

*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry:*  
B. S. Johnson's Oppositional Discourse of Unbelief

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ABSTRACT

This article points out the analogous nature of the novel and postmodernism as forms of oppositional discourse and suggests that it is worthwhile to consider the postmodernist novel as the oppositional discourse of unbelief, which contests the forms and conventions of our culture, in general, and of the novel itself, in particular, deliberately setting itself up in opposition to them. This is the case of *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, where an analogy is drawn between the Double-Entry system of bookkeeping, which the protagonist applies rigorously to his experience, and the Grand Narratives of Christianity and Capitalism, which are rigorously applied to our own. Each is a manner of giving form and significance to existence in the same way as narrative itself tends towards a similar fallacious ordering of experience. Thus, Johnson alludes to a conceivable reality but at the same time contests the validity of the forms we use to give shape to it.

When any postmodernist narrative is considered, the tendency is to begin, not with the text, but with a theoretical consideration of the nature of postmodernism and even of that of the novel. This is an annoying feature of much contemporary criticism which usually leads to abstraction, although it is sometimes difficult to avoid. For this reason it becomes necessary to rediscover the text itself.

The work of B. S. Johnson is inevitably related to topics like metafiction and postmodernism although he, neither as critic nor as novelist, referred to himself in these terms. He clearly seeks a confrontation with convention and tradition, but the innovative manner in which he does so leads us to reconsider the nature of the relation between tradition and innovation, between novel and postmodern.

Up to now, the postmodern debate has failed to appreciate this relation that exists between novel and postmodern and, while many instances of postmodernism have occurred in narrative, the link is more than casual: the ideology of each is similar and what is called postmodern in narrative is the result of taking advantage of possibilities that have

always existed in the form in order to push it in a new direction, but without breaking completely with the past.

The appearance of postmodernist narrative is, therefore, linked to the development of the novel as such, as many features that are considered postmodern just happen to be and have always been found there. Considered as part of the development of the novel, postmodernist narrative can be seen as sharing similar ideological implications and it is in this light that we have to see the supposed innovations of much contemporary narrative.

Let us consider a few basic shared features: the novel, since its beginnings always reacted against other, particularly literary, forms of narrative, with a tendency to assimilate a great variety of modes of discourse without being considered as any of them. The novel is, therefore, hybrid, an open genre which uses and at the same time contests the ideologies and forms which precede and coexist with it. All of this is equally true of the postmodernist novel although we can say that the latter highlights some of these existing features, particularly in the light of contemporary ideology. However, it remains a novel, and the changes that we find there are of degree and not of nature. The innovations that are found usually occur in terms of the fact that the novel has always been an area where distinct cultural codes and forms of expression, both literary and non-literary, come into contact and interact with one another (see Holquist and Reed 418-19). Each novel can also be considered as a unique set of variables (Bradbury 289), but it always involves the use of a series of existing possibilities that are always available, though emphases may change.

The novel has always questioned traditional ideas of realism and many changes in its development are related to this. The novel itself, and later developments, including the postmodernist novel, are also a result of this. This leads us to consider the changes that have taken place as resulting from the nature of the novel as oppositional discourse: that is, the novel exists in some kind of relation of opposition to other modes of discourse, traditions and conventions as well as to earlier considerations of realism (see Bakhtin 5). Curiously, the same can be said of postmodernism which is perturbed by the fact that we so readily assimilate conventions and the conventional and reacts against the fallacies of accepted realistic modes of discourse.

The novel is, then, essentially, anti-traditional, although it is a question of degree to which point each novel takes advantage of or rejects the possibilities that exist within, and even outwith, that tradition. The rejection of conventions or the unconventional use of the mechanisms of narrative form part of a playful element which has always existed in the novel and, up to a point, our consideration of the novel as traditional, modern or postmodern depends on the observation or transgression of literary conventions. However, the innovative use of already existing modes and forms has always been typical of the novel as well as forming part of the character of postmodernism. Thus, although it may be doing it for different reasons, the postmodernist novel continues to do what the novel had already been doing before.

