe* that nonsense about the Chimera? Even Philonoë admits there's no proof that it wasn't something you and Polyeidus dreamed up: another pig fantasy, killing the imaginary female monster. Nobody ever saw her, even! (Barth, 1972, p. 175)

Compared to Perseus, Bellerophon is a minor Greek hero whose original story is bewildering. Therefore, his rejuvenation cannot be achieved, because his achievements are based on a random chain of events that befall him (numerous murders, his persecution and fall from Pegasus). Such events have no great prospects to be repeated given the fact Bellerophon did not plan to perform any of them in the first place. For this reason, even the great seer Polyeidus cannot help him shape his story or bring him immortality. On a metafictional level, this novella testifies that not all traditional stories are suitable for postmodern revision. Even the most inventive of writers (Polyeides) can do very little out of a chaotic story about a character who doubts his own identity: e.g. it turns out that Bellerophon is not Bellerophon, but his brother Deliades who unravels the story full of illogicality:

> I'm not star-bound Bellerus, but starstruck Deliades. Bellerus died in the grove that night, in my place, while I humped (half-sister!) Sibyl in holy his. I was his mortal killer; therefore I became his immortal voice: Deliades I buried in Bellerophon, to live out in selfless counterfeit, from that hour to this, my brother's demigoddish life. It's not my story; never was. I never killed Chimarrhus or Chimera, or rode the winged horse, or slept with Philonoë, or laid my head between Melanippe's thighs: the voice that spoke to them all those nights was Bellerus's voice. And the story it tells isn't a lie, but something larger than fact. (Barth, 1972, p. 190)

In the last scene of this novella, Bellerophon's/Deliades's life is in danger as he falls from Pegasus being stung by a gadfly; actually, the gadfly that Zeus sent to thwart Bellerophon's flight is another shape assumed by Polyeidus. In this comical termination, both Polyeidus and Bellerophon/Deliades fall and in the meantime they have to come up with the precise plan for their safe landing and survival. On the metafictional level, the author (creator) and his/her protagonist (creation) depend on each other – they are connected by the act of writing/invention:

the downfall of the one means the downfall of the other (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 117). Thus, in this situation, Polyeidus as the creator must improvise and save his art of fiction from disappearance, that is, from both literal oblivion and artistic insignificance. Like a real postmodern author, Polyeidus improvises and uses his power of self-transformation to become "the work of fiction he has just produced. Not fully 'content' with how the story has been finally fashioned, the author decides to close it anyhow" (Kofman, 2015, p. 42). Thus, Polyedius and his work "Bellerophoniad" become one and the same, or, more precisely, they turn into

> A certain number of printed pages in a language not untouched by Greek, to be read by a limited number of 'Americans,' not all of whom will finish or enjoy them that is to be found by John Barth in the Maryland marshes. (Barth, 1972, p. 190)

The failed attempt to rewrite the ancient Greek myth and to give Bellerophon immortality becomes a hilarious story in which Barth demonstrates his authorial skillfulness and creativity. He manages to create a new fictional work even from an old story full of holes about a less known hero from ancient Greek mythology and to recreate it for the audience from the second half of the 20th century. At the same time, Barth self-reflexively parodies the chosen myth, thematizing the futile attempt to copy someone else's life/work, in order to demonstrate the consequences arising from excessive and purposeless literary experimentation. On the other hand, "Bellerophoniad" becomes a playful comment on the author who pretends to be unskillful and as such this novella can also be interpreted as an ironic anticipation of negative commentaries by hostile critics.

6.   *Chimera* as historiographic metafiction

In *Chimera*, Barth problematizes the process of writing fiction and explores "his own state of (personal and professional) life" (Kofman, 2015, p. 41), seeking a way out of his writer's block through the very act of writing. Nevertheless, *Chimera* incorporates additional socially critical dimension, in the sense that it becomes Barth's platform for addressing social and cultural themes prominent in the 1960s and 1970s. Obvious expansion of "pure" metafiction into this socio-cultural sphere classifies *Chimera* as metafiction in the wider sense, that is, as historiographic metafiction.

More specifically, *Chimera* moves beyond the discussion of strictly literary issues reserved for "pure" metafiction, or rather combines the former with deconstruction of patriarchal norms and assumptions, tapping into revisionist cultural discourse of his time offered by feminists with regard to women's rights, gender stereotypes, or systematic marginalization of women in traditional texts that have constituted the male canon for centuries. Hence, Barth thematizes in *Chimera* denial of women's rights and patriarchal victimization of women, showing them for what they are, namely cultural practices which have been ideologically inscribed in the old texts, e.g. in ancient Greek myths or in the female narrator's position in *Thousand and One Nights*. Therefore, *Chimera* novellas reach back into the past in order to expose and understand discrimination women have been facing for centuries, and then to revise patriarchal cultural patterns within a work of art which aspires to be a reflection of its own age— the revolutionary and feminist sixties and seventies. As a true postmodernist work, *Chimera* goes back into the past in order to build upon it and to revise it, this time culturally, and this is achieved by going directly into the worlds of the chosen myths and tales and by changing them from within. In other words, John Barth assumes an unmistakably pro-feminist attitude in *Chimera* by rewriting official historical and cultural narratives of the past from the female perspective. This aspect of *Chimera* serves to reveal patriarchy as the ideological background of ancient Greek myths as well as of the frame story of the Oriental fairy-tale. It uncovers the silenced, female side of these stories, countering ideological agendas in the original versions which favored only one (male) interpretation, or "reality" defined according to the powerful phallocentric vision of the world. Deconstruction of seemingly innocent storylines of the chosen myths and stories justifies the classification of *Chimera* as historiographic metafiction that offers

a broader meaning and application of metafiction with reference to the context. Thus, this novel is engaged in challenging and redefining the cultural myths and stereotypes that are as old as ancient Greek myths (and maybe even older). As already discussed, postmodernist literature does not exist only for the sake of formal and stylistic experimentation, but uses those to tackle more complex ideological issues:

> Because of its refusal to surrender to sheer textuality, it can, with a certain amount of credibility, investigate the determining role of representations, discourses, and signifying practices. It can, in other words, address the matter of power. (Bertens, 2005, p. 75)

Postmodernists argue that literary works always possess a certain amount of power that latently influences general thought as they transmit lessons to be learnt from one generation to the next. This makes literature (just like historiography) a powerful tool of social and political indoctrination. For example, vividly retold stories and fairy-tales for children may educate about the "right path" and teach desirable conduct, which can be abused to train children to accept social conformism and normalize various kinds of social inequalities, including gender inequality. Postmodernists argue that the same applies to adults and therefore focus on deconstructing seemingly natural grand narratives from the past, such as the patriarchal narrative, in order to expose its constructedness and suggest the (feminist) alternative.

