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"The Reluctant Fundamentalist": suggesting a method to investigate readers' engagement with postmodernist literary fiction

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General Introduction

Over the last forty years, we have seen the emergence of an increasing interest in analyzing the relationship between texts and readers through reader-oriented theories. This may be exemplified by the works of Jauss and Iser published in the 1970s and 1980s, such as *The Act of Reading* (Iser, 1987), *The Implied Reader* (Iser, 1978), *Toward An Aesthetic of Reception* (Jauss, 2005), and *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Fish, 1980) which highlight that readers play a pivotal role in the process of meaning-making. Furthermore, it seems that reader-oriented theories and postmodernism share some theoretical assumptions and developed in the same period, since "the turn toward the reader" received its greatest "impetus" in the post-war years (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5), while postmodernist studies were developing and gaining prominence (Creighton, 1982, p.217). However, one major issue concerns the concept of the readers in reader-oriented theories, which is based on no empirical evidence. Particularly, Iser's "implied reader" is neither a "real" nor an "ideal" reader, but rather "a transcendental model" (Iser, 1987, p.38). Likewise, although he provides some empirical evidence to explain the text-reader relationship, Fish's methods are generally considered as "flawed" and his conclusions "unconvincing" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.8), as he is merely concerned with providing "anecdotes" (Fish, 1980, p.305), rather than quantitative data. Hence, it seems that although they mark the emergence of a new interest in the text-reader relationship, reader-oriented approaches lack a workable methodology and appear inappropriate to investigate the audience's processing of literary fiction.

For this reason, the aim of this thesis is to find a method to explore the audience's engagement with narrative texts, particularly the readers' responses to the "paradoxes" and "contradictions" of postmodernist fiction (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17; Jameson, 1997, p.12). In this sense, more recently, scholars have been focusing on the mutual influence cognitive psychology and narratology have on each other (see e.g., Bell et al., 2019; Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003). Particularly, the term "psychonarratology" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003) has been coined to describe an approach to literary studies combining the two disciplines: on the one hand, narratives can help us to understand human conscious and unconscious experiences, such as shaping the meaning of our selfhood (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xiv), or undergoing "cathartic identification" with negative fictional characters, on the other, cognitive psychology may provide insight into narrative choices (Bell et al., 2019, pp.258-259). In this way, psychonarratology seems to supply the fallacies of reader-oriented approaches, as it combines both theoretical and empirical evidence to investigate readers' processing of

narrative texts. This is because whilst narratology provides the variables which are necessary for this investigation, such as "the characteristics of the individual reader" or "the nature of text" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.13), cognitive psychology furnishes the "empirical" and "interpretative tools" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37). Thereby, psychonarratology may be regarded as an approach which better suits the examination of literary fiction.

Having established the context of this research, it is now worth outlining the structure of this thesis, defining specific key terms, and giving a brief review of the most relevant academic literature. In this respect, this thesis is divided into four chapters, specifically, the first two offer the theoretical background for the analysis of the audience's responses to the postmodernist novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Chapter 1 introduces postmodernism as a "contradictory" and conflicting cultural phenomenon (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3; Jameson, 1997, p.12) comparing Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Jameson, 1997) and Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2004). Furthermore, this chapter attempts to provide a historical, social, and geographical contextualization of postmodernism, highlighting how scholars have different opinions on these issues. In this sense, it is explained that although some critics claim that the postmodern is essentially a phenomenon belonging to the past (see e.g., Kirby, 2009; Hutcheon, 2002), it is still important to investigate it nowadays, since it has persisted as an "aesthetic phenomenon" and "a general social condition" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.167). As for Chapter 2, which is entitled *Reader-oriented approaches and postmodernism*, it discusses reader-oriented criticism as an approach to literary studies which advocates for "the turn toward the reader" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5). Particularly, this chapter introduces the precursors to reader-oriented theories, namely Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralists, and the works by Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, who are considered as the critics who gave the greatest "impetus" to the development of reader-oriented criticism. Instead, the second part of this chapter shows that although both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernist fiction claim that narrative should be regarded as an act of enunciation, specifically, a dialogic transaction between texts and readers, Jauss's and Iser's concepts of the readers are too generalized to be applied to the analysis of the audience's processing of literary texts. Likewise, Fish's experiments on the existence of "interpretive communities" are inaccurate and the conclusions he draws unconvincing.

The last two chapters focus on the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Moshin Hamid, which tells the story of Changez, a young Pakistani man who has moved to the US to study at Princeton University and work in one of the most prestigious New-York based firms (White, 2019, p.445), but returns to Pakistan after September 11, due to the disillusionment he experiences. In this sense, Chapter 3, entitled *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: *the dramatic monologue in post-9/11 historiographic metafiction*, defines *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a postmodernist novel, particularly, as a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.ix), an expression coined by Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2004). Then, this chapter explores the novel's narrative form, that is, the dramatic monologue, which stresses the importance of enunciation and features the "revelation of character" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) as "the assertion of identity through difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59). This is because Changez is both a "marginalized voice" (Garner and Szalai, 2021) and an unreliable first-person narrator. Furthermore, it will also be explained the reasons why this narrative form seems particularly suitable for the investigation of the readers' engagement with literary fiction, referring to the definition of narrative texts as "act[s] of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74) provided by both reader-oriented and postmodernist theorists.   After having explained the reasons why *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may be regarded as a postmodernist novel, Chapter 4, *Negative empathy and cognitive dissonance in readers' engagement with postmodernist narrators: The Reluctant Fundamentalist's narrator Changez as a case study*, illustrates "a thought experiment" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.26) to examine the audience's empathetic engagement with Changez. In this respect, it is suggested that psychonarratology is an approach that may suit the investigation of readers' processing of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, because it combines both theoretical and empirical evidence. It is worth clarifying here that, like Caracciolo's research on cognitive dissonance (Caracciolo, 2013), this "thought experiment" (ibid.) is not based on "an original empirical study, but it is at least consistent with experimental research both on cognitive dissonance in real-world settings and on readers' engagement with characters" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.23). Thereby, providing evidence from experimental research (see e.g., De Graff et al., 2010; Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020; Krieken et al., 2017), this chapter shows that while engaging with first-person narrator Changez, readers can experience negative empathy, that is, a process of "cathartic identification" (Ercolino, 2022, p.46) with "strange" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.1) unreliable postmodernist characters, and cognitive dissonance, a psychological phenomenon which consists in holding two different mental states, cognitions, or beliefs contrasting one another (Festinger qtd. in Egan et al., 2007, p.978). This is since the audience

is encouraged to emotionally identify and sympathize with Changez through "linguistic cues representing emotions" (Krieken et al., 2017, p.8), first-person narration and internal focalization, but they can at the same time experience revulsion and "imaginative resistance" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.21) while reading "counter-moral" propositions (Kim et al., 2018, p.194) representing emotions that can be considered as immoral.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Postmodernism

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1985, pp.xxiv).

"There is no dialectic in the postmodern: the self-reflexive remains distinct from its traditionally accepted contrary—the historico-political context in which it is embedded. The result of this deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions is a contesting of what Lyotard (1984a) calls the totalizing master narratives of our culture, those systems by which we usually unify and order (and smooth over) any contradictions in order to make them fit" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.x).

Introduction

"That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism" (Aylesworth, 2015). In this regard, the epigraphs above call attention to the contradictions of postmodernism, and particularly, its challenge to the process of meaning-making (Hutcheon, 2004, p.x). Specifically, in Lyotard's view, postmodernity advocates for a crisis in representing and describing reality, and thus, the concept of postmodernism itself appears to be difficult to define (Aylesworth, 2015). However, although many struggle to give a definition of postmodernity (Aylesworth, 2015; Hutcheon, 2004, p.x), this chapter will try to confront the widely held view that postmodernism is an indefinable phenomenon, and attempt to outline some definitions by comparing literary theorists and critics Frederic Jameson and Linda Hutcheon.

As for the structure, this chapter is divided into four sections, all of which investigate postmodernism, and thus strive to give an accurate definition of this cultural phenomenon. In this sense, whilst the first two will provide a description of the main characteristics of postmodernism, the third and forth will contextualize it in a larger social, political, and economic framework. Particularly, the first section will analyze the etymology of the term, focusing on the meaning of the prefix 'post', and on a few definitions given by some notable cultural critics (see e.g., Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022; Proctor, 2012). As a result, it will be possible to give an introductory outline of the major features of postmodernism, and of its relationship with modernism.

With regard to the second section instead, it will focus on Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Jameson, 1997) and Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2004). Specifically, it will consider the "contradictory" nature of

the postmodern (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17; Jameson, 1997, p.12), its internal conflicts, and paradoxes. In this sense, it will also explain some of the reasons why it may be interesting to investigate postmodernism nowadays, apart from its bizarre paradoxes, analyzing how Jameson's and Hutcheon's works offer valuable suggestions on this issue.

Turning now to the last two sections, after having illustrated some of the major features of postmodernity, they will discuss postmodernism more in depth, and look at contextualizing the postmodern within a larger social, political, and cultural framework. As for the third section, it is worth explaining that it will be divided into three subsections, which will attempt to contextualize postmodernism, comparing Jameson's and Hutcheon's definitions of the phenomenon. In this sense, we will first focus on Jameson's temporal and economical signposting of postmodernism, and its possible definition as both "the cultural dominant" of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.14), and a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). Then, we will move on to investigate Hutcheon's periodization of postmodernity, and the reason why an increasing number of critics are advocating for the "death of postmodernism nowadays" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164). In the end, this section will outline several scholars' opinions on the place where postmodernism originated and developed, with a particular focus on Jameson's and Hutcheon's views on the geographical features of postmodernity.