The changes that are found in the postmodernist novel take place due to a change in attitude towards reality and realism, something that has always occurred in the novel, in its beginnings and during its periods of development. These changes usually lead to a search for new means of presentation and the assimilation or rejection of some mode of discourse (Kettle I: 24). Therefore, we should think of the development of the novel as a

series of realisms, or different forms of seeing reality, and that the postmodernist novel is a further example of this.

As oppositional discourse, even the traditional English novel denied the conventions of previous realisms, but made use of its adopted conventions (mainly those of non-literary modes of discourse) to persuade the reader of its realism. Later, the novel would begin to defamiliarise these conventions and, although this is a feature of both modernism and postmodernism, it remains a defining feature of the novel itself through which it is continually renewed.

Postmodernism, seen as oppositional discourse (or even as a series of oppositional discourses), questions our forms of framing reality and asks whether there are possibilities for renovation when many had considered the possibilities to have been exhausted. Authors like B. S. Johnson understood that man does not represent reality but projects or constructs it, and that he does so inevitably in terms of existing conventions, whether he follows them or not. This involves a critical reconsideration of past and present conventions in which the inevitable distortion of experience that takes place in any narrative is emphasised. Johnson continues to make use of existing literary and non-literary modes of presentation as the novel has always done, but like other postmodernist writers he does so in a more self-conscious and critical manner.

It has been said that postmodernity is the result of a legitimisation crisis where authoritative and official narratives are questioned (see Habermas and Lyotard 74). There are only approximations to the truth and postmodernism, as oppositional discourse, reconsiders the forms and conventions we use. Theorists tell us that while we are able to conceive of reality, it remains unrepresentable. This means that we can only know a simulacrum, which, in postmodernity, coincides with a period of deterioration which has overestimated the value of the image at the expense of reality. It becomes clear that the reality with which we come in contact is a fabrication, a fictional construct like any other fictitious narrative (all of this is more fully developed by Jameson, Lyotard and Baudrillard). We can only know a simulacrum of reality and the grand narratives of our time, like Christianity and Capitalism, are recognised as such in spite of their apparent authority. Postmodernist narrative draws attention to all this in a more subversive manner than its predecessors which is often called metafiction. This involves the denaturalisation and revelation of its own artifice in a self-reflexive manner, which can also be considered as a kind of oppositional discourse. This kind of activity is not exclusive to postmodernist texts, but no longer forms part of a rhetoric designed to persuade the reader: but rather dissuades him as regards the realistic possibilities of the narrative.

The work of B. S. Johnson shows that the terms novel and postmodernist are analogous as, according to Johnson himself, he only wanted to do what the novel does best and we could say that that is what makes the novel postmodernist (1973). He enters into a dialogue with the forms and conventions of literature in order to discover the mechanisms of the novel, making use of but contesting the conventions we find there. In a novel like *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, he shows how narrative always distorts reality and he draws attention to a number of realistic fallacies, in particular he defamiliarises and questions authoritative and official discourses like those of Christianity and Accounting and, by showing that they too are analogous, highlights the need for alternatives.

*Christie Malry* is an obvious example of fabulation which, through a form of negation, alludes to reality through its absence. More than this, we find an extreme example of metafiction which enters into a direct dialogue with the reader and with form, exploiting a wide range of narrative modes and embodying a serious statement about the fictional nature of all narratives. Johnson himself said that his material was the inside of his own skull and, in this case, this is true almost entirely as regards his self-conscious consideration of the mechanisms available to him as a writer. He ranges from the grand narratives of religious discourse to accountancy, and from an impressionistic stream of consciousness to a dramatic theatrical style. The use of the former, particularly where the fictitious nature of every mode of discourse is foregrounded, clearly implies a serious statement about the way in which our idea of the world has been radically distorted by both religion and materialism. The statement made is that reality is not like this and we are forced to go beyond these grand narratives in order to look for an alternative.