John Barth and other postmodern authors who criticize literary tradition from this perspective strategically foreground the incorporation of predominantly white phallocentric narratives into the "great tradition", which has contributed to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Thus, subtypes as well as goals of metafiction merge in postmodern fiction, because "the notion of the author is integrally linked with that of patriarchy; to contest the dominance of the one, is implicitly to contest the power of the other" (Bertens, 2005, p. 90). Hence, when Barth takes on the responsibility to challenge literary tradition, literary concerns are inseparable from the cultural, as he envisions a more inclusive world rooted in freedom of expression and gender equality. In accordance with postmodernist emphasis on the link between text and context, Barth is devoted to writing fiction which rewrites the social and cultural phenomena from the perspectives of the oppressed. However, *Chimera* also questions rigid binary oppositions and illustrates that both men and women are victims of the patriarchal system. This becomes clear in the instances when both genders cooperate in the subversion of patriarchy. Still, Barth links transformation of old patterns primarily with strong female characters who are

responsible for the action that moves forward in a spiral-like manner, turning apparent grotesqueness and incongruence of *Chimera* into structural perfection. Thus, this novel completely breaks all stereotypes by not taking the side of any ideology, but, on the contrary, it reveals a path that can revive dilapidated literature, but also improve the functioning of society by initiating a change based on better and equal opportunities for all.

6.1. *Chimera*: re-examining the position of women and men in the patriarchal myth

In today's society, myths are usually perceived as innocent and neutral stories of old that once upon a time portrayed fears and hopes of people who created and transmitted them. However, scholars, who approach mythologies more meticulously and analyze the ways in which myths are constructed, argue that myths are more than just fantastic stories that captured lives of heroes, gods, semi-gods and alike. Thus, Roland Barthes in his famous collection of essays entitled *Mythologies* (1957) argues that myths usually present themselves as something natural, and thus transform history into nature: "Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (Barthes, 1991, p. 108). He describes myth as a type of speech, and believes that everything can become a myth if appropriated by society, since "there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things" (Ibid, p. 107). Thus, we usually create myths to organize the world we live in, to bestow a meaningful law which would justify and order our existence. To be more precise, we are not talking only about ancient myths, but about any myth, i.e. religious, social, or political grand narrative (Lyotard) which presents itself as a sum of natural and neutral facts, that is, as an irrefutable total explanation. Myth is popular and easily accepted because it "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences" through organizing a world without contradictions as it "establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves" (Ibid, p. 143). Consequently, particular worldviews naturalized in myths and transmitted through time and space illustrate and reflect social conditions under which they were created and perpetuated, or they reveal their own social and ideological context.

Although history and myth represent different ways of organizing the past, both highlight important events embedded in tradition. History is usually considered more factual and "objective" than myth; however, additional efforts are being made to supplement historical "facts" in the cases where "reliable" data are not available due to non-existent explanations and artifacts. In these circumstances, historians turn to a less reliable oral tradition, most often mythology, from which they draw the necessary information to fill the gaps in the chronology of events: "who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be: there's a lot at stake in a myth" (Morales, 2007, p. 18). If we recall Linda Hutcheon's theorizing concerning historiographic metafiction and Hayden White's comparison between historical works and any other narrative, we could easily connect myths with history. It is also useful at this point to remember Barthes' claim that history and mythology are inseparable from each other. Thus, myth could be seen as yet another medium that apparently innocently transfers ideologies hidden inside of it, because "mythology was also an expression of accumulated experience, the first 'teacher of life' before this function was taken away from it and assigned to history by Cicero" (Ceglarska, 2018, p. 345-346). Through the heroic stories and described lives of immortal gods and ordinary mortals, we can better understand the social hierarchies, ideological systems as well as conditions under which the myths occurred:

> The myth, by referring to common beliefs, not only enables the unification of certain social groups, due to their profession of similar deities, but also facilitates the identification of values relevant to this new community, thus indirectly presenting the real structure of the contemporary society and at the same time, the factors that bind them together. (Ceglarska, 2018, p. 349-350)

So it is no wonder that postmodern authors like Barth have tried to unravel and deconstruct stories that have remained intact and unquestioned for centuries. In making alterations to the chosen stories, Barth also points out how selected myths are the carriers of particular values and how they could be linked to the industrialized Western society of his day. Kofman argues that

> Barth humanizes the mythic heroes and assigns contemporary meaning to past stories and characters, thus demystifying and defamiliarizing mythical narrations. Rather than radicalizing myths as self-parody, I think that Barth, in any case, if he does not parody the myths themselves, he definitely parodies mythopoetics or the process by which myths are constructed. In doing so, Barth participates in the history of myths. And rather than

'restoring' myths, Barth in fact restores literature by means of a critical discussion of mythopoetic construction. (Kofman, 2015, p. 57-58)

Barth's parody of traditional texts rests on his belief that there are no ideologically neutral texts, although they may present themselves as "natural" entities, and that is why he attempts to unmask and deconstruct these texts by pointing at their hidden context. Thus, Barth emphasizes ideological background of the selected myths in *Chimera* and shows that they have originally been rooted in the patriarchal context. In rewriting them from the female perspective, Barth creates playful remakes, but besides bringing ancient myths and stories closer to the twentieth-century readers, Barth also sharpens readerly awareness of their hidden ideological subtext.

Although the importance of some myths ceases to exist as the time passes and as society changes in some aspects, other myths stubbornly persist and endure all challenges since "myth allows legitimization of certain principles, or even specific rights, just by referring to their genesis in the sphere of the sacred" (Ceglarska, 2018, p. 350). As exemplified in Barth's *Chimera*, it seems that patriarchy is easily transferred through time and space: it changes its form to fit in the given social environment, but essentially stays the same in its very core. Gerda Lerner, a distinguished historian and pioneer in women's studies, in her *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) explains the origins of misogyny in ancient Mesopotamia and the subsequent Western societies, and argues that patriarchy is a historically constructed system of social organization. Just as Barthes argues that myths tend to present themselves as natural, Lerner argues that patriarchy should be challenged from its very roots since male-dominance over women should be stopped being perceived as something which is biologically natural. She also asserts that women are central to the production of civilization, and thus seeks to understand why women were and still are in the marginalized position. Because of the male dominance over women, Western civilization has for centuries supported history written from the male perspective. Furthermore, Lerner argues that, until the most recent past, historians have been men,

> and what they have recorded is what men have done and experienced and found significant. They have called this History and claimed universality for it. What women have done and experienced has been left unrecorded, neglected, and ignored in interpretation. Historical scholarship, up to the most recent past, has seen women as

marginal to the making of civilization and as unessential to those pursuits defined as having historic significance. (Lerner, 1987, p. 4)