Finally, before drawing the chapter's conclusions, the last section will discuss the relationship between postmodernism and modernism, introducing the existence of two different schools of thought debating on this issue (Hutcheon, 2004, p.49). In addition, it will be explained why Hutcheon states that she does not belong to any of these schools, as she perceives the relationship between these two phenomena as too paradoxical to be classified (Hutcheon, 2004, p.52).

1.1 Etymology and definition of postmodernism

As stated in the introduction above, to grasp the concept of postmodernity, I suggest that we start by investigating postmodernism as a term. In this sense, due to the vast amount of material written on this subject (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17), this section will first analyze the etymology of the term, focusing on the meaning of the prefix 'post'. Secondly, to examine the meaning of postmodernism more closely, and better understand its etymology, I will quote a few definitions by some of the most notable cultural critics and encyclopedias (see e.g., Collins Dictionary, 2022; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). In the end, we will draw a comparison between the definitions, to outline the major features and contradictions of this

phenomenon, and give a brief outline of its relationship with modernism. However, it is worth noting that as for postmodernism's contradictions, they will be investigated in the second section of this first chapter.

First, it is necessary to argue that, when attempting to define postmodernism, we should inevitably face the vast amount of material written on this subject (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17). Furthermore, since the number of sources investigating postmodernism is immense, to give a detailed and precise analysis, it is important to start from examining the etymology of the term. Particularly, as for the importance of beginning from postmodernism's etymology, Hutcheon states that "the debate invariably begins over the meaning of the prefix, 'post' - a four-letter word if ever there was one" (ibid.). Hence, to avoid a chaotic analysis of this phenomenon, since Hutcheon herself affirms the pivotal role of the prefix 'post' in describing postmodernism, it may be worth investigating it more thoroughly, comparing this prefix with some definitions of postmodernity by several cultural critics.

In this sense, to examine the prefix 'post' considering the definitions offered by respected scholars, I searched for the meaning of the term postmodernism in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and essays. As for its etymology, it is possible to state that critics generally agree that 'post' means "after, afterwards" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022; Proctor, 2012, p.16). For this reason, from a temporal point of view, postmodernism may primarily be defined as the phenomenon following modernism.

In addition, analyzing scholars' definitions, more information could be obtained, apart from postmodernism's general temporal signposting. In this regard, considering that Proctor begins his introduction to postmodernism by quoting some explanations by illustrious critics (Proctor, 2002, pp.15-19), I suggest adopting the same method, and, thereby, analyze and compare what different scholars say on this issue. Nevertheless, it is necessary to state that the scholars I have decided to cite here are different from the ones chosen by Proctor, and that the order in which they are quoted is not relevant:

- "Postmodernism [...] in Western philosophy, a late 20th-century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022)

- "Postmodernism is a late twentieth century approach in art, architecture, and literature that typically mixes styles, ideas, and references to modern society, often in an ironic way" (Collins Dictionary, 2022)
- "It can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Aylesworth, 2015)
- "A style and movement in art, architecture, literature, etc. in the late 20th century that reacted against modern styles, for example by mixing features from traditional and modern styles" (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2022)
- "Ideas, attitudes, or styles of art, literature, or thinking that have developed after modernism, often as a reaction against it" (MacMillan Dictionary, 2022)

Hence, some conclusions may be drawn from these definitions. First, it is worth noting that to address postmodernism several terms are employed: "movement" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022), "approach" (Collins Dictionary, 2022), "set of practices" (Aylesworth, 2015), "ideas, attitudes, or styles" (MacMillan Dictionary, 2022). Therefore, from now on, all these nouns will be applied to refer to postmodernism in this thesis. Secondly, postmodernism developed as a phenomenon in the late twentieth-century, or, more generally, as it can be deduced from its etymology, after modernism. Thirdly, postmodernity marked a cultural shift. In this regard, Collins Dictionary affirms that postmodernism revized modernist ideas and styles in an ironic way (Collins Dictionary, 2022), whilst Encyclopedia Britannica writes that postmodernity is characterized by new features, such as skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). Finally, Oxford and MacMillan add that the postmodernist movement came into being as a reaction to modernism (MacMillan Dictionary, 2022; Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2022). Overall, to start analyzing postmodernism, I suggest beginning by investigating the meaning of the prefix 'post', considering the definitions of some of the most notable cultural critics. In this way, it is in fact possible to understand not only that postmodernism has its own peculiar features, like the use of mixed styles (Collins Dictionary, 2022), but also that some scholars believe it should be seen as opposed to modernism.

As for the relationship between these two phenomena, I think it is now time to investigate it, considering the definitions quoted above. In this regard, it is possible to argue that while the prefix 'post' works primarily as a temporal signposting, from the scholars' definitions, it

could also be noted that some critics view postmodernism as a phenomenon which contrasts modernism. Specifically, Hutcheon writes that,

> Does it have as negative a ring of supersession and rejection as many contend I would argue that, as is most clear perhaps in postmodern architecture, the post position signals it's contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17).

In other words, although many affirm that postmodernism is opposed to modernism, Hutcheon suggests that postmodernity is essentially a contradictory era, for it is both dependent and independent from the movement which preceded it (ibid.). Thus, in her view, merely stating that postmodernism is inimical to modernism is both a simplification and generalization.

To sum up, this section has attempted to investigate both the etymology, and a few definitions of postmodernism, by searching for the term in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and essays. As for its etymology, it is worth noting that by analyzing it, it may be reasonable to assume that postmodernism started to develop after modernism, for the prefix 'post' primarily means "after" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022; Proctor, 2012, p.16). Regarding its definitions instead, it is possible to state that the postmodernist movement has its own peculiar features, like subjectivism, relativism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022), the importance given to the concepts of difference and simulacrum (Aylesworth, 2015). In the end, as for the relationship between postmodernism and modernism, it is important to notice that whilst some scholars merely affirm that postmodernism is the phenomenon following modernism, others suggest that these two phenomena are opposed to each other (see e.g., MacMillan Dictionary, 2022; Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2022). Nevertheless, Hutcheon affirms that by stating that postmodernism is the opposite of modernism, they tend to over-simplify and generalize such a contradictory movement as postmodernism, whose complexity seems to be due to the fragmentation of contemporary Western culture (Hutcheon, 2004, p.17).

1.2 Postmodernism: a contradictory phenomenon

"If you do not really understand what postmodernism is yet, you are not alone" (Fisher and Graham, 2014, p.29). Having introduced the complexity of such a phenomenon, the aim of this second section is also to investigate the concept of postmodernism, focusing on its internal conflicts and contradictions (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3; Jameson, 1997, p.12) by comparing Jameson's and Hutcheon's theorizing of postmodernity. Specifically, this section

will first introduce the ongoing debate about the concept of postmodernism, and the main reasons why critics generally find it hard to define. Then, it will move on to clarify that although scholars do not generally regard postmodernism as "a new paradigm" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.19), it still marks the advent of new features in both cultural, economic, and social spheres. In the end, some conclusions will be drawn, juxtaposing Jameson's and Hutcheon's views on postmodernism and its paradoxes.

As stated above, even though many have tried to theorize it (see e.g., Jameson, 1997; Hutcheon, 2004; Kelly, 2011) the debate on postmodernism is still ongoing, as it seems that critics struggle to define it (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3). This is since postmodernism "defies definitions because it is extremely complex, often contradictory, and constantly changing" (Proctor, 2012, p.15). In this regard, in his acclaimed work on postmodernity, Jameson states,

> As for Postmodernism itself, I have not tried to systematize a usage or to impose any conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning, for the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory (Jameson, 1997, p.12).

Furthermore, it may be argued that this description of postmodernism is similar to that found in Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2004). Particularly, Hutcheon begins her theorizing of the postmodern by arguing that the nature of the postmodernist enterprise is "fundamentally contradictory" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3). In other words, in Hutcheon's view, to confirm its own existence, postmodernism installs and then withdraws, "uses and abuses" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.57), those very notions it tries to suppress (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.5-19). In the same way, Proctor states that "the essence of postmodernism is deconstruction without construction, antithesis without synthesis" (Proctor, 2012, p.15). Overall, it may be stated that critics generally find postmodernism hard to define. In this regard, both Jameson and Hutcheon describe postmodernism as a "contradictory" and conflicting phenomenon (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3; Jameson, 1997, p.12), especially due to its paradoxical relationship with the conventions it tries to defeat.

Having defined postmodernism as a "contradictory" (ibid.) phenomenon, it is now worth clarifying some of the reasons why it may be interesting to investigate postmodernism nowadays, apart from exploring its contradictions. In this regard, both Hutcheon and Jameson argue that one of most compelling aspects of postmodernism is that it brings some formal and stylistic novelties. As for Hutcheon, it may be noted that although she affirms that postmodernism cannot be regarded as "a new paradigm" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.4), as it deals with the same conventions it tries to subvert, it "may mark, however, the site of the struggle

of the emergence of something new" (ibid.). This is the case with "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5): a novel genre which stems from postmodernism's "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (ibid.). In the same way, Jameson asserts that postmodernist contradictions usually lead to "complex and interesting new formal inventiveness" (Jameson, 1997, p.24). In Jameson's view this is particularly exemplified by postmodernist movies as,

> The nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned 'representation' of historical content, but instead approached the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion (Jameson, 1991, p.24).

Therefore, it may be stated that both Hutcheon and Jameson believe that although postmodernism has many contradictions and cannot be considered as "a new paradigm" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.4), it is characterized by the "emergence" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.19) of new formal and stylistic features. Hence, I suggest analyzing and investigating this phenomenon and its novelties, despite its bizarre paradoxes.