The novel is about Christie Malry, "a simple person" (11), both in terms of his attitude towards life and in terms of the simplicity of his characterisation, which shows how Johnson combines statements about life and narrative. Christie's problem is how to acquire money, the "be all and end all" for a typically materialistic character, born without money into a materialistic world. He first joins a bank in order to place himself close to it, soon becomes disillusioned and then becomes an accountant to find out where money comes from. Naturally, he soon begins to see everything in terms of profit and loss, credits and debits, particularly as, when studying a correspondence course on accounting, he discovers the double-entry system of bookkeeping. One day, on finding his progress impeded by an office building on his way to work, he promptly decides to apply this system to life in general: for each offence that he receives from society Christie expects some recompense from society:

I could express it in Double-Entry terms. Debit Receiver, Credit giver, the Second Golden Rule, debit Christie Malry for offence received, Credit Office Block for the offence given How settle that account? I am entitled to exact payment of course. Every Debit must have its corresponding credit, the First Golden Rule. But payment in what form? (24)

What he does is to scratch the wall of the office building and from then on Society becomes gradually more and more in debt to Christie for its offences against him, and his modes of exacting payment become more and more extreme, bizarre and, finally, unbelievable. The novel also tells of Christie's mother, his upbringing, his relationship with his girlfriend and his sudden death from cancer. Each section concludes with a "reckoning," which balances Christie's credits and debits. It is curious to note that "reckoning" is a word with obvious religious overtones, and the novel gradually develops a parallel between the two. Christie's use of credit and debit is equated with good and evil, punishment and recompense. Our vision of reality is distorted by seeing everything in terms of either religious or economic discourses and the fictitious nature of each is underlined.

The novel is overtly and self-consciously the creation of an omniscient and omnipotent author. The narrator always reminds the reader and even his characters of his involvement

in the work. But this is more than a fabrication; it has its point to make, which is that man has been led to conceive of reality and even himself in materialistic terms, terms which are analogous to those we find in the discourse of Christianity. We see how society imposes a particular vision of itself on the individual and find that man has been misled, particularly by religion and history, into sharing a false notion of the existence of form and meaning in our lives. All of this takes place in a dialogue with form and convention which shows up the possibilities and limitations of available modes and discourse. In straightforward terms, Christie's exaggerated form of ordering the universe in terms of credits and debits shows that any order we perceive is imposed, impersonal and meaningless.

Johnson's work in general tends to look for new forms of mimesis but paradoxically, each attempt discovers itself as yet another form of distortion or fiction. This applies as regards his construction of character as well as in the way he searches for a new way of ordering the chaos which we discover in this novel. Johnson draws attention to the relation between fiction and reality at a number of levels. One of these is to consider the nature of character as a fictional construct, which also involves an exploration of the relation between author and character. This involves playing with the logic of realism and draws attention to the basic absurdity behind the realistic fallacy. Every omniscient author creates the illusion of independent autonomous characters, but in Johnson's novel, these same characters find that realism and reality overlap and interact, which allows them to transgress ontologically distinct worlds in order to take part in discussions with their author. This follows on from where Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* began, where the realism of characters is taken literally and the fictitious is considered as real, thus highlighting the typical and fictitious nature of characterisation as such.

Much of the novel reads like the typical anti-heroic "angry young man" novels of the 50s and 60s, but the narrative is continually interrupted by comments about the nature of narrative and more particularly by comments by the characters themselves about their own fictitious nature. Thus, distinct ontological worlds collide and the relation between the narrative and the reality that exists beyond it is remarked. Johnson commits himself to a form of realism, but finds that his own characters give the game away by referring to the fictitious nature of their existence. However, this itself is paradoxical as narrator, characters and even the reader become involved in "real" discussions about, and make valid, or even, acceptable statements about the narrative, drawing our attention to a series of levels or degrees of reality, which become apparent due to our both real and fictitious participation in the appreciation and creation of a series of distinct ontological worlds. The way in which this is done depends largely on the use of a series of dialogues between reader-narrator and narrator-character, where valid critical comments on the nature of the narrative are placed in the mouths of characters. We also find the interaction of real and fictitious worlds as well as the overlapping of literary and non-literary modes of giving order to existence.