Similarly, John Barth challenges patriarchy from the perspective of the late twentieth century, which may also be connected to the occurrence of the "second-wave" feminism which started in the late 1960s in the United States. Noticing women's subservient position in the ancient myths and stories, Barth attempts to rewrite them in a feminist key. As *Chimera* thematizes patriarchal gender roles, it demonstrates its author's position of active involvement in the related social, cultural and artistic issues. That the heroic myth is among central concerns of the three novellas certainly confirms Barth's interest in literary revision of patriarchy. Namely, male protagonists in *Chimera* embody the myth of patriarchy which presupposes marginalization of women. Each novella in *Chimera* vividly illustrates the original stories where the male protagonists are glorified because of their heroism which is based on slaughter and oppression of their respective female victims. The two ancient Greek myths and the Oriental fairy-tale which Barth chose for his revision are based on the totalizing pretensions which devote all their attention to a perfect male figure who assumes a great power in his community. For example, the stories of Perseus and Bellerophon reveal how their privileged position in ancient Greek mythology was secured by their excessive physical strength which in turn established them as worthy rulers of their communities. On the other hand, deceived by his wife, King Shahryar projects his distrust on all women and thus strengthens misogyny in his kingdom. In all three novellas, Barth's strong female characters attempt to re-write the original myths, speaking up for themselves and against the institutionalized power of men. As the female protagonists tell their versions of the story, they subvert patriarchy through questioning the male protagonists' implied and unnecessarily magnified superiority. Through their storytelling, women from the two myths and the fairy-tale obtain their stolen power and use it to overcome gender stereotypes deeply rooted in their respective societies. In the course of the respective stories they manage to re-educate their male counterparts and help them on the path of personal transformation. Through challenging and subverting patriarchy, Barth envisions a different social and legislative order which includes both male and female interpretations of the world. At the same time, gradual repudiation of patriarchal limitations by male protagonists must be read as a metafictional suggestion that renewal of literature cannot be reduced to deconstruction of traditional narrative strategies, but inevitably involves deconstruction of subtly embedded ideologies which latently

support any form of inequality, and in this case it is patriarchy. Thus, "Bellerophoniad" illustrates the obstacles to achieving gender equality, in contrast to "Dunyazadiad" and "Perseid". In addition, Barth thematizes the initial struggle of his male protagonists to fit into patriarchal norms, which turns them into a parodic version of traditional androcentric notions of a hero.

The following section elaborates Barth's deconstruction of patriarchy through his postmodern revision of selected traditional texts shaped by normalized patriarchal assumptions.

In "Dunyazadiad", we are presented with two women, Scheherazade and Dunyazade, who aim to sacrifice themselves in order to save the lives of women in the kingdom ruled by misogynist elite, namely by king Shahryar and his brother Shah Zaman. The two brothers had been betrayed by their wives, which resulted in their ultimate skepticism towards womankind. Women from this kingdom were in danger due to extremely repressive gender policy: each night the two brothers would choose two young women to deflower and kill in the morning. In order to seem as strong men who cannot be emotionally hurt by women, the two of them "set themselves up as patriarchs with life-and-death control over women to compensate for an ultimate powerlessness" (Raper, 1989, p. 28).

In the original version of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade tells stories to the king in order to survive, which means that she is a prototype of any author whose "survival" depends on the quality of her/his storytelling. Meanwhile, Shahryar listens in amazement to her stories, which is actually her only hope because her storytelling alone has the power to postpone her death in the morning: while her existence depends on Shahryar's will to listen, her strategy is to make the king curious enough so that he could spare her life for another day to continue the story the following night. She uses the same tactic for thousand and one nights, after which, in the original fairy-tale, Shahryar falls in love with her and the two of them get married. In Barth's revision of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Dunyazade retells the framing story of Scheherazade. Dunyazade starts off the novella by describing the thousandth night of Scheherazade's storytelling. In the opening scene and the first part of novella, Dunyazade is a passive listener who praises her sister for her storytelling talent, while Scheherazade admits that her storytelling was the only way to stop Shahryar from killing more young virgins in the kingdom. Scheherazade argues that she made such a conclusion after her "full-time research on a way to stop Shahryar from killing all our sisters and wrecking the country" (Barth, 1972, p. 4).

She analyzes female condition from the perspective of the political science and concludes that "Shahryar's power was absolute" (Ibid.) and that, in comparison to his institutionalized power, her own was miserable. Psychology, she claims, turned to be "another blind alley" (Ibid.), offering no useful solutions to this situation. Thus, the only strategy available to Scheherazade is her own art of storytelling.

However, she receives her supply of stories from the Genie, which symbolizes cooperation between past and present, if only for a while. Yet, after realizing that she will not be able to forever recount her stories in order to save her and her sister's lives, Scheherazade makes a desperate plan to kill the two brothers, and later commit suicide together with her sister. In the second half of the novella, Dunyazade takes on the role of the narrator and protagonist in the crucial moment and gives the story an unexpected turn. Dunyazade finally turns from passive follower (and listener) of her sister's into an active protagonist who pushes the action of the novella forward through her own improvisation. No longer just a careful observer and listener from the first part of the novella, who spends nights at the bottom of the bed in the king's chamber, witnessing Scheherazade and Shahryar making love, Dunyazade becomes powerful in the second part, because she understands "the one-dimensional quality of the hatred her sister expresses, chiefly because she intuits the ambivalence of Scheherazade's relationship to Shahryar" (Raper, 1989, p. 28). Dunyazade remembers the nights when Scheherazade and Shahryar were making love, and concludes that it seemed that Scheherazade felt "a kind of pleasure despite herself" (Barth, 1972, p. 13). Dunyazade also realizes that profound transformation of the kingdom deeply poisoned by the institutionalized misogyny requires a different approach, which would result in them waking "together in a world that knows nothing of *he* and *she*" (Ibid). Thus, Dunyazade actually prevents her sister from acting against herself and against the interest of her gender, just for the sake of revenge which cannot effect genuine social change. She suggests that violence is not the answer to violence, and that real progress is impossible without inner transformation of both women and men. Thus, she takes on a role of a teacher of both her sister and Zaman, as she decides to improvise and incorporate a new perspective on their situation—the one which would deconstruct stereotypical gender roles and seek equal opportunities for both men and women in the kingdom. Her plan, which eventually abolishes rigid social norms, consists of changing stereotypical gender roles, where it is necessary to understand and accept the perspective of the "other" in order to know oneself.