To sum up, this short section has shown how scholars generally consider postmodernism as a "contradictory" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3; Jameson, 1997, p.14) phenomenon, and find the concept difficult to grasp. In this sense, Hutcheon believes that the contradictions of postmodernism derive from its ambiguous relationship with those same conventions it tries to challenge, and Jameson similarly advocates that postmodernism is a concept which is internally conflicted and paradoxical. However, it is worth noting that although postmodernism cannot be considered as "a new paradigm" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3), both critics affirm that postmodernity witnesses the emergence of formal and stylistic novelty, such as "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5) and the new stylistic features of nostalgia movies (Jameson, 1997, p.24). This is the main reason why it may be interesting to investigate postmodernism nowadays, apart from analyzing its extravagant paradoxes.

1.3 Contextualizing postmodernism

So far, this thesis has focused on the etymology of postmodernism, its internal conflicts and contradictions, and the definitions given by several scholars. The following section is instead an attempt to describe postmodernism by comparing Jameson's and Hutcheon's definitions of postmodernity, and it is divided into three subsections. In this sense, we will first focus on Jameson's periodization of postmodernity, and explain the meaning and features of late capitalism. Then, we will move on to analyze his definition of postmodernism as both a

"cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14), and a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). In this regard, to better explain why it is possible to describe postmodernism as "the cultural dominant" of late capitalism (Jameson, 1997, p.14), I suggest investigating the pivotal role played by culture in postmodernity. Secondly, this section will compare Jameson's periodization and definition with Hutcheon's, and explain why many critics advocate the "death of postmodernism" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121) nowadays. In the end, we will discuss why it is still worth talking about postmodernism in our contemporary society, although many advocate for its death.

1.3.1 Defining postmodernism: cultural dominant and commodity

The aim of this subsection is to analyze the definition of postmodernism by Jameson. In this sense, it will first focus on the periodization of postmodernism and, therefore, its connection with late capitalism. Then, we will thoroughly examine the meaning of the expression "late-capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.9) comparing Jameson's explanation with Jeffries's, and move on to outline the reasons why Jameson defines postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) by investigating the importance of culturalism in the era of late-capitalism. In the end, before drawing our conclusions, it will be explained why postmodernism may not only be defined as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14), but also as a commodity.

Firstly, regarding the periodization of postmodernism, I suggest we start by analyzing Jameson's point of view on this issue. In this sense, it may be stated that although the term seems to have entered the philosophical lexicon in the late 1970s with Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (Aleysworth, 2015), Jameson traces its origins back to the end of the 1950s or early 1960s (Jameson, 1997, p.11). Particularly, he defines postmodernism as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.11) - that is to say, a cultural phenomenon which began in the 1950s, and developed more properly in the 1960s, when new products and technologies were made available after wartime shortages (Jameson, 1997, pp.11-13). Overall, it may be argued that postmodernism is regarded as the result of late-capitalist dissolution of bourgeois hegemony, and the development of mass culture, taking place between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s (Hutcheon, 2004, p.6).

As far as late capitalism is concerned, it is now the time to investigate its meaning, and connection with postmodernism. In this regard, it may be worth quoting an article from *The Guardian* (Jeffries, 2011). Particularly, it may be stated that, similarly to Jameson, Jeffries

affirms that postmodernism is strictly related to the last stage of capitalism, which began in 1973 or 1974, when an economic recession took place, owing to an increase in petrol prices (ibid.). Nonetheless, Jeffries asserts that the premises for late capitalism are to be found in the 1960s, which were characterized by two main phenomena: the beginning of petrol extractions by Europe and the US, and the end of the Fordist capitalist model. In this regard, he writes,

> Welcome to post-Fordism or, if you prefer, the era of late capitalism. These terms are, like deconstructionism and post-structuralism, if not synonymous with postmodernism, then synchronous with it (ibid.).

In other words, in Jeffries's view, late capitalism developed in the 1970s, and it is synchronous with postmodernism, although its origins go back to the 1960s. However, it may be stated that his periodization of late capitalism differs from Jameson's, as the latter advocates that the late-capitalist era begins a decade earlier than the former.

Moving now back to Jameson, before comparing Jameson's periodization of postmodernity with Hutcheon's, it is necessary to investigate Jameson's definition of postmodernism in his critically acclaimed work *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Jameson, 1997). Specifically, it may be affirmed that Jameson defines postmodernism not only as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14), but also as a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). Focusing on postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) first, it is necessary to state that in Jameson's view, postmodernism should not be merely considered as an aesthetic style, but as "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.40). This is because postmodernism has caused a mutation in the sphere of culture, becoming the dominant form in cultural production, and supplanting the "archaic" modernist one (Jameson, 1997, p.15). Thus, Jameson specifies that postmodernism may be regarded as "the cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) of late capitalism, since in the second half of the 20th century, its features dominated the political, social, and economic spheres.

Therefore, before explaining why Jameson defines postmodernism as a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15), I suggest analyzing the central role played by culture in the period of late capitalism. In this sense, it may be useful to quote Eagleton, as he says,

> Why is everyone talking about culture? The idea, fashionable now among sectors of the Western left, that everything is cultural belongs to the doctrine known as culturalism [...] Culturalism inflates the importance of what is constructed, coded, conventional about human life, as against what human beings have in common as natural material animals (Eagleton, 1997, p.1).

Specifically, Eagleton believes that there are two main reasons why culture has supplanted nature in postmodernity. Firstly, after WWII, artistic production has become a consumers' product (Eagleton, 1997, pp.2-3). Secondly, culture has started to play an important role not only in the artistic sphere, but also in the social and political ones (ibid.). Overall, it may be argued that Eagleton advocates that in the second half on the twentieth-century, culturalism has become prominent, owing to the "aestheticization of reality" (Jameson, 1997, p.4), that is to say, culture has finally replaced nature and become a consumers' product itself (ibid.).

As for culturalism, it is also important to state that, likewise Eagleton, Jameson affirms,

> Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature' (Jameson, 1997, p.4).

This quotation is similar to Eagleton's, as both Jameson and Eagleton advocate that one of the major features of postmodern culture is the fact that it has supplanted nature. In general, by stating that postmodernism is the "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) of late capitalism, it may be argued that late-capitalist culture, which has fully replaced modernist nature, is dominated by the features of postmodernism, which will be, nevertheless, outlined in the next chapter.

Having explained the role of culture in postmodernity, let us turn to consider postmodernism as a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). In this regard, Jameson affirms that postmodernism may be considered as a consumers' product, as in postmodernity, culture has been commodified. Particularly, Jameson advocates that "in postmodern culture, 'culture' has become a product in its own right" (Jameson, 1997, p.4). In this regard, postmodernist aesthetic production has been turned into consumers' goods, due to an ongoing necessity to produce and consume new aesthetic commodities (ibid.). Furthermore, Jameson states that the postmodernist tendency to commodify cultural products stands "in contrast to the role such elements were called upon to play, or most often repressed from playing, in a modernism anxious to resist consumption and offer an experience that could not be commodified" (Jameson, 1997, p.76). In general, it may be stated that since postmodernism permeates all aspects of cultural production, and, in contrast with modernism, postmodernist cultural production has been commodified, Jameson regards postmodernism as both the "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) of the latest stage of capitalism, and a consumers' product.

To conclude, this subsection has attempted to investigate postmodernism by analyzing Jameson's definition. In this sense, it may be affirmed that Jameson defines postmodernism as both "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) and a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). As for the first, postmodernism is regarded as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1997, p.14), since in a world which is no longer dominated by nature, postmodernist features have started to prevail in both the cultural and social spheres. Regarding postmodernism as a commodity instead, it may be argued that this phenomenon could be considered as a commodity, because in postmodernity culture has become a consumers' product. This is due to late-capitalist "aestheticization of reality" (Jameson, 1997, p.4), and an increasing necessity to produce and consume new goods.

1.3.2 Is a periodization of postmodernism possible?

After having outlined Jameson's view on the periodization of postmodernism, it is now worth explaining what Hutcheon's states on this issue. In this sense, this second subsection will illustrate that although Hutcheon initially affirms that postmodernism cannot be periodized (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.3), in her later works, she seems to reconsider the temporal signposting of postmodernity, and describes postmodernism as a phenomenon belonging to the past (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164). Then, this subsection will outline the main reasons why Hutcheon advocates that postmodernism is "over" nowadays (Hutcheon, 2002, p.165), as well as the points of view of other critics, supporting her new position. In the end, we will investigate why despite many advocate "the death of postmodernism" today (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121), it may be still worth studying and analyzing this phenomenon.

In the first place, it is worth noting that Hutcheon challenges Jameson's temporal and economic signposting of postmodernism, as she believes that any attempts to define postmodernity by periodization are doomed to fail. Particularly, whilst Jameson traces its origins back to the 1950s or early 1960s (Jameson, 1997, p.11), Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is primarily a label for a cultural enterprise, which scholars still struggle to locate by temporal signposting, "after 1945? 1968? 1970? 1980?" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.3). In this sense, Hutcheon criticizes Jameson and all those scholars who attempt to locate postmodernity either by temporal or economic signposting, such as the 1950s or late capitalism (ibid.). Specifically, she affirms that,

> In as pluralist and fragmented a culture as that of the western world today, such designations are not terribly useful if they intend to generalize about all the vagaries of our culture. After all, what does television's 'Dallas' have in common with the architecture of Ricardo Bofill? What

does John Cage's music share with a play (or film) like *Amadeus*? (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp.3-4).

Thus, in contrast to Jameson, Hutcheon believes that postmodernism does not require any temporal or economical periodization to be theorized and defined, in fact such generalizations may be hazardous to such a fragmented culture as the western contemporary one.