This novel is an obvious construct and ends very abruptly with the sudden death of the protagonist. This might have been due to lack of interest or lack of imagination on Johnson's part but really stems from his appreciation of the artificial nature of all endings. All endings and beginnings are imposed, distort and must be fictitious. Christie's Mum (not Johnson) explains this in the novel:

“We fondly believe there is going to be a reckoning, a day when all injustices are evened out, when what we have done will beyond doubt be seen to be right, when the light of our justification blazes forth upon the world. But we are wrong: learn, then, that there is not going to be any day of reckoning, except possibly by accident. It seems that enough accidents happen for it to be a hope or even an expectation for most of us, the day of reckoning. But we shall die untidily, when we did not properly expect it, in a mess, most things unresolved, unreckoned, reflecting that it is all chaos. Even if we understand that all is chaos, the understanding represents a denial of chaos, and must therefore be an illusion.” (20)

The link between this Christian form of considering reality and Christie's use of reckonings should be clear and the irony is obvious: Johnson is denying any form or significance in the universe and even in his novel, as there can only be an illusion of such order. Thus our reality, no matter the terms in which we consider it, must be a fiction. Form and significance within and outwith the novel is denied and everything that happens is just by accident. Any reckoning whether religious or otherwise, must be a false reckoning and even Christie's death is denied significance, for which reason the final reckoning in the novel does not balance. Christie's, like all deaths, is meaningless. In this way, Johnson undermines the basic structure of the novel as well as the illusion of form that he creates. Any sense of form is shown to be just an illusion. Moreover, the character's desire to find both order and significance through his use of double-entry parallels that of the author and both are deliberately shown to be futile.

We have said that this novel can be considered as a dialogue with form: an oppositional discourse. Christie suggests just that to the “author” towards the end: “Your work has been a continuous dialogue with form” (166). What this means in this novel, is that while Johnson works within a series of recognisable conventions he continually draws our attention to them as artificial. He clearly marks his expositions, development, complication and resolution but undermines his choice of form by exposing their fictionality. He parodies the conventions of realistic writing at several levels from the role of the omniscient narrator to chapter headings and modes of discourse in order to make clear that, whichever the ontological world they belong to (the real world or a fictitious world), they are still narrative devices in spite of the fact that we are accustomed to calling them realistic.

A number of different, particularly realistic, modes are parodied in this novel, particularly the roles of reader and author, as well as the complicity that exists between the two, but not in an attempt at persuasion, as would occur in a traditional narrative, but in order to emphasise the fictitious nature of the whole thing: a realistic convention is used to a metafictional end. The explicit structure combined with the use of chapter headings which parody those of 18th century novelists serves a similar purpose, so that all of these become apparently obvious, fictitious and arbitrary. The parodic nature of Johnson's use of these conventions makes it clear that they are all narrative devices and, above all, it becomes clear just to what extent it is fallacious to call them realistic.

The novel parodies a number of different modes of discourse which appear at different levels, ranging from the 18th century style chapter headings to the contemporary dialogues

between the characters. However, the narrative as such is shared by a number of voices which are aware of their role within the novel and which dialogue with the "author" on a number of occasions. The reader himself finds himself placed in a similar dialogue with the author which brings about a curious transgression of narrative levels, thus rendering our implicit dialogue equally fictitious, but which, more importantly, broaches the question of authority. Here we have a narrator who explicitly expresses his ignorance about his characters and their development, while, paradoxically, a heightened critical awareness forms part of the dialogues of the characters. Even Christie himself, near the end, draws attention to his struggle for independence, and the possible existence of an alternative ending to that imposed by convention and the author.

The literary modes and conventions made use of by Johnson are all realistic and the non-literary modes taken from religion and accounting are also considered as authoritative. However, the existence of an alternative is suggested and, placed within a narrative construct where these distinct modes are juxtaposed, in a sense vying for authority, we find that the idea of any kind of authoritative or official discourse is undermined. More than that, we see that any mode of discourse tends to construct rather than represent reality, imposing the forms and conventions that it brings with it (in this case the rigidity of the imposed values of accounting and christianity are obvious) and the distinct ontological nature of these constructs imposed on experience become apparent: their fictitious nature becomes just as obvious as that of the novel itself, and the greatest irony of all is that Johnson is making use of the modes of discourse which are those of the grand narratives of our time. We make use of them to give form and significance to our own existence, which Johnson, through Christie's rather exaggerated application of them, shows to be not only funny, but, in the end, absurd.