Since it is through storytelling and love-making that both Dunyazade and Shah Zaman fight over power issues as well as for their respective lives, revealing their vulnerability in the process, Barth confirms his prior statement that "writing and reading, or telling and listening, were literally ways of making love" (Barth, 1972, p. 15). However, on Dunyazade and Shah Zaman's first wedding night, Barth reveals the relative power of both sexes as he abolishes traditional assumption where the woman is the personification of passivity, while the man, on the other hand, is described as active. The author destabilizes this assumption by allowing both Dunyazade and Shah Zaman to feel both power and powerlessness as they exchange the role of listener and narrator, because he argues that "The teller's role [...] regardless of his actual gender, was essentially masculine, the listener's or reader's feminine, and the tale was the medium of their intercourse" (Barth, 1972, p. 16). Traditionally, the position of the reader/listener has been interpreted as passive and associated with lack of agency and, therefore, usually described as "feminine", which illustrates the underlying gender stereotypization. In contrast to traditional fiction based on such gender biased assumptions about the narrative process, *Chimera* (along with other literary production of the age) functions as its postmodern opposite insofar as it utterly relativizes the abovementioned assumption by assigning a very active role to its readers regardless of their gender, inviting them to co-operate in the process of making and interpreting fiction. Similarly, on an intradiegetic level, Shah Zaman and Dunyazade permanently reverse the positions of the narrator and the listener regardless of their gender, while the very interchangeability of their roles subverts patriarchal identification of femininity with passivity and powerlessness, that is, masculinity with agency and power. While they are exchanging positions, both in bed and in the act of storytelling, they are creating more nuanced meanings which legitimize at least two equally valid interpretations or sides of the story. Each perspective reveals that which was not clear at first glance and by adopting only one perspective. In this process, both of them uncover their weak spots regardless of their position in the storytelling. As the impact of their individual stories depends on the will of the listener to truly comprehend the struggles of the storyteller, both Shah Zaman and Dunyazade narrate in fear of being misunderstood and insecure of the outcome. Thus, since Dunyazade possesses the razor, and Shah Zaman has the institutional power in his hands, both of them tell their respective stories in the critical moment, when the only hope for harmless resolution and mutual understanding depends on the will of the listener to listen and believe the story told. This demonstrates that real

power does not inherently lie in any of the storytelling positions, but in the interplay of those with the wider context in which storytelling occurs, in this case Zaman's political power and/or Dunyazade's razor. In this manner, Barth once again points at the intertwinement of text and context, which is crucial for particular kind of reception and interpretation of literature. Luckily, this dangerous play between life and death results in mutual understanding which could not have been reached without a conscious effort to hear the other side. Since the immediate context here is that of patriarchy, Zaman and Dunyazade both contribute to changing the patriarchal matrix by an act of will to genuinely reach out to each other, and in this process they together rewrite the old frame-story which reflected and confirmed the patriarchal order, symbolized by the precarious storytelling position of Scheherezade's. In other words, Barth demonstrates that a text echoes its context, e.g. the frame story echoes patriarchy, but also that a revision of text signals a change of context, e.g. Dunyazade's and Zaman's abolishing of patriarchy, in the same measure in which the altered context engenders a revised text, e.g. feminist redefinition of gender relations engenders "Dunyazadiad". Although Zaman's "re-education" is fully implemented by Dunyazade, when he occupies the position of the narrator, Shah Zaman confesses that it actually begins with his "original mistress" (Barth, 1972, p. 32) teaching him that he must break the vow to kill virgins, because killing is not something which is inscribed in his nature as unchangeable:

> 'You *are* unable to keep it,' she told me softly: 'not because you're naturally impotent, but because you're *not* naturally cruel. If you'd tell your brother that after thinking it over you've simply come to a conclusion different from his, you'd be cured as if by magic.' And in fact, as if by magic indeed, what she said was so true that at her very words the weight was lifted from heart and tool together; they rose as one. Gratefully, tenderly, I went into her at last; we cried for joy, came at once, fell asleep in each other's arms. (Barth, 1972, p. 29)

This observation could also be connected with the position of men who are, in the context of patriarchal society, supposed to be raised as harsh and strong. This means that Zaman as a man is entrapped by the same patriarchal society, where men are also struggling to fulfill their prescribed gender roles. Raper argues that "the myth of male heroic superiority is the way men save face" and it is exactly killing of innocent girls that keeps Shah Zaman from seeming "'chicken-hearted and a fool' – or, worse yet, from seeming a cuckold" (Raper, 1989, p. 28). However, soon does he realize that he does not have to seem or act harsh only because he is a man, i.e. because the norms and the myth of male superiority ask of him to behave in this manner. Thus, Shah Zaman gains strength by admitting that he never even killed deflowered

virgins, but instead he sent them away from the kingdom where they joined the female community, namely the Country of the Breastless, founded by his "original mistress":

> with a thousand thanks to her for opening my eyes, a thousand good wishes for the success of her daring enterprise, and many thousands of dinars to support it (which for portability and security she converted into a phial of diamonds and carried intravaginally), I declared her dead, let her father the Vizier in on our secret, and sent her off secretly to one of my country castles on a distant lake, where she prepared for the expedition westward while her companions, the ostensible victims of my new policy, accumulated about her. (Barth, 1972, p. 32)

He claims that, in order not to appear as a weak man, he invented stories of his cruelty that covered up his true self. Thus, the man who symbolizes patriarchal power puts an appearance of power in accordance with prescribed stereotypes, and in so doing actually points to the dilapidation of patriarchy as an ideology which generalizes and creates unsustainable and unnatural stereotypes. This finally and unequivocally leads to deconstruction of the myth of androcentrism, which, ironically, sabotages itself. By accepting the female perspective, Shah Zaman experiences self-realization which immediately sets him free from the shackles of patriarchy:

> For 3500 years, as Barth's tale illustrates, men (and women) have died for the story of the hero – that is, to save face. Only embracing the great *as if*, which allows Shah Zaman to free himself from the myth of male behavior and to express elements truer to his own nature, can lead to a culture that differs in the way his (or our) survival requires. (Raper, 1989, p. 29)

Hence, Barth demonstrates that gender equality can be achieved only through sincere acknowledgement of injustices done to women and through refusing to make each person fit in the predetermined stereotypical patterns of gender-appropriate behavior. However, Barth's deconstruction of the subservient position of women stresses the importance of unity and mutual understanding between genders, highlighting the fact that humanity consists of human beings who are equally important for the preservation of civilization. Symbolizing necessary cooperation between men and women, Shah Zaman and Dunyazade together rise above their prescribed roles simply by acknowledging each other's story. Unlike Scheherazade, whose storytelling marathon and battle for her own survival leave her passively exposed to Shahryar's temper, Dunyazade builds upon and rearranges this pattern by abandoning her sister's revenge plan, and through her storytelling, she manages to turn her potential killer into her lover and

husband. By allowing Shah Zaman to interrupt her storytelling with his own (confessional) story, Dunyazade opens up new space for negotiation consisting of mutual exchange of thoughts and ideas, which ultimately leads to their mutual understanding. As Shah Zaman takes the position of the narrator, he finally tastes the bitterness of the struggle for life, sustained only by the means of one's own words and intellect and without institutional weaponry. Thus, Dunyazade's plan to rewrite Shah Zaman is constructive as it changes the position of both women and men in their kingdom. Shah Zaman suggests:

> 'Let's end the dark night! All that passion and hate between men and women; all that confusion of inequality and difference! Let's take the truly tragic view of love! Maybe it *is* a fiction, but it's the profoundest and best of all!' (Barth, 1972, p. 32)

Finally, their enlightenment sheds a light on the importance of equal share of both men and women in the maintenance of civilization, as they put into practice what Lerner has described as the only solution for the deconstruction of patriarchy:

> a radical restructuring of thought and analysis which once and for all accepts the fact that humanity consists in equal parts of men and women and that the experiences, thoughts, and insights of both sexes must be represented in every generalization that is made about human beings. (Lerner, 1987, p. 220)

Thus, Shah Zaman and Dunyazade represent gender cooperation which defies patriarchal norms, whereas Scheherazade's obedient storytelling only prolongs and reaffirms King Shahryar's dominant position. Moreover, since King's misogyny is not limited to the king, but extends to his subjects, it is both a personal and a political issue (reflecting the feminist slogan of the 1960s that personal is political), which shows that power structures in society always strive to shape opinions of the masses and to dictate what is wrong and what is right. If the institution that possesses the power, in this case Shahryar, is blind to and persistent in doing injustice to women, the same pattern is followed by the individuals who contribute to "public health". The same could be applied to the discourse of the late twentieth century, where the masses, usually educated by the narratives and ideologies propagated by the government, religious authorities, cultural and educational institutions or entertainment industry, are successfully convinced that there is no other way to prosper but to embrace what the powerful ones representing the dominant culture dictate. Yet, Barth's fiction including *Chimera* reflects the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s by virtue of its countercultural stance. Therefore, Barth's deconstruction of patriarchy

in "Dunyazadiad" starts from the very top of the social hierarchy and shatters that hierarchy by imagining and advocating new and more liberal possibilities for the renewal of society. Ultimately, in their redefining of patriarchal gender relations and their liberation from old stereotypes, Shah Zaman and Dunyazade mirror their author and vice versa: all of them suggest that necessary revision of the past, whether in the realm of storytelling or (gender) politics, extends to all ontological levels which are anyway an ever shifting confluence of the factual and fictional.

The second novella "Perseid" explores the importance of the bond between the past and the present moment, where the past serves as a corrective for the present. This is illustrated by protagonist Perseus' mid-life transformation prompted by the realization of his previous mistakes. While "Perseid" has been analyzed in Section Five within the framework of pure metafiction, and Perseus as metaphor for both postmodern author and postmodern procedure of revision of the literary past, this section offers a reading of "Perseid" as "an examination of male reliance on the patriarchal Hero-construct, as well as the possibility of transforming this model" (Šoštarić, 2010, str. 150). In the ancient Greek myth, Perseus is the embodiment of masculinity. He is presented as a brave and strong hero whose greatest achievement is his killing of Gorgon Medusa. He is rewarded for his heroic deeds with a wife, Andromeda, who initially glorifies both Perseus and his deeds. Whereas the ancient myth captures young Perseus, John Barth explores what happens to this hero in his forties when he turns into an "unpleasant middle Perseus" (Barth, 1972, p. 77). He is "unpleasant" because he is struggling to regain his former glory which has been slowly but steadily fading away. Although known as the famous slayer of Medusa, he has a mid-life crisis caused by the realization that he no longer possesses strength that would make him a hero again. His impotence is another problem which prevents him from being desired or respected among women, including his own wife Andromeda. In his revision of the ancient myth of Perseus, Barth once again elaborates on the state of a hero who is, after all, yet another victim of patriarchal system. Taught to measure his worth according to his heroism and physical strength, Perseus is unable to accept his position, and instead, he wants to repeat the cycle of his heroic youthful adventures and to "be twenty with Andromeda again" (Barth, 1972, p. 65). Barth's story begins from the middle, when Perseus finds himself in Calyxa's cave, after he has already experienced the first set of failures in his futile mission of personal rejuvenation. Upon waking up in Calyxa's cave, Perseus is prompted by pictorial depictions of his life on the

72

cave wall to recall his previous life and the act of leaving his town, his loveless marriage and the boredom of his everyday life. Soon do we realize that middle-aged Perseus is only a distorted and faded image of his younger self, who was not worthy of divine intervention and the props (knapsack (*kibisis*), adamantine sword, helm of darkness, winged sandals, and polished shield) needed to defeat the Gorgon. In contrast to the original myth where the necessary equipment was provided by Athena, Zeus, Hades and Hermes (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 245), in Barth's version Perseus relies solely on the winged Pegasus. However, as he was not strong and agile enough, he was outwitted at the very beginning of his second attempt to behead Medusa. As the past cannot be exactly repeated, Perseus fails to outwit the Graeae, who instead of giving him information that would lead him to the Stygian nymphs, steal his Pegasus and leave him alone in the middle of the desert where Calyxa finds him. Thus his heroic endeavor fails and he becomes only a tragicomic echo of a former hero. At Calyxa's place, Perseus recounts his youthful adventures to Calyxa with the help of temple murals that unfold in the spiral-like shape. As he remembers his glorious days, he still insists on repeating them in the same way and order, which means that he still has not learned anything from his fiasco at the lake where Calyxa found him. However, Perseus soon learns the error of his ways, realizing that the past is not there to be literally copied, but to be understood and overcome. So, Perseus fails to "renew" himself, that is, make himself great and distinguished again, as long as he stubbornly adheres to the old script of the heroic myth. Eventually, he achieves glory and immortality, but only after he has learned from his own mistakes, which is a long and painful process and the main subject-matter of "Perseid". Calyxa points out that his attempt to literally repeat the past is irrational and thus destined to fail from the very beginning: "How can Being Perseus Again be your goal, when you have to be Perseus to reach it?" (Ibid, p. 61).

On his path towards self-realization, Perseus has to develop the other side of his personality, the one which has been silenced by patriarchal norms and system of values. His delusions are revealed by two teachers, namely Calyxa and the New Medusa, who help him overcome his pathetic condition. Andromeda gives up on Perseus much earlier, as she understands that Perseus never loved her in the first place, but rather showed her around as mere accessory, or as a beautiful woman whose main task was to adore Perseus and his heroic accomplishments. Still, even though Andromeda prepares to leave him, disappointed over her wasted life and tired of his constant complaints, Perseus reasserts the heroic script by stubbornly

insisting that it was him who set Andromeda free, to which she responds: "I've always been [free]! […] Despite you! Even on the cliff I was free" (Barth, 1972, p. 77). Thus, Andromeda lets Perseus suffer and leaves him, infuriated by the injustice he has done to her due to his inability to see beyond his own self-centeredness.