In this regard, it is surprising that although initially reluctant to locate postmodernism by either temporal or economic signposting (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp.3-4), in the epilogue of her second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2002), Hutcheon states that postmodernism is fundamentally a twentieth-century phenomenon (Hutcheon, 2002, pp.165-166), and, therefore, a "thing of the past" (Kelly, 2011, p.2). It is worth noting here that the first edition of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004) was first published in 1984, and, therefore, many years before the publication of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2002). In this sense, although the edition I am quoting here dates 2004, it seems that Hutcheon's statement about the impossibility of periodizing postmodernism was not revised in her later publications. In contrast, in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2002), she explains that in the twenty-first century, postmodernity appears to be institutionalized, and its artistic production seems to be outmoded and outdated (Hutcheon, 2002, pp.165-166). Specifically, Hutcheon says,

> Let's just say: it's over. What we have witnessed in the last ten or fifteen years and what I'd like to explore in this epilogue is not only the institutionalization of the postmodern, but its transformation into a kind of generic counter-discourse (Terdiman, 1985) of the 1990s (Hutcheon, 2002, p.165).

Overall, it is worth noting that despite her initial unwillingness to periodize postmodernism, in her following works, Hutcheon defines it as a phenomenon of the past, and locates it in the twentieth century.

Furthermore, it may be argued that although Hutcheon was initially alone in her position, it seems that a growing number of critics, scholars, and authors are advocating "the passing of postmodernism" nowadays (Alber and Bell 2019, p.2). In this sense, Toth advocates for a gradual "passing of postmodernism", whilst Rudrum and Stavris for a "definitive supplanting of the postmodern" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121). Furthermore, Kelly affirms that at the end of the twentieth century, "a revisionist work of postmodernism" began (Kelly, 2011, p.392). In fiction, this is the case with a wide range of American authors. Particularly, Kelly states that,

Whether, in classifying the fiction that began to surface in the late 1980s and 1990s and has con- tinued into the new millennium, critics favor 'hybrid fiction' (Grassian), 'American literary globalism' (Adams), 'cosmodernism' (Moraru), 'late postmodernism' (Green) or 'post-postmodernism' (Burn), it is clear that the narrative of 'postmodernism, then' is already under construction in the critical stories told about recent American literature (Kelly, 2011, p.393).

Hence, it may be argued that not only critics and scholars, but also fiction authors generally support "the death of postmodernism" today (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121), regardless the "various degrees of postmodernism's demise" (ibid.) they support, or the label with which they call the new phenomenon following postmodernism.

Having explained what Hutcheon means by defining postmodernism as "a thing of the past" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164), I will now move on to discuss the reasons critics generally attribute to the "death of postmodernism" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121) in the twenty-first century. In this sense, whilst Hutcheon states that the passing of postmodernism is due to its transformation into "a counter-discourse" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.165) overlapping with feminism, postcolonialism, queer, race, and ethnicity theory (ibid.), other critics tend to attribute the "death of postmodernism" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121) to the growing dominance of television and digital technology, as in the twenty-first century, individuals have gained power to influence and control cultural products in a way which was not possible before (Alber and Bell, 2019, pp.122-123). Particularly, this is the case with literature: while postmodernism considered literature as a "spectacle" to be interpreted by its readers, with the advent of digital technology, cultural products, such as the Internet, could not exist without the consumers' intervention (Kirby, 2009, p.1). Furthermore, Alber states that another main argument supporting the "death of postmodernism" is that,

[Postmodernist] ironic self-reflexivity was perceived as being innovative and interesting back in the 1960s. In the twenty-first century, however, playful metafiction has become an exhausted (and thus potentially ineffectual) convention (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121).

Hence, in the twenty-first century, postmodernist conventions appear to be obsolete and out-of-date for several reasons, and many critics feel that new ways of creating culture are needed (ibid.).

After having cited some critics supporting the "death of postmodernism" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121), it is now the time to highlight that although their number is increasing (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.2), there are still a few stating that postmodernism should not be limited only to the twentieth century. For example, talking about postmodernity, Butler affirms that,

> This condition is supposed to affect us all, not just through avant-garde art, but also at a more fundamental level, through the influence of that huge growth in media communication by electronic means. […] And yet in our new 'information society', paradoxically enough, most information is apparently to be distrusted, as being more of a contribution to the manipulative image-making of those in power than to the advancement of knowledge (Butler, 2002, p.3).

Particularly, to exemplify the postmodernist attitude of suspicion towards mediatic information in contemporary literature and society, he quotes two authors of fiction, namely Pynchon and De Lillo (ibid.). In this regard, it is interesting to notice Kelly's contrasting statement on this issue. Specifically, the critic affirms that one of the major features of "the revisionist work on postmodernism", or "new postmodernist studies", is that of adopting an historicist perspective to read works that are commonly considered as postmodernist, such as Pynchon's and De Lillo's (Kelly, 2011, pp.392-392). In this regard, it may be argued that Butler's and Kelly's statements are opposite, since while Butler believes that Pynchon and De Lillo are to be considered postmodernist authors (Butler, 2002, p.3), Kelly advocates that their works are to be regarded as belonging to the "revisionist work on postmodernism", since they are characterized by an historicist perspective (Kelly, 2011, pp.392-393). Overall, I think that it is useful to quote a critic who has a different view on postmodernism, to show that despite many support the "death of postmodernism" nowadays (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.121), this issue is still widely debated.

Furthermore, despite some critics believing postmodernism is over, for the purpose of my research, it may be interesting to highlight the reasons why it may still be worth talking about postmodernism nowadays. In this sense, Fischer affirms that postmodernist theories are still having a major impact on contemporary societies (Fischer, 2014, p.21). Likewise, despite she defines postmodernism as "a thing of the past" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164), Hutcheon holds the view that its influence is still visible today. Particularly, she argues that,

> Even if the postmodern is over today, it is likely to say that it has persisted nonetheless as a space for debate. This is true whether the focus is on postmodernism as an aesthetic phenomenon or on postmodernity as a general social condition (Hutcheon, 2002, p.166).

As for postmodernism as "an aesthetic phenomenon" (ibid.), Hutcheon advocates that postmodernist theories are still relevant for musical studies (Hutcheon, 2002, p.169). Particularly, she says that the opera was the first "to get continuing postmodernist attention", but it also seems that other kinds of classical music may be analyzed with postmodernist tools (ibid.). Regarding "postmodernity as a general social condition" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.167) instead, in Hutcheon's view, nowadays' technology and multiculturalism are inevitably influenced by postmodernist culture (Hutcheon, 2002, p.169). Thus, in the end of her

epilogue, Hutcheon addresses readers and critics saying, "post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it – and name it for the twenty-first century" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.180). Overall, it may be argued that it is still worth talking about postmodernism nowadays, since it seems to influence contemporary society both as "an aesthetic phenomenon" and "a general social condition" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.167).

To sum up, this subsection has attempted to clarify the term "postmodernism" by comparing Hutcheon's definitions of postmodernity with Jameson's. Particularly, whilst Jameson affirms that postmodernism is a phenomenon that began in the 1950s and developed during the last stage of capitalism (Jameson, 1997, pp.11-13), Hutcheon initially argues that when discussing postmodernism, it is better to avoid any generalization or periodization (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp.3-4). However, it is worth noting that in the epilogue of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2002), she unexpectedly reconsiders the periodization of postmodernism, and affirms postmodernism is "a thing of the past" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164), as in contemporary society its features seem out-of-date. Notwithstanding that an increasing number of critics appear to support Hutcheon's new position (see e.g., Alber and Bell, 2019; Kirby, 2009) this section has in the end tried to outline some of the main reasons why it may be still worth dealing with postmodernism nowadays, focusing on postmodernity as an "aesthetic phenomenon" and "a general social condition" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.167).

1.3.3 The geographical origins of postmodernism

After having focused on the periodization of postmodernism, I suggest investigating its geographical origins. In this sense, we will first compare Butler's and Jeffries's views on this issue, to show that the debate on the geography of postmodernity is still open. In the end, this short subsection will move on to analyze Hutcheon's and Jameson's positions on this same topic, as they seem to have contrasting opinions not only with regards to postmodernism's periodization, but also to its geographical origins.

Firstly, as stated above, it may be argued that the debate on the geographical origins of postmodernism is still ongoing. On the one hand, as for the birth of the theory of postmodernism, Butler argues that the movement originated in France in the 1960s and was subsequently exported to England and the United States (Butler, 2002, p.6). In this regard, it is possible to mention Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault among the main scholars and authors of postmodernism, all of whom seem to have been inspired by the Marxist paradigm (Butler,

2002, p.7). On the other hand, according to Jeffries, "the modern world died at 3.32pm in St Louis, Missouri, on 15 July 1972", when the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe apartments took place (Jeffries, 2011). In this sense, citing the architectural critic Jencks, he argues that following this demolition, a new architectural style was born, which marked the birth of postmodernism (ibid.). However, like Butler, he also claims that postmodernism officially originated in France, although its unofficial place of birth was St Louis. Specifically, he says that the year of the birth of postmodernism was 1979, with the publication of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (ibid.). Overall, I have decided to quote both Butler and Jeffries to show that the debate about where postmodernism originated and developed is as open as that about its periodization. However, it may be affirmed that the critics agree on considering postmodernism as both a European and American phenomenon.

Furthermore, after having illustrated how Jameson and Hutcheon hold contrasting views on the periodization of postmodernism, it is now the time to consider their opinions about the place where postmodernity emerged and developed. In this sense, it may be stated that Jameson and Hutcheon have opposing ideas on this issue. Hence, to compare their assumptions, I suggest focusing on Jameson first. Particularly, Jameson apologizes for the "Americanocentrism" of his study, since he claims that although there are several forms of postmodernism, they are all variants of a North American postmodernist global style (Jameson, 1997, p.11). In this regard, he argues that,

> [This] is justified only to the degree that it was the brief 'American century' (1945-73) that constituted the hothouse, or forcing ground, of the new system, while the development of the cultural forms of Postmodernism may be said to be the first specifically North American global style (Jameson, 1997, p.11).

In general, as for the geography of postmodernity, it may be argued that despite he affirms that postmodernism developed as a global phenomenon, Jameson believes that its style is primarily derived from North America.