The limitations and artifice of the novel form are made ever more apparent and Johnson's oppositional discourse, in part, consists in calling on particular conventions in order to later reject their utility or show up their limitations. The typical 18th century chapter heading entitled "Christie Described; and the Shrike Created," is ironic in that the chapter fails to describe Christie, and "the Shrike created" obviously alludes to the fictitious nature of the whole thing. In this chapter the "author" calls for the collaboration of the reader to help with the construction of his character, although this might lead to a false identification by the reader with one whom the reader himself (like any other omnipotent god-like figure) might try to create in his own image. That some kind of description is expected is made clear from the outset, which is a clear allusion to the novelistic convention that is about to be abused and is clearly part of the dialogic nature of the novel. The refusal of the narrator to play the conventional game ensues and the futility of trying to equate reality with a simulacrum is made evident:

An attempt should be made to characterise Christie's appearance. I do so with diffidence, in the knowledge that such physical descriptions are rarely of value in a novel. It is one of its limitations and there are many others.

The sarcasm becomes more apparent as the chapter continues and the reader is left to make up the character for himself, as we said, in his (in this case) own image, although that too

is seen to be governed by convention (in terms of moles etc.). We even find that Christie's motives, which are suggested and which are bound to the Christian-materialist values suggested earlier, when we get to them, are undermined, to such an extent that it all seems a matter of chance:

Nor are his motives important. Especially are his motives of no importance to us, though the usual clues will certainly be given. We are concerned with actions. A man may be defined by his actions, you will remember. We may guess at his motives, of course; he may do so as well. We may also guess at the winner of the three-fifteen at Market-Rasen. (51-52)

Johnson, ironically, makes a point of distinguishing between "we" and "him," when "we" are clearly a fictional construct placed artificially and realistically at two distinct levels within the text. Really, we can try to predict the winner at a race meeting, and at a distinct fictitious level we can predict or ask ourselves about Christie's (real or fictitious?) motives for what he does. "Really," we do tend to judge people by their actions, but in the novel are bound to the realistic and accepted conventions imposed, this time, not by the author but by the character: double-entry, Christianity, modern society, the credit-debit system is clearly applicable and is applied in both constructs.

Johnson is an anti-religious writer and refers ironically to God as the prime mover of all things in Christie's mother's version of the story of creation. Ironically, this figures as one of Christie's main motives for seeing reality and acting as he does although the implications within an arbitrary work of fiction are that the story of creation is equally fictitious. The parallels between the novelist's role and that of God-Almighty, his characters and those of the Bible, soon become clear:

Here is the story promised you on page 29, as told to Christie at his Catholic mother's shapely knee: It seems that there has always existed a God, or it may be that He created Himself. There is no doubt, however, that He claims to have created something He calls the world, though in context this must be extended to cover the universe or universes, too. Into this world He places various creations, roughly interdependent though a certain amount of jockeying for position is evident in the early stages. Amongst these creations is Man and (shortly afterwards) Woman. God gives this couple, known as Adam and Eve, something called free will, which means they can act as they like.

The parallels between the official Biblical story and the equally authoritative novel are clear as to the nature of the omnipotent and omniscient creator of character in both. Some of the inherent paradoxes common to both stories also become apparent. Even in the style we can notice the curious use of *there is* and *there has always existed* which deny the existence of cause, implying a random state of affairs without explanation; the obvious contrast between "no doubt" and "he claims" is the kind of contradiction which casts further aspersions on the existence of God. The fact that he created himself (a self-made man?) clearly alludes to the parallel between the author and God, narrators who are fictional entities created by themselves. There is a further allusion to the whole thing as "story," and, as it is narrative, everything that is suggestive of order must, in the end, be

seen as a kind of fictional construct. The religious implications are obvious, but they are further reaching by alluding more directly to the novel itself where the omniscient author essentially questions the conventions that allow him to bring himself into existence.

The previous quotation continues and we are told that "God has been making it all up as he goes along, like certain kinds of novelist . . ." (79-80). The story of the Creation coincides at every point with Christie's story, even as regards the creation of a mate for the protagonist, which draws attention to the fictitious nature of both narratives, that there is no plan, neither in the novel, nor in Creation, that the supposed order that exists in the Universe and in Christie's Great Idea are both equally fictitious and, finally, absurd: some people, like Christie (or you or maybe somebody you know) believe it all.