The first who challenges Perseus' belief system is Calyxa, but she also directs Perseus towards eternity by the power of her storytelling. It is interesting to note that Barth's Calyxa uses vocabulary typical of the second-wave feminists, which leads to conclusion that Perseus is to be re-educated and literally rewritten from the feminist point of view. Just like in "Dunyazadiad", Barth thwarts male-dominance over women by placing the male protagonist in the position of passive listener. From that position Perseus acquires a different perspective, and learns to perceive himself and others, primarily women, from another angle. This is a necessary transformation which enables Perseus to liberate himself from the patriarchal stereotype of the so-called "real man" and to genuinely understand and heal himself. Additionally, Raper argues that, from the very start,

> Perseus's heroic behavior arises from a great reservoir of unconsciousness. His eagerness in middle life to feel heroic again suggests that the heroic pattern is the only masculine role he knows or feels comfortable playing. (Raper, 1989, p. 20)

In conversations with Calyxa, the "unpleasant" Perseus becomes more pleasant, as their conversations about various issues, such as relationships, his marriage, love, jealousy, and heroism, contribute to progress in his sexual life. As a real psychoanalyst, Calyxa manages to untangle Perseus' thoughts, which leads to his metaphorical re-birth that includes an alternative view of masculinity and heroism. Thus, he admits that under the tutorship of Calyxa, he has learnt "what few men knew, fewer heroes, and no gods: that a woman's a person in her Independent right, to be respected therefore by the goldenest hero in heaven" (Barth, 1972, p. 45). In this instance, Barth exposes the most important issue with which women have struggled for a long period of time, namely male reluctance to acknowledge women's independence.

Although Perseus is re-educated enough at this point to understand that women are independent and not the "other" in the social structure, his journey is not completed until he realizes that the killing of Medusa, which he deems as his greatest achievement, is actually a great injustice done to womankind. Calyxa's mission is transferred to New Medusa, who in Barth's sequel to the myth of Perseus was resurrected by goddess Athene. Barth meticulously

goes to the center of the myth and completely rewrites it, and in the process demonstrates the complex processes the society must undergo in order to reach gender equality. The novella shows that patriarchy is deeply rooted in Western societies and that it cannot be easily deconstructed either in fiction or in reality.

In the original myth, Gorgon Medusa was one of the three beautiful daughters of the sea deities Phorcys and Ceto. However, after having been raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, Medusa was punished together with her two sisters. Outraged Athena transformed all three into the Gorgons, "hideous beings with golden wings and brazen claws, vast, grinning mouths with tusks, and serpents for hair. So ghastly was their appearance that their looks turned men to stone" (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 140). In his revision of traditional myth of Medusa and Perseus, John Barth reverses Medusa's story, especially by making her the main factor in Perseus' re-education which sets him on the path of self-discovery and genuine transformation. In this manner, Barth deconstructs the patriarchal ideological background of this story in Greek mythology. As previously discussed, myths are never innocent and they are never just fictional stories, but indicate the context. So, the injustices glorified in the original myths speak of the time and place of their construction and reveal the underlying ideological subtext. Through the revision of the myth of Perseus, Barth draws attention to the patriarchal context underlying it, and gives a chance to the silenced side of the original myth to display its perspective. The readers are presented with the injustice done to beautiful Medusa, whose only "sin", which brought about her tragedy of being raped and then beheaded, was her own beauty. This myth opens up more space for discussion if we pay attention to the way in which ancient Greek mythology glorified supremacy of men over women. In Greek mythology, Athena is the daughter of Zeus and his first wife the Oceanid Metis. When an oracle foretells that the child his wife carries is a girl, and that his second child will be a boy who will overthrow him, Zeus swallows his pregnant wife. However, Hermes splits open Zeus's skull and "from the opening Athena sprang, full-grown and armed" (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 55). Thus, Athena is a symbolic guardian of patriarchy and male supremacy, as a woman of father born, and this probably explains distinguished place she has been awarded in patriarchal Greek mythology. Furthermore, Šoštarić argues that the act of punishing Medusa, the victim of rape, by Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, reveals institutionalization and justification of male superiority over women (Šoštarić, 2017, p. 111). Instead of helping the female victim, Athena decides to humiliate her and collaborate with

patriarchy in supporting the powerful god Poseidon. Barth translates this intriguing part of Greek mythology into the feminist discourse of the 1970s, satirizing liberal feminists ready to collaborate with the system to gain privileged position at the expense of many underprivileged women who remained victimized by both men and women on the basis of race, social position and/or sexual orientation. Indeed, Barth does not miss to emphasize that Athena almost exclusively supports male protagonists, e.g. she provides both Perseus and Bellerophon with the necessary tools they need to succeed in their respective missions.

Furthermore, Barth approaches the original myth from a perspective that sabotages violence. Although Perseus is her killer, the New Medusa, "who loved her beheader" (Raper, 1989, p. 21), employs a more flexible approach that distinguishes her as a "bigger man" as opposed to Perseus who is presented as a pale and remote shadow of an ex-hero. By juxtaposing New Medusa's will to help Perseus overcome his struggles and Perseus' obsession with killing her again for his own selfish purposes, Barth explains the lack of genuine strength hidden behind the myth of manliness. Eventually, Perseus comes to understand the beauty of true feelings through the storytelling and love-making and liberates himself from patriarchal stereotypes, just as he learns over time to act selflessly, that is, make moves which are not motivated by egotist glorifying of his self-image. His newly-won self knowledge involves realization that he never loved Andromeda for who she really was, but for what she represented for him, i.e. the reward for his heroic deeds. He also realizes that his killing of her younger lover Danaus was an act of hurt pride, but also his symbolic destruction of the young self-image he had once praised. Moreover, when New Medusa finally deconstructs Perseus' past, another powerful dimension opens up for both Perseus and the readers. Namely, New Medusa uncovers true nature of his entire endeavor: everything he has ever achieved in the past and was proud of has been a useless and excessive use of force and power, motivated by ridiculous assumption on his part that his mother, for whom he eventually embarked on adventures, did not need him to save her. Hence, New Medusa interprets his attempt to save his mother from the new man she actually wanted in her life as nothing more than his senseless attempt to be in the center of attention. Once Perseus experiences a kind of self-revelation encouraged by New Medusa's "lessons" and by the story of her own rape by Poseidon and her subsequent killing by Perseus, Perseus is ready to see the uncowled New Medusa, the real woman and "not a surface on which a man projects his fantasies or needs" (Šoštarić, 2010, p. 151).

Transformation which Perseus undergoes serves as an example of what it takes to beat ideologies such as patriarchy. Again, it suggests that progress in gender relations and the realization that the world, in Lerner's words, consists "in equal parts of men and women" (Lerner, 1987, p. 220) depends on the willingness to listen and understand the other side. Finally, "Perseid" illustrates that gender equality can be achieved only when the hitherto silenced and ignored truths and perspectives are voiced and brought to the surface, as a precondition of genuine mutual support and understanding between genders.

"Bellerophoniad" is the third novella in *Chimera* which ironically pretends to betray and dismantle all the ideas and conclusions that the author has previously established in "Dunyazadiad" and "Perseid". However, it in reality intensifies the meaning of two previous novellas as it demonstrates that Bellerophon's quest has no higher purpose, i.e. neither is he a great hero who exemplifies patriarchal values, nor is he the one who challenges and dismantles old patriarchal narratives and rewrites them in a new light. Thus, "Bellerophoniad" is a pure example of a perfect mess where the main hero fights for his life that is not even his, in a story which belongs to someone else. If we compare Bellerophon to Perseus and Shah Zaman, we realize that Bellerophon is irrevocably trapped into patriarchal system that ruins him, his family and his people. Unable to renounce patriarchal masculinity, he blindly copies the story of Perseus' rejuvenation from "Perseid" without profound motivation or understanding of his own actions. Unlike Perseus, who became more mature and wiser through the analysis of mistakes from his heroic past, which enabled him to break free from patriarchy, Bellerophon copies Perseus' adventures only on the surface, never grasping the meaning of the self-exploration and self-knowledge that Perseus ultimately achieves. Thus, as a victim who does not realize who his oppressor is, and as a character who does not know who he is or why he does what he does, Bellerophon turns out to be defeated by his own imitation of the well-known "Pattern of Mythic Heroism" (Barth, 1972, p. 188).