As for Hutcheon, it is worth underlining that her opinion about the place where postmodernity originated and developed contrasts with Jameson's. Specifically, she affirms that the concept of postmodernism should not be limited to Anglo-American culture (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p. 4), as she claims that postmodernism is both a European and American (North and South) cultural phenomenon, and criticizes those scholars who, like Jameson, advocate that postmodernity is primarily an Anglo-American event (ibid.).

Furthermore, she believes that one of the main differences between postmodernism and modernism is that the latter was a purely Anglicized phenomenon, as she states that,

> Although the concept of *modernism* is largely an Anglo-American one (Suleiman 1986), this should not limit the poetics of *postmodernism* to that culture, especially since those who would argue that very stand are usually the ones to find room to sneak in the French *nouveau roman* (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.4).

In general, it may therefore be stated that whilst Jameson believes that postmodernism is primarily a North American phenomenon, since North American postmodernism serves as an example for the other forms of postmodernism, Hutcheon advocates that limiting postmodernity to North America is a mistake, as she believes postmodernism is to be attributed to both Europe and America.

To sum up, this section has attempted to give a definition of postmodernism, providing its temporal, economic, and geographical context. In this sense, it may first be argued that Jameson defines postmodernism as both "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson, 1997, p.14) and a commodity (Jameson, 1997, p.15). Particularly, he advocates that this phenomenon started at the end of the 1950s, although it evolved more properly in the 1960s, owing to late-capitalist development of mass culture (Jameson, 1997, p.11). Furthermore, since the late-capitalist era was dominated by culturalism, and culture was commodified, postmodernism became the dominant form in cultural production, and a consumers' product (Jameson, 1991, pp.14-15). As for Hutcheon, it is worth noting that in her later works, she changes her opinion about the periodization of postmodernity. Specifically, although she initially criticizes Jameson for locating postmodernism by temporal signposting, in the epilogue of her second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2002), she affirms that postmodernism is dead nowadays, for it has to be considered primarily as a twentieth century phenomenon (Hutcheon, 2002, pp.165-166). In this regard, it is important to underline that even if the number of scholars advocating the passing of postmodernism is increasing, its influence is still visible nowadays, especially as an "aesthetic phenomenon" and "general social condition" (Hutcheon, 2002, p.167). In the end, this section has investigated the geographical origins of postmodernism, and highlighted that the debate on this issue is still ongoing. In this sense, Butler believes that postmodernism originated in France (Butler, 2002, p.6), while Jeffries advocates that postmodernity began with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe apartments in St Louis, and only officially in France in the late 1970s (Jeffries, 2011). As for Jameson and Hutcheon, it may be argued that they have opposite views on this issue. Particularly, Jameson advocates that postmodernism is primarily

a North American phenomenon (Jameson, 1997, p.11), whilst Hutcheon affirms that is both a European and American movement (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.4).

1.4 Postmodernism and modernism

As the label itself suggests, postmodernism is inevitably linked to modernism (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.37) to which it owes even its verbal existence (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.52). The aim of this last section is thus to explore the relationship between these two phenomena. Specifically, it will first introduce and explain the existence of two different schools of thought debating over the relationship between postmodernism and modernism. Then, after having illustrated the main arguments of both schools, this section will move on to compare Jameson's and Hutcheon's positions on this issue.

First, it is necessary to state that in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, among those critics who have tried to theorize the postmodern, Hutcheon identifies two schools of thought holding opposite views on the relationship between postmodernism and modernism (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.49). On the one hand, the first school advocates that postmodernism marks a break with modernism, as it rejects all modernist notions, such as "the coherent subject", "the accessible historical referent", and "the modernist use of myth" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp.46-50). In this regard, as representatives of this first school, it may be worth quoting Jameson, and Lyotard (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.50). For example, as stated in the introduction above, in Lyotard's view, while modernism was characterized by metanarratives, postmodernism challenges the idea of metanarratives as a way of meaning-making (Lyotard, 1984, pp.xxii-xxiv). In this sense, the two phenomena may be regarded as opposite,

> I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a meta-discourse […] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth […] I define postmodernity as incredulity towards metanarratives (ibid.).

Furthermore, it could be argued that Butler also belongs to the first school of thought, as he advocates that postmodernism contrasts modernism, since "it confronts and denies the emotionally expressive qualities of previous modernist art (Butler, 2002, pp.1-2)". On the other hand, as members of the second school of thought, Lodge, Fokkema, and Newman argue a relationship of continuity between postmodernism and modernism, for they believe postmodernism raises the same issues of modernism, but re-examines and completes them (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp. 46-51). For instance, Lodge believes the two phenomena "share a commitment to innovation and to a critique of tradition", while Fokkema affirms they share

self-reflexivity (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.51). Hence, it may be claimed that although postmodernism is deeply embedded in modernism, their relationship is still being heatedly debated nowadays.

Focusing now on Jameson, it may be argued that as a representative of the first school of thought (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.50), he affirms that the existence of postmodernism depends on "the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*" with the past (Jameson, 1997, p.13). First, Jameson states that the two "phenomena [namely postmodernism and modernism] would still remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function", and this is because postmodernity developed in the latest stage of capitalism (Jameson, 1997, p.15). In other terms, postmodernity could be regarded as a "radical break or *coupure*" (Jameson, 1997, p.13) with modernism, as Jameson defines them as two separate worlds, with postmodernity beginning when modernity ends, specifically, when culture starts to permeate all spheres of reality, finally supplanting nature itself (Jameson, 1997, p.4). In general, Jameson believes postmodernism and modernism are two "utterly distinct phenomena" (Jameson, 1997, p.15), since they developed in two different phases of Western society.

Thus, with the beginning of postmodernity, a new aesthetic emerges on a philosophical, artistic, and ideological level (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.50). Particularly, in Jameson's view, postmodernity is characterized by "depthlessness", which is "a new kind of flatness" or "superficiality" (Jameson, 1997, p.16), contrasting modernist hermeneutic models (Jameson, 1997, p.20). Furthermore, whilst one of the most significant features of modernity was the existence of an autonomous subject, postmodernity signals the end of the modern bourgeois ego, and the "death of the subject" itself (Jameson, 1997, pp.21-22). Overall, it may be argued that according to Jameson postmodernism marks a "break" (Jameson, 1997, p.13) with modernism, since it is characterized by a new aesthetic on multiple levels.

As regards to the relationship between postmodernism and modernism, Hutcheon shares the perspective neither of the first nor of the second schools of thought mentioned above, as she believes postmodernism relates to modernism in an ambiguous way. In this sense, Hutcheon argues that,

> My own response is probably typically postmodernist in its acceptance of both models, for I see as one of the many contradictions of postmodernism that it can both self-consciously incorporate and equally self-consciously challenge that modernism from which it derives (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.52).

Particularly, this is the case with self-reflexivity in literature. In this regard, Hutcheon holds the view that self-reflexivity is shared by both modernist and postmodernist literature (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.52). However, in postmodernity, modernist features are paradoxically used and abused, exploited and challenged at the same time (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.53). Hence, it may be stated that whilst Jameson considers postmodernism as a "radical break or *coupure* with the past" (Jameson, 1997, p.13), Hutcheon avoids any periodization, and advocates that postmodernism relates to modernism in a paradoxical way.

To sum up, it has been shown that there are contrasting opinions about the relationship between postmodernism and modernism. Particularly, it is possible to identify two different schools of thought debating on this issue. In this regard, whilst Jameson may be considered as a representative of the first school of thought, as he advocates that postmodernism signals a "radical break or *coupure*" with modernism (ibid.), Hutcheon affirms she is a representative neither of the first nor of the second school, since she believes the two phenomena are related in an ambiguous and paradoxical way.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has tried to challenge the widely held view that postmodernism is indefinable, investigating the etymology of this phenomenon, as well as its temporal, social, and geographical context. In this sense, it may be argued that from a temporal point of view, postmodernism may primarily be defined as the phenomenon following modernism, as it seems that critics generally recognize that the prefix 'post' means "after, afterwards" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022; Proctor, 2012, p.16).

Furthermore, this chapter has compared Jameson's and Hutcheon's definitions of postmodernity. In this regard, as for Jameson, he states that postmodernism is a globalized North American cultural movement, which began in the 1950s, and developed more properly in the 1960s in the late-capitalist era (Jameson, 1991, pp11-13). On the other hand, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon affirms that this phenomenon is both European and American, and should not be limited only to the North American culture. Moreover, she criticizes Jameson and all those scholars who locate postmodernism by temporal or economic signposting, as she believes postmodernism is too fragmented to be given a precise temporal context. For this reason, it is particularly worth noting that in *The Postmodern Condition*, Hutcheon changes her opinion on this issue, and acknowledges the necessity of periodizing

postmodernity, stating that postmodernism is fundamentally a twentieth-century phenomenon (Hutcheon, 2002, pp.165-166), and, therefore, a "thing of the past" (ibid.).

Regarding the relationship between postmodernism and modernism instead, this chapter has shown that although many affirm that postmodernism is opposed to modernism (MacMillan Dictionary, 2022; Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2022), Hutcheon suggests that postmodernity is essentially a contradictory era, for it both "uses and abuses" the conventions of the movement which temporarily preceded it (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.17). In this regard, both Jameson and Hutcheon describe postmodernism as a "contradictory" and conflicting phenomenon (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.17; Jameson, 1997, p.12), and, therefore, hard to be defined. Finally, it is important to state that despite all postmodernism's paradoxes and contradictions, and the fact that an increasing number of critics are supporting Hutcheon's theory of "the passing of postmodernism" (Alber and Bell, 2019, p.2), postmodernity marked a cultural shift, and it is hence worthy of being studied nowadays. Particularly, Hutcheon advocates that postmodernism is "the site of the struggle of the emergence of something new (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.4)", Whilst Collins affirms that postmodernism revised modernist ideas and styles in an ironic way (Collins, Dictionary 2022), and Encyclopedia Britannica writes that postmodernity is characterized by new features, such as skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022).