It becomes clear that the characters are placed in a world that is organised in terms of an artificial order. Their free-will is obviously fictitious as, in spite of Christie's attempts to reason with the author, he is killed off in a manner that denies there being any point to his existence. The obvious links between the novel's narrative and the grand narrative of Western religion, that is, the fiction that appears in a novel and the fictions that we create or are created for ourselves in real life, is made clear, and the implication is the same: we are also stuck in an artificially ordered world, bound by artificial conventions and denied free-will. This is all very pessimistic, but takes place in a typically playful and comic postmodernist novel.

In a work which emphasises the nature of the novel as oppositional discourse, Johnson successfully integrates the novel and the anti-novel, the text and its metatext, the fiction and its commentary, in a way he had never tried before. Part of his technique is to make use of retraction: to make clear his intention to do something and then refuse to do it. This highlights the narrative process and often alludes to conventions that he intends to break with. On other occasions he simply mentions the nature of the style he is about to use or even the fitness of a particular technique he has employed. The juxtaposition of distinct modes of discourse, and deliberately playing with the dimensions of situational constraint (he often uses language in a manner convention would deem inappropriate, mixing formal and informal registers), is another way in which the nature of the narrative is foregrounded. On the one hand, he does this to highlight the possibilities of the narrative, but at the same time draws attention to the limitations of whichever mode he uses (there are explicit references to the use of "oratio obliqua" and "oratio recta" and their respective limitations among many other examples).

Earlier, we mentioned *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien, which bears comparison with *Christie Malry*. Both take advantage of a number of different modes of discourse borrowed from different periods of literary history. One in particular, the parodic chapter headings after the fashion of eighteenth century narratives, precisely because they are parodic, implies a dialogue with form which functions in a number of ways. Obviously, they anticipate what comes next, but they are often used as red herrings. They emphasise the selection process that is going on in the head of the author, suggest the possibilities available to him and, in particular, draw attention to the traditional and conventional nature of the narrative structure. Chapter One bears the title, "The Industrious Pilgrim: An Exposition without which You might have felt Unhappy." There are a number of points here: the protagonist's quest or search (a traditional literary theme and structural element)

is introduced, although rather ironically, as it is a quest that will be unsuccessful; the adherence to traditional rhetoric is also suggested (“An Exposition”), although this is later undermined when the narrator breaks the frame and transgresses narrative levels; the title also suggests reader involvement and expectation, the exercise of a specific choice by the author, one that could have been omitted, and in general, refers to the existence of alternatives in spite of certain limitations imposed on the novelist by the predispositions of novelistic convention. In fact, this particular use of the chapter heading emphasises just how conventional and artificial it all is.

These headings are like a kind of parenthesis in which explicit metafictional comment is made. The novel as a whole tends towards such comment and, particularly in the headings, the author parodies the intrusive eighteenth century omniscient narrator. However, these headings and parentheses undermine the realism of the narrative, even undermining the authority of the narrator himself, rather than searching for a conventional acceptance of the facts. In this way, Johnson plays with the idea of the authoritative text, not only subverting the authority of his narrative by juxtaposing discourses which compete with each other (the biblical grand narrative and modern accounting), but he also forces the reader (implicitly) and his characters (explicitly), through their discussions with them, to question the way in which the material is handled as well as its verisimilitude (the dialogue with the reader regarding the efficacy of description and the author being unable to compete with the reader’s imagination is an example of this). However, the greatest irony is that, through this kind of juxtaposition, the authority of every mode is undermined and the grand narratives are seen in the same light and at the same level as this distorted and fictitious narrative.

Johnson continually highlights himself as narrator and his technique. His oppositional discourse of unbelief draws the reader into a dialogue in which he himself questions his own authority, something which is paralleled by his interweaving of different styles in such a way that the reader is continually reminded of inappropriateness or limitations, or the existence of alternative choices. Reader expectation is continually referred to, but not just in terms of what has happened or what is going to happen at the level of story, but in terms of the creation of the novel as artefact, drawing attention to page numbers or the context of what is written within an artificial novelistic structure. The whole thing is seen as arbitrary (although this is, ironically, a naturalised novelistic convention), which emphatically suggests the existence of alternative possibilities, but not only in this novel, but even within the readily accepted grand narratives of our age: they are all equally distorted, arbitrary, illusory and fictitious.