So, Bellerophon carries a heavy burden on his back simply because "mythic heroes at that age and stage should become the opposite of content" (Barth, 1972, p. 87). The illusions he follows inevitably betray him, as his Pegasus has neither strength nor enough luck to serve his purposes. As Bellerophon stubbornly attempts to imitate heroic pattern in his forties, or even more hilariously, to imitate Perseus in the latter's initial folly of trying to repeat his youthful

adventures in his forties, he goes against himself and fails to preserve happiness and contentment he already possessed. Although he claims that: "By imitating perfectly the Pattern of Mythic Heroism, I'd become, not a mythic hero, but a perfect Reset" (Barth, 1972, p. 188), he never manages to become that perfect Reset of a hero in the manner of Perseus, but rather a phony parody of a perfect Reset. The story of Bellerophon becomes even more complex once we discover that the person who is narrating this story is, in fact, a certain Deliades. Deliades has killed his brother long ago and continued to live under his name. It turns out that Perseus' life has been copied by Bellerophon who turns out to be Deliades who copies both Bellerophon's and Perseus' life: in this manner, inauthenticity in the story is doubled. Raper therefore argues that "Bellerophoniad" succeeds in "creating a myth not of heroism, but of role-playing, the counterfeit life, inauthenticity" (Raper, 1989, p. 24). Even though the failed hero is physically strong, in his inability to be the embodiment of either the "Pattern of Mythic Heroism" or of the "perfect Reset", he misuses his strength to feed his ego and compete with rivals, instead of using it to help others. Ironically, Bellerophon could not fit in the image of a hero in the first place because he lacks plausible heroic past, and therefore has nothing to revisit and revise in the second cycle of his adventures in the manner of Perseus.

Unlike Shah Zaman and Perseus from the previous novellas, Deliades/Bellerophon neither gets to know himself, nor are there women in his life who would inspire him to understand what is behind his personal problem. Thus, he goes back and forth in his attempt to imitate Perseus' path towards "estellation", but the point is that he does not understand the reason why Perseus was immortalized. He does not realize that Perseus' award stems from his revision of the past achievements, by which he provides resistance to the imposed standards of the mythical pattern of masculinity; in turn, his rejection of the heroic norms allows him to revise the stagnant, outdated image of the (once) young hero and to develop the other side of his personality that recognizes the importance of adding a female perspective to his life story.

Although Bellerophon has numerous love affairs with women, he never genuinely loves any of them, and remains stuck in the toxic relationship with his own ego. However, his actions are accompanied by comments from three women who surround Bellerophon: his wife Philonoe, and two Amazons, Anteia and Melanippe, and they represent three types of women who destroy, consciously or unconsciously, the path to gender equality. Philonoe is portrayed as a loving wife

who deeply respects and supports her husband. Raper describes her as "one of those women who appear to 'love' directing all their time and energy toward an external object, a husband or child or both" (Raper, 1989, p. 27). Thus, she encourages Bellerophon in his insane attempts to fulfill the heroic myth, and, in doing that, she perpetuates oppression of both men and women. She never manages to transcend her prescribed patriarchal position of a woman who is dependent on her husband's deeds and life. Philonoe admits that she ended up without a clear sense of identity, the one which is not defined by association to her husband or children, and laments over

> One more sad bit of testimony to the way we women are apt to let everything else slide in our preoccupation with child-bearing and -rearing, till we find ourselves grown dull and uninteresting people indeed. (Barth, 1972, p. 144)

In maintaining Bellerophon's illusions about his mythical greatness, Philonoe loses her sense of identity and her right to interpret her own reality. Preoccupied with repeating the same pattern all her life, she senses that it is too late to change the life of a "dull and uninteresting" (Barth, 1972, p. 144) person she has become. Devoted completely to supporting and glorifying her husband, she perfectly fits in the patriarchal norms and tradition. Although this "dutiful wifeliness may arise from deep-seated inner needs, it remains a role taken from the external world, not from within" (Raper, 1989, p. 27). After a brief and rare revelation pointing at the dissatisfaction with such a life, Philonoe seems to be the kind of woman who is still proud to be the wife of such a hero, but who ironically bores Bellerophon because of "her absolute solicitude, her angelic, her invulnerable devotion" (Barth, 1972, p. 87). Philonoe accepts to live in the shade of her husband and willingly embraces her subservient role by glorifying Bellerophon, i.e. patriarchy. Ironically, it seems that both of them subvert their own prescribed positions, as they struggle to apply them "correctly". Also, it could be understood as Barth's parody which indicates that the myths of patriarchy are so tailored that they can hardly be respected, even by gods, semi-gods and heroes. In this novella, the author unequivocally demonstrates that patriarchy is indeed a myth that can by no means be considered as something which is inscribed in the nature of human beings. By this, he thwarts any possible sympathy with the main characters. If observed from the perspective of the late 20th century, they represent the dilapidation of patriarchy that sabotages itself.

In contrast to Philonoe who plays the role of the obedient wife that attempts to preserve and maintain patriarchy, Anteia is basically seduced by the male heroic myth and believes that she deserves to become a hero "who behave[s] in ways the culture is conditioned to value" (Raper, 1989, p. 26). Thus her orientation towards the embodiment of physical strength turns her into a woman warrior who, in the beginning, pursues the same "Pattern of Mythic Heroism" as male heroes. Anteia feels "disembodied" because she cannot free herself from "a heroical spirit trapped in a female frame" (Barth, 1972, p. 111). All her girlhood she desired to become a mythic hero, however, society prevented her from being brave and strong simply because she was a female. She even admits that on one occasion she disguised herself as a boy in order to join in the campaign against the Solymians. Thus, she reveals that what she wanted was a man who had the potential to become a true hero, a god or a semi-god – it is through his adventures that she would taste the power of a true patriarch; she complains: "Since I couldn't be a hero […] I thought I'd be a hero's wife" (Ibid). Since the true hero that fits her definition of bravery was hard to find, she sets up the absolute matriarchy of Tiryns. In her attempts to imitate the path of male heroism, Anteia turned into a grotesque character that seeks revenge. Thus she becomes militant in her gender separatism and the creation of the matriarchal state. Unlike Medusa from "Perseid" who seeks equal rights for both men and women, Anteia chooses extreme solution that is equally oppressing as it only values the female perspective/interpretation. Thus, Raper argues, "her subsequent revision of western mythology will obviously serve the vanity of female supremists as effectively as old myths served male supremists" (Raper, 1989, p. 26). Therefore, in Anteia's embrace, Bellerophon has no chance of growing into a hero or achieving Perseus-like self-realization. It seems that the author latently implies that extremist gender policy is not the key, because exchanging patriarchy for yet another ideology such as matriarchy does not lead towards equality. However, Anteia is a strong female character, who, ironically, better fits in the "Pattern of Mythic Heroism" than Bellerophon. She also further connects common themes and events between the three novellas, as her assertion that "Mythology is the propaganda of the winners" (Barth, 1972, p. 172) echoes in every part of *Chimera*. Impatient and furious with insecure Bellerophon, she threatens him: "We're going to rewrite you!" (Ibid).