Chapter 2

Reader-oriented approaches and postmodernism

"We have to see ourselves neither as inventively fooling around with texts nor as "decoding" complex ciphers, but as generating a reading of the text by a process which […] has more in common with a relationship between persons than with the scientific scrutiny of a natural object" (Barrison qtd. in Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.83).

Introduction

This chapter stems from the necessity to find a method to investigate postmodernist fiction, particularly the audience's responses to the "paradoxes" and "contradictions" of postmodernism (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.17; Jameson, 1997, p.12), which are inevitably reflected on postmodernist literature (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.40). In this respect, it seems worth examining reader-oriented criticism, as an approach to literary studies which advocates for "the turn toward the reader", since it focuses on the centrality of the readers in the process of meaning-making. Furthermore, I suggest investigating reader-oriented approaches considering some of postmodernism's main theoretical assumptions, to determine whether this approach could suit the investigation of the audience's processing of postmodernist novels.

In this sense, the first section of this chapter will focus on some terminology related to this "turn toward the reader", namely "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism". Particularly, it will be argued that to avoid any confusion, this thesis will privilege the use of the umbrella term "reader-oriented" criticism, as it seems to encompass both "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism". Then, I will attempt to outline the main features of the reader-oriented approach, and state that it emerges as a reaction to the formalist study of literature.

Having provided a general overview of reader-oriented criticism, the second section will focus on the history of this new approach to literary studies, starting from its precursors. In this respect, Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralists will be introduced first since they seem to express some concern for the text-reader relationship, although they still advocate for considering the work of art as an "autonomous" entity, which does not need the interaction with the audience to be given meaning. Therefore, it will then be explained that the greatest "impetus" to the development of reader-oriented criticism may be attributed to scholars Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and, for the American critical scene, Stanley Fish, in the 1970s

and 1980s, as they place the text-reader relationship at the centre of their studies of narrative, since they claim that readers are fundamental in the process of meaning-making.

The last section will instead investigate the relationship between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism. Specifically, it will first show that it is possible to draw some parallelisms between the two phenomena, as they developed in the same period and share some theoretical assumptions. Nevertheless, it will then be explained that Hutcheon's advocates for a clear separation between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism, as she believes that postmodernity marks the emergence of new theoretical concepts in literary studies. For this reason, Jauss's, Iser's and Fish's theory will be examined in light of Hutcheon's statement to verify whether reader-oriented approaches may be employed in the investigation of readers' responses to postmodernist novels.

2.1 Terminology and definition: reception theory, reader-response criticism, and reader-oriented literary studies

Before moving on to investigate the main features of this shift of perspective from authors to readers, it may be worth focusing on terminology, and clarify the use of such terms as "reception theory", "reader-response criticism", and "reader-oriented literary studies" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5). Specifically, this section will first argue that scholars generally advocate for a distinction between reception theory and reader-oriented criticism, although the arguments for this separation may be considered inconsistent and contradictory. Hence, it will then move on to analyze the reasons for adopting an umbrella term, namely "reader-oriented" theory, as boundaries between reception and reader-response studies seem to be blurred.

To begin with, as stated in the paragraph above, it may be affirmed that critics generally advocate for a distinction between "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism". In this regard, although they do not examine their differences explicitly, Bortolussi and Dixon refer to them as two distinct approaches to the study of narrative. This is because "reception theory" and "reader-response theory" are introduced and analyzed separately in their work (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.6-8), thus drawing a sharp dividing line between the two. Similarly, in the *Preface* to his work, Holub clearly states that "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism" should be regarded as two separate disciplines, owing to "several important features", which are going to be examined in the next paragraphs. Therefore, since critics consider them as different approaches to literary studies, it may be worth asking why

they could be seen as separate, and which theory may be the best to adopt in our investigation of the relationship between readers and texts.

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism", thereby it was decided to adopt the umbrella term "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5) theory/criticism/literary studies. This choice was made for various reasons. First, although they analyze the two approaches separately (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.6-8), Bortolussi and Dixon examine them in the same section of their work, entitled *Reader-oriented Literary Studies* (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5), from which the term employed in this thesis was derived. The explanation for their choice may be that reception theory and reader-response criticism are both part of a new literary scholarship, focusing primarily on the role of the reader, of which scholars Jauss and Iser are considered as the initiators (ibid.). Thus, the first reason why the terminology "reader-oriented" was preferred is that in Bortolussi and Dixon's work, it is used as a term including both reception theory and reader-oriented criticism.

Secondly, turning to Holub, it may be argued that his "several important features" marking a sharp distinction between "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism" are inconsistent and contradictory, especially when he states,

> Reception theory may be separated from reader-response criticism on the basis of lack of mutual influence. Aside from Iser, whose writings have received extensive coverage in both camps, there has been practically no contact between the two groups (Holub, 2019, p.xiii).

In the first place, his theory may appear inconsistent, because he does not provide enough arguments for a clear separation between the two approaches. Particularly, he constantly repeats that the causes are to be found in the little contact and influence critics had on each other, as "reception theory" developed in West Germany with scholars Jauss and Iser, whilst "reader-oriented criticism" was mainly an American phenomenon (Holub, 2019, pp.xii-xiv), thus sounding unconvincing.

Furthermore, it may be affirmed that the quotation above shows another weakness of Holub's theory, that is, the contradictory nature of his explanation regarding critic Wolfgang Iser. In this sense, it may be asserted that being Iser one of the leading scholars in the field of "reception theory", Holub's argument in favour of a sharp distinction between the disciplines, due to a lack of contact of their theorists, seems contradictory and ambiguous (Holub, 2019, p.xiii). Likewise, Holub contradicts himself also later in his work, when he says that "if one thinks of Jauss as dealing with the macrocosm of reception, then Iser occupies himself with

the microcosm of response" (Holub, 2019, p.60). Overall, another reason why it may be worth adopting "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5) theory as an umbrella term to refer to both reception theory and reader-oriented criticism is that Holub's explanation of a sharp distinction between the two approaches is based on and contradictory arguments.

In a similar way, it is interesting to note that while analyzing the difference between the two forms of reader-response theory, Barton does not distinguish between reception theory and reader-response criticism, and quotes Iser as a leading figure of reader-response theories (Barton, 2002, p.150). Specifically, he advocates for the existence of two main forms of reader-response approach, namely a "hard" and a "soft" one (Barton, 2002, 147). Whilst the first is characterized by the readers' leading role in the process of meaning-making, since it is the audience who are endowed with creating the meaning and the authors lose any power over their creations (Barton, 2002, pp.147-149), in the "soft" version there no longer exists a hierarchical relationship between the two, as "text and reader are in dialogue" (Barton, 2002, p.150). It is here that Barton exemplifies this version of reader-response criticism by quoting Iser, and argues that,

> As a matter of fact those who have written on the theory of reader response have by no means always espoused a 'hard' form of the approach. Wolfgang Iser, from whom much of the current discussion derives, is far more nuanced in style than popular presentations of reader-response criticism might suggest (Barton, 2002, p.150).

In general, apart from the separation between the two approaches to reader-response theories, the "hard" suggesting that "the author brings the words and the reader the meaning" (Barton, 2002, p.147), while the "soft" implying that audience and text work together in the process of meaning-making (Barton, 2002, p.50), it is worth noting that similarly to Holub, Barton regards Iser as a representative of reader-response criticism, rather than reception theory, and does not make a proper distinction between the two disciplines. As argued in the paragraph above, this may suggest that the boundaries between reception theory and reader-response criticism are blurred, and it could thus be worth adopting an umbrella term, such as "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5).

So far, we have focused on how the reasons for a sharp distinction between the two disciplines may be inconsistent, as it seems that scholars refer to Iser as a representative of both reception theory and reader-response criticism and tend to include the two disciplines under the label "reader-oriented criticism" (ibid.), thus implying that the limits between the

approaches are not clear-cut. Lastly, it may be affirmed that there is a third reason for adopting an umbrella term in this thesis, and it is a personal choice. Having shown how the limits between the two disciplines are sometimes difficult to examine, choosing a terminology encompassing both could help to avoid confusion. Thus, in this thesis, the term that will be used to refer to this new shift toward the reader in literary criticism is "reader-oriented" (ibid.), for the avoidance of doubt.

2.1.1 Main features of reader-oriented criticism

Having clarified the reasons for adopting the adjective "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5), it is now important to provide an overview of the main features of reader-oriented theories. In this regard, in the following paragraphs, it will be argued that central to the entire discipline of reader-oriented theory is the focus on the readers in the dynamic process of meaning-making. Furthermore, it will be explained that reader-oriented criticism features a shift of attention from the formal characteristics of the text to the text-reader relationship. In the end, some conclusions will be drawn to summarize the main findings of this section.

As for the features of reader-oriented theories, it may be affirmed that reader-oriented criticism generally refers to an approach to literary studies which insists on the importance of readers' processing of fiction (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Hence, it reflects a growing interest in the relationship between texts and audiences, and in examining what readers bring to texts and vice-versa (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.220). Specifically, for Bortolussi and Dixon, reader-oriented theory features an "emphasis on the recipient of narratives" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.2), namely the readers, who participate in the creation of meaning (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5). Similarly, Rosemblatt employs a transactional view of the reading process, and says that,

> [It] underlines the essential importance of both elements, reader and text in the dynamic reading transaction. A person becomes a reader by virtue of his activity in relationship to a text which he organizes as a set of verbal symbols. A physical text, a set of marks on a page, becomes the text of a poem or of a scientific formula by virtue of its relationship with a reader who thus interprets it (Rosemblatt, 1969, p.44).