In *Christie Malry*, the reader is made aware of a hierarchy of narratives, or distinct levels of authority, partly through the presentation of the different kinds of reckoning (religious, accounting and novelistic, all of which are equally undermined); partly through the introduction of both reader and characters into a discussion about freedom and limitations within the novel (Johnson frequently alludes to the limitations of the novel form); and partly through the use of intertextuality (the *Suma de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionità*), which provides yet another ontological level, adding to the tension that exists between them, as well as to the confusion that begins to exist between the real and the fictional or fantastic. The reader, for example, may feel that he is involved

literally in the novel when the author addresses him, or gives him authority to make use of his imagination, but such an illusion is undermined when Johnson transgresses ontological levels to involve himself in a similar discussion with Christie, a fictional character, thus drawing attention to the fictional nature of everything in the text, even, ourselves. Our own freedom of choice, as readers, is undermined, as is the character's, as is the author's, all of which constitutes part of what Johnson wants to say about the nature of the narratives which we use to tell our lives: reality to a great extent is determined, created and limited by the mode of discourse we use.

There is an obvious confusion between what is real and what is fictitious in the novel, which extends to a confusion between the literal and the metaphorical to the point where he allows the realistic to become real: that is, he allows Christie to exist at the same ontological level as himself. By doing this, which is basically to overdetermine the fictional as real, we find that he shows up the fictionality of different kinds of discourse. Christie, at the outset, is just a name given to a character which we are allowed to imagine for ourselves, although, by making the ontological leap which involves him in a discussion with the author, Johnson shows that the laws which govern the construction of Christie's fictional world, govern our own.

B. S. Johnson draws attention to and examines the relation between fact and fiction, those ontologically distinct zones which continually collide (even in our every day lives), and we find that although telling stories is telling lies, we cannot escape the construction of reality through narrative. Johnson makes use of and equates different kinds of discourse in order to highlight the relation between factual and fictional narratives. Thus the only reality is the fictional process, which in spite of its arbitrary nature and its tendency towards distortion, makes a mockery of cause and effect. Arbitrary authorial intervention supplants this and, as Christie's mother says, once more transgressing ontological levels, all is done "for the purposes of this novel" (28). Essentially, what this tells us is that, in any narrative, structure and meaning are imposed and artificial. *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* shows a character artificially imposing form in order to give meaning to experience. This highlights the essential paradox behind any narrative in that it gives form where there is none. Johnson shows the arbitrariness and artificiality of our conventionalised existence, and undermines the authority of the narrative discourses which impose themselves upon us.

Johnson's narrative creates itself in order to later subvert itself by the introduction of subversive elements. It is not only a parodic text, but is self-parodic, and makes fun of its own self-consciousness. Basically, by substituting cause and effect with the arbitrary will of the author, and by ironically relating this to God's will, the text, while it continually tends to impose order with its five reckonings, undermines itself, and also undermines any belief in a prime cause or a final reckoning in reality.

At the end of the novel, both Christie and Johnson seem resigned to this state of affairs, and the point is to draw attention to his basic unbelief. In order to do so, he makes use of an oppositional discourse which installs and subverts a wide range of both literary and non-literary modes, ranging from the grand narratives of religious discourse to accountancy, and from an impressionistic stream of consciousness to a dramatic theatrical style. As we have seen, the use of these first two modes in particular within a novel which

foregrounds the fictionality of every mode, implies a serious statement about the way in which our vision of reality has been distorted by both religion and materialism. The net effect is to suggest that reality is not like that, and while the novel does not offer an alternative to those narratives, it alludes to a reality that is made more manifest to us by its absence. Johnson, like Beckett before him, always found chaos underlying everything and what he does is to emphasise his need to give order to things even when there is none. This is extended to the way in which our society is ordered in much broader terms and, thus, Johnson questions the grand narratives of the twentieth century, and forces us to look for an alternative.

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