On the other hand, Melanippe is an Amazon who attempts to comprehend Bellerophon, but unlike Philonoe, she never supports him blindly. In Barth's revision of the myth, Bellerophon rapes Melanippe, and thus destroys her military career and her attempt to establish a matriarchal

community. However, she becomes his lover and chronicler, and accepts to live in a cottage with him, after he departs from Anteia mostly because of her lack of interest in his struggles. Even though Bellerophon wants to make her play the same role Calyxa played for Perseus, or Medusa, for that matter, Melanippe is neither satisfied with Bellerophon's story nor with the role assigned to her. Anyway, like Medusa, she is a listener who actively listens and interrupts the story that Bellerophon narrates. As such, she is the only female character who follows her own nature, i.e. she does not follow any patterns that would limit her to just one role. Even though she is "the only true Amazon in a courtful of falsies" (Barth, 1972, p. 145), she argues that she is "herself" after all, since her personality could fit no precise or generalized definition. Thus, she finds it more appropriate to be defined as "herself" – "a category of one that fits her better, she feels, than even the two categories, 'human being, female'" (Raper, 1989, p. 27). Gradually, she becomes impatient with Bellerophon who is insecure and lost in his own plans to rejuvenate himself. She points out his disorientation and her impatience with a mythic hero who wishes to be immortalized and yet possesses no valuable deeds to support his unjustified expectations:

> It drives me crackers that we've got this winged horse right here to take us anywhere in the world, and all we do is spin around the saltmarsh after mealtimes -- then back to your scribbling scribbling while I make dinner and twiddle my thumbs. (Barth, 1972, p. 182)

Unlike Anteia, she gives up on both matriarchy and patriarchy, understanding that either of the two may become too extreme. After a longer deliberation, unsatisfied with her position in Bellerophon's life and unwilling to accept the wifely role assigned to her by Bellerophon which made her forget her Amazonian power, Melanippe lets "herself" admit her own truth, her own "little narrative":

> I hate to say this, but I guess I'd be happier with less of a hero and more of a regular man. I don't mean that sarcastically. I'm tired of Amazoning; I'm tired of being a demigod's girlfriend, too, if it means hanging around this cottage till I die. But I'm also tired of bopping about with different lovers; what I want is a plain ordinary groovy husband and ten children, nine of them boys. (Barth, 1972, p. 182)

While she is not particularly satisfied with any of the abovementioned options, she specifically rejects to express the non-existing admiration for a man she did not even perceive as a hero. Thus, her "private self gives her the energy to reject Bellerophon's effort to impose a

Medusa-like role on her as the audience of his tale" (Raper, 1989, p. 27). She makes it perfectly clear that Bellerophon never learns anything and that she does not understand why he seeks help from all the women in his life. The truth is that Bellerophon just wants to be supported in his nonsense, and thus avoids constructive criticism in seeking the unconditional admiration that further masks his unresolved and unclear past.

7. Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the early phase of postmodernist literature in America, which was usually characterized as radically experimental. As a perfect example of postmodern experimentation with form and content, *Chimera* clearly embodies Barth's program of renewal of literature. In order to better illustrate the position of postmodern fiction, the theoretical part addresses the main factors that contributed to the overall shift in thought in the late 20th century which made the production of such works possible.

Thus, the first part of the thesis explored and provided information on the circumstances that influenced the general shift in thought in the second half of the twentieth century, the general characteristics and main ideas related to the phenomenon of postmodernism, as well as changes in the cultural, political and philosophical spheres that contributed to the emergence of fictional works such as John Barth's *Chimera*. The discussion of philosophical background of postmodernism includes a brief analysis of some Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas relevant for subsequent analysis, such as Nietzsche's historicist approach to analyzing concepts such as the Truth/Facts, Knowledge and Morality. This part further incorporates relevant aspects of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, primarily his concept of *language-games*, as well as a short review of basic poststructuralist ideas. Next subsection in this part discusses the main formal and stylistic features of postmodernist literature, and then focuses on metafiction and its subtypes relevant to subsequent analysis of *Chimera*.

The second part provides the analysis of *Chimera* and it is subdivided into two analytical subsections. The first subsection explores *Chimera* as "pure" metafiction, i.e. a literary work which can be described as "fiction about writing fiction". This section includes discussion of the novel's spiral-like structure, particularly its relevance for the postmodern intertwinement of form and content. The discussion continues with the examination of further aspects of postmodern metafiction: self-reflexiveness and self-criticism (self-mockery), the role of the postmodern author, the purpose and meaning of used narrative strategies and styles, the paradoxical and playful nature of this work, the mixing up of fiction and facts and the resulting ontological confusion, as well as the ambivalent postmodern revision of literary tradition.

The second analytical subsection examines *Chimera* as historiographic metafiction. The examination focuses on the novel's engaged treatment of broader social issues, more precisely, on the inscription of patriarchy in the traditional myths and stories, as a system which favors male dominance, keeping women in a subservient or marginalized position. The section also discusses patriarchy as the ideological subtext of mythology and examines Barth's revision of selected traditional myths and stories in a feminist key, and from the perspective of the late 20th century.

The thesis shows that Barth's mythological heroes are confronted with a difficult task to understand the nature of gender inequality and their own role in its perpetuation with the help of various female characters who draw attention to gender stereotypization and gender discrimination normalized by patriarchy. Importantly, by emphasizing the link between text and context, Barth explores the male-female relationships through his program of literary replenishment. Thus he demonstrates that his fiction is engaged in the social and cultural revision of dilapidated traditional patterns. In *Chimera*, Barth rewrites old patterns from the perspective of the oppressed (women), arguing that deconstruction of various absolutes, such as patriarchy, is indispensable for a healthy society which offers equal opportunities for all. With his metafictions Barth creates worlds in which women are liberated from subordination by their own power and by their experience of the world. Hence, *Chimera* propagates a social order in which women's identity is recognized and added to the one-sided picture informing ancient stories and myths, revealing that both men and women are victims of the patriarchal system.

In conclusion, this thesis presents *Chimera* as a tightly intertwined postmodernist network of metafictional elements and social criticism and argues that *Chimera* reaches its full potential only when these two metafictional layers are observed together.

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