Another important aspect of reader-oriented theory I would like to introduce and examine is its effort to overcome the limitations of studying narrative focusing exclusively on its formal characteristics. In this respect, it may be asserted that,

> This emphasis on the recipients of narrative can be seen as the result of a paradigm shift that exposed and transcended the limitations of purely formalist models. In literary theory, it is marked by the transition to reader-reception and -response theory (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.2).

It is worth explaining here that formalist approaches to the study of narrative may be considered limited as they regard literary texts as autonomous entities and neglect the context of their reception (ibid.). Therefore, it may be stated that reader-oriented criticism emerges as an attempt to overcome purely formalistic studies of narrative texts, by emphasizing the readers and their pivotal role in the dynamic and transactional process of meaning-making.

To conclude, this section has shown the reasons for adopting the umbrella term "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5) while investigating the shift towards the reader in literary theory and has then pointed out its main features. Specifically, it may be affirmed that in broad terms, reader-oriented theory may be regarded as an approach to literary studies which highlights the centrality of the dynamic text-reader relationship in forging the meaning of narrative discourses. To do so, it transcends "purely formalist models" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.2), to include the readers' processing of texts in the study of narrative. As for the choice of this umbrella terminology, this subsection has also found out that although critics generally support a clear distinction between "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism", their arguments are not convincing. First, Bortolussi and Dixon examine both disciplines in the section *Reader-oriented Literary Studies* (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5), thus suggesting that rather than being considered as distinct, these two approaches are part of the same shift of perspective in literary studies. In the second place, it has been shown that an argument based on the lack of contact between the scholars of the two approaches may be contradictory (Holub, 2019, p.xiii), as both Holub and Barton struggle to define the theory adopted by Iser. Particularly, it may be interesting to see how Holub contradicts himself several times in his research, arguing that Iser is both a representative of reception and reader-response theory, even though in his view, the two disciplines differ sharply. Finally, whilst this subsection did not confirm a sharp distinction between "reception theory" and "reader-response criticism", it substantiated the use of the adjective "reader-oriented" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5) to avoid any confusion in this research, as the boundaries between the disciplines are blurred.

2.2 The history of reader-oriented criticism

Having provided an overview of reader-oriented criticism, for the purpose of my research, it is important to outline the history of this turn in literary studies. To do so, the section has been divided into subsections, each of which examines an important step in the history of reader-oriented approaches.

2.2.1 Premises to reader-oriented literary studies

To begin with, Rabinowitz argues that "the turn toward the reader may well be the single most profound shift in critical perspective of the post-war years, although influences and precursors are not difficult to find (Holub, 2019, p.13). Particularly, it may be affirmed that the premises for this "shift" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5) are to be found in the early 20th century, in the works of Russian Formalists, such as Shklovskij, Tynjanov and Ingarden, and Czech Structuralists, like Mukarovsky and Vodicka (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.5-6; Holub, 2019, pp.13-15): while the first focus on the formal composition of literary works and textual analysis (Holub, 2019, p.15), the latter analyze their structures as semantic artifacts (Holub, 2019, p.30). Conversely to what Bortolussi and Dixon appear to suggest by introducing it briefly (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.6), failing to provide enough support for their arguments, the connection between formalist and structuralist theories with reader-oriented approaches is less straightforward than it seems. Thereby, it may be worth examining the main features for which Formalists and Structuralists could be considered as precursors to reader-oriented approaches.

In the first place, this connection is exemplified by the work undertaken by Russian critic Viktor Shklovskij (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.6; Holub, 2019, p.16), self-proclaimed founder of Russian Formalism (Steiner, 2016, p.44). As stated above, it may be affirmed that one of his main theoretical concerns is that of investigating the formal features of literary texts. In this regard, in his *The Theory of Prose* (Sher and Shklovskij, 2009), he compares literature to a machine, and states that it is possible to examine its laws, as if it were a clock or a car. From this "machine analogy", he derives his founding of "Mechanistic Formalism" (Steiner, 2016, pp.46-48). This conception of literature is illustrated by the following quote:

> The understanding man scrutinizes the car serenely and comprehends 'what is for what': why it has so many cylinders and why it has big wheels, where its transmission is situated, and why its rear is cut in an acute angle and its radiator unpolished. This is the way one should read (Shklovskij qtd. in Steiner, 2016, p.46).

For this reason, it may be stated that Shklovskij's main interest, and therefore the general concern of Russian Formalism, is the formal features of "the artistic work as a complex artifact" (Steiner, 2016, p.50), which has to be "scrutinized" as a mechanism (Shklovskij qtd. in Steiner, 2016, p.46).

Another concern of the Formalist school is that of investigating the way in which works of art can be experienced and distinguished from non-aesthetic materials through "de-familiarization" (Holub, 2019, p.18). In this respect, Shklovskij argues that art has the power to affect our perception in a "de-familiarizing" mode (Holub, 2019, p.18), in contrast to the "automatization" of everyday life (Steiner, 2016, pp.49-50). Particularly, he defines "defamiliarization" (Holub, 2019, p.18) as the "device" through which readers can perceive the "literariness" of a text, that is, "the quality which makes a work literary" (Holub, 2019, p.17), and thus differentiate it from "automatized objects" belonging to everyday experiences (Steiner, 2016, p.136).

Having provided the technical definition of "de-familiarization" (Holub, 2019, p.18), it may be worth pointing out its importance in discussing the premises of reader-oriented approaches. In this respect, it could be asserted that this concept refers to the relationship between texts and readers, for it is the means through which "artistic reception" is activated (Jauss, 2005, p.16). Since "the work of art as a product of an intentional human activity is a functional object whose purpose is to change the mode of our perception from practical to artistic" (Steiner, 2016, p.50), through the "device" of "defamiliarization" (Holub, 2019, pp.17-18) the object is perceived outside the "habitual nature of its exposure", and is, therefore, "made strange" to the world of everyday perception (Holub, 2019, pp.18-21). In general, arguing that literature exerts an influence on the audience's perception, especially in a "de-familiarizing" (Holub, 2019, p.18) mode, Shklovskij shifts the focus of attention from the author-text to the readers' reception for the first time (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.6; Holub, 2019, p.16).

As stated above, not only Russian Formalists, but also scholars from Czech Structuralism may be regarded as the precursors to reader-oriented theories. In this regard, Czech critic Mukarovsky, leading theorist of the Prague Structuralist school, asserts that works of art should be considered as structures, to be analyzed in the light of semiology (Holub, 2019, pp.29-31). Furthermore, in his view,

Between the subject and the object […] lays the paradigm of socially existing aesthetic norms which condition and determine any subject-object interaction which is to be considered aesthetic (Burbank and Steiner, 1978, p.ix).

Here, it may be worth pointing out two main passages which are crucial to understand his contribution to text-reader relationships. First, literary works can act as signs, mediating the relationship between the texts and their audience (Holub, 2019, pp.31-32). Secondly, while analyzing aesthetic response, it is inevitable not to consider the sociological aspects, since readers' reception is influenced by their social backgrounds (Holub, 2019, pp.32-35). In this regard, he argues that,

The approach to the problem of aesthetic norm through sociology is not only a possible approach [but] a basic requirement for research since it enables us to investigate in details the dialectical contradiction the variability and multiplicity of the aesthetic norm and its right to constant validity (Mukarovsky qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.33).

In general, from a structuralist point of view, literary texts should be considered as structures, mediated to the readers through signs, which do not exist as "independent entities" (Holub, 2019, p.31), since aesthetic responses are inevitably subjected to social contexts.

Therefore, it may be stated that the main difference between formalist and structuralist theories is the way they conceive the relationship between the artistic and non-artistic spheres, hence between works of art and social backgrounds as well. On the one hand, Mukarovsky believes that focusing on texts is not enough to investigate literature, instead, while dealing with narratives we should regard the "interpenetration of social reality and literary texts" (Holub, 2019, pp.30-31). Because of this, the major criticism Mukarovsky moves to Formalism is that on the other hand, its "mechanistic" (Steiner, 2016, pp.46-48) examination of texts never goes beyond the literary work itself (Holub, 2019, p.17). Shklovskij illustrates this point clearly in his *Preface* when he writes that,

It is perfectly clear that language is influenced by socioeconomic conditions. […] Nevertheless, the word is not a shadow. The word is a thing, it changes in accordance with the linguistic laws that change the physiology of speech and so on […] (Shklovskij, 2009, p.vii).

It is worth noting here that far from neglecting the influence of socioeconomic backgrounds, Shklovskij recognizes their centrality in the linguistic and literary field. However, he believes that aesthetic and non-aesthetic materials are to be considered as two distinct realms to be kept separate (Burbank and Steiner, 1978, p.xix). In this respect, he continues by arguing that,

As a literary critic, I have been engaged in the study of the internal laws that govern literature. If I may bring up the analogy of a factory, then I would say that neither the current state of the

world cotton market nor the politics of cotton trusts interest me. One thing alone concerns me: the number of strands that make up the cotton plant and the different ways of weaving them (Shklovskij, 2009, p.vii).

This is because in the Formalists' view, the works of art stand as autonomous objects, whose "literariness" could be perceived by the audience through specific "devices" (Holub, 2019, p.17). In direct contrast to formalism, Mukarovsky hence advocates that the aesthetic experience is inevitably conditioned and mediated by extra-literary factors (Burbank and Steiner, 1978, p.xix).

Despite both schools of criticism build the premises to reader-oriented approaches, one major theoretical issue seems to be the conception of the readers. In this respect, it may be worth quoting several different critics, to show how in these first studies, readers are considered as "universal, aggregate, hypothetical entities responding in unison" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.6). Particularly, Holub suggests that for Formalist critics, the reader is conceived as an "autonomous, idealized individual […] an abstract [and] ideal perceiver" (Holub, 2019, p.32). This is both the case with critics Jurij Tynjanov and Roman Ingarden: while for the first, the reader is in service to the literary system, and reduced to "the intersubjective basis of human consciousness" (Steiner, 2016, p.136); for the second, although different "concretizations" (Holub, 1987, p.25) of the same literary works are possible, the reader is conceived as an ideal individual, and the literary work as an "organic unity" whose structure is always invariable, hence, "scholars should be able to reach an agreement on the [audience's] reconstruction of the literary work of art" (Holub, 2019, pp.27-29).

The same tendency to universalization and generalization may be attributed to Structuralist critics as well. In this regard, although Mukarovsky succeeds in describing the interactions between certain populations of readers and particular texts (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.6), his "receiver" may be considered as a social product, a "social creature, a member of a collective" (Mukarovsky qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.32). In the same way, even though Vodicka's structuralist contribution defies Ingarden's theory about an ideal concretization of literary works (Holub, 1987, p.25), by affirming that the critic has the role of arbiter who determines what is the adequate "concretion" of a narrative text, readers' reception is idealized and considered as universal (Holub, 2019, p.35). With these examples, it has been possible to show that both formalist and structuralist theories provide a universalized conception of the readers, thereby making realistic findings about the reader-text relationship almost impossible, as they are too generalized.

To sum up, it may be stated that critics from Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism helped lay the foundations for reader-oriented literary studies, especially for their interest in readers' reception, and can thus be regarded as the precursors to reader-oriented theories. However, this subsection has also pointed out the main differences in their contributions: on the one hand, Shklovskij advocates for investigating the text-reader relationship through a "mechanistic" approach (Steiner, 2016, pp.46-48), based on the analysis of the text formal features; on the other, Mukarovsky's main concern is the dynamic text-reader relationship working through structures and signs, which are socially mediated (Holub, 2019, pp.31-35). Furthermore, if Formalists advocate for a separation between aesthetic and non-aesthetic materials, as this distinction is fundamental to perceive a work of art as artistic (Steiner, 2016, pp.49-50), Structuralists instead claim that these two spheres inevitably interact and influence each other (Burbank and Steiner, 1978, p.xix). In the end, it has been argued that although formalist and structuralist theories are built on different theoretical assumptions, they share the same main limitation, that is their conception of the readers, who are considered as a universal entity, whose response to narrative can be grasped through generalization.

2.2.2 The 1970s and 1980s: a general overview of Jauss, Iser and Fish

Even if it may be affirmed that the basis for the development of reader-oriented theory dates to the early 20th century with the works of Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralists (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.5-6; Holub, 2019, pp.13-15), this new approach to the study of narrative flourished more properly in the second half of the century, in the 1970s and 1980s (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2002, p.5). Particularly, critics seem to agree on this period, as it coincides with the publication of the works *The Act of Reading* (Iser, 1987), *The Implied Reader* (Iser, 1978), and *Toward An Aesthetic of Reception* (Jauss, 2005). In this regard, it may be stated that Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are generally attributed the greatest "impetus" to the development of this new literary criticism, therefore this subsection will focus on their contributions to this "turn toward the reader". Furthermore, whilst both Jauss and Iser are prominent figures in the German critical scene, Stanley Fish is to be considered one of the most important representatives of American reader-response theorists (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.8). Specifically, this chapter introduces Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Fish, 1980) which focuses on the interdependence between texts and readers (Fish, 1980, p.1).

Before investigating their methods and theoretical explanations in detail, it may be worth providing a general overview of their approaches, and a brief comparison. In this sense, it

may be affirmed that central to Jauss's theory, which was called the "aesthetics of reception" and was formulated in the late 1960s (Holub, 2019, p.57) are the readers' aesthetic responses to narrative texts (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.7). Particularly, his main concern in investigating the text-reader relationship is that of restoring the connection between literature and history, which he believes was undergoing a growing disregard at his time (Holub, 2019, pp.53-57). In this respect, Jauss advises that we should focus on the study of literary history, to find "the vital link between the artefact of the past and the concern of the present" (Holub, 2019, p.54). Indeed, in the critic's opinion, examining this "vital link" (ibid.) is fundamental to analyze the relationship between literary texts and their audience.

Similarly, in *The Act of Reading* (Iser, 1987), Iser focuses his attention on the text-reader relationship, and the act of reading as a process (Holub, 2019, p.82), hence his contribution to reader-oriented literary studies. Within this framework, he argues that,

> As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process. Reading is therefore the focal point of this study, for it sets in motion a whole chain of activities that depend both on the text and on the exercise of certain basic human faculties. Effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process (Iser, 1987, p.ix).

Specifically, in Barton's view, Iser believes that the text has "something there" to which readers have to respond (Barton, 2002, p.150). Hence, he adopts a transactional and dynamic view of the act of reading, as it may be stated that narrative works, far from being devoid of meaning,

> [They] 'mean' something which the interpreter is trying to discover, and is not an empty vessel into which meaning is poured. [...] The point is that we can conceive of a reader-response approach which concentrated on how we perceive the meaning of texts, yet did not deny that this meaning is already in some sense 'there' to be discovered (Barton, 2002, p.151).

However, his theory differs from Jauss's, as he expresses less concern for the relationship between history and literature. Particularly, he believes that to analyze the readers' responses, it is necessary to focus on the individual texts, rather than on the history of readers' aesthetic reception (Holub, 1987, pp.82-83; Iser, 1987, p.x;). Despite the difference in their respective methods, it is nevertheless worth noting that both critics may be considered as giving the greatest "impetus" to reader-oriented theories since they shift their focus of attention on the text-reader relationship.

Likewise, Fish claims that readers and texts are not separate entities and that the audience contributes to the process of meaning-making. In this sense, he contrasts the Formalists' idea that the text is the only creator of meaning, stating that,

> The argument of this piece is rather a negative one, directed to all those practitioners of stylistic who wish to go directly from a description of formal features to the specification of their meaning. My thesis was that such a move, because it was unconstrained by any principles, produces interpretations that are always arbitrary. […] Linguistics facts, I conceded, do have meaning, but the explanation for that meaning is not the capacity of syntax to express it but rather the ability of the reader to confer it (Fish, 1980, p.8).

Hence, it may be argued that similarly to Jauss and Iser, Fish's contributes to "the turn toward the reader" by saying that the text and the reader are not two stable and independent entities.

2.2.3 Robert Jauss: the problem of historicity and the horizon of expectations

Having provided a general outline and comparison of the two critics' main theoretical assumptions, this subsection will focus on Jauss's method and approach. Particularly, it will first explain that his theorization of the readers' processing of literary texts is based on the critique of previous Marxist and formalist theories, which failed to explain the connection between the aesthetic and historical spheres (Jauss, 2005, p.10). In this respect, it will then move on to argue that although both schools of criticism share a concern for the role of history in literature, their theories present several limitations on this issue. Especially, they do not acknowledge the readers' aesthetic reception in the dynamic process of meaning-making, and thus relegate the audience to play a passive role. In the end, this subsection will show that only by introducing the concept of the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22), it is possible to accomplish the integration of history and aesthetics and explain literary history as a process of dialogic mediation between author and readers over time.

As stated in the introduction above, it can be argued that at the center of Jauss's argument stands the critique of Marxist and formalist literary theories, which share a mechanistic methodology of investigation (Jauss, 2005, p.56). Nevertheless, it is necessary to assert that apart from their mechanistic approach, Jauss criticizes his predecessors for several other reasons, and it is precisely through this critique that he lays the foundations for his theorizing of the "aesthetics of reception" (Holub, 2019, p.57). Against this background, he argues that "the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an aporia, the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship" (Jauss, 2005, p.10). Thus, to better understand Jauss's theory on readers' responses, and its relationship with history, it could be worth examining the weaknesses he

identifies in his predecessors both in the connection between history and literature and in their conceptions of the role of the readers. In this sense, it may be useful to focus on the problematic relationship between history and literature first, and then move on to explain Jauss's new theorization of the role of the reading audience, because it is through the examination of literary history that the critic builds the premises to his "aesthetics of reception" (Holub, 2019, p.57).

Precisely, it may be affirmed that *Toward An Aesthetic of Reception* (Jauss, 2005), which was first published in 1981, opens with Jauss's concern for the crisis in the relationship between history and literature, as he argues that,

> In our time literary history has increasingly fallen into disrepute, and not at all without reason. The history of this worthy discipline in the last one hundred and fifty years unmistakably describes the path of a steady decline. (Jauss, 2005, pp.3).

Nevertheless, before stating the main reasons for his concern, it is important to clarify that although he claims that this "decline" (ibid.) is most clearly seen in Marxist and formalist theories (Jauss, 2005, p.9), Jauss does not deny their efforts to explain this complex connection. As for Marxist critics, the interest in the relationship between these two disciplines stems from the fact that they conceive literary texts as a social and historical product, since,

> The history of literature, like that of art, can no longer maintain the 'appearance of its independence' when one has realized that its production presupposes the material production and social praxis of human beings. […] Thus literature and art can be viewed as a process 'only in relation to the praxis of historical human beings', in their 'social function' (Jauss, 2005, p.10).

Similarly, Formalists argue that "literariness" is inevitably influenced by history (Steiner, 2016, p.219), as it may be stated that,

> When the work of art is 'perceived against the background of other works of art and in association with them', as Viktor Shklovsky formulates it, the interpretation of the work of art must also take into consideration its relation to other forms that existed before it did. With this the Formalist school began to seek its own way back into history (Jauss, 2005, p.17).

In general terms, it is therefore undeniable that Jauss recognizes that both schools of criticism share a concern for the role of history in artistic production, even though he expresses his worry about a crisis in conceiving their relationship.

Despite their interest in the subject, Jauss in fact claims that from a theoretical point of view, Marxist and formalist theories just contribute to widening the gap between history and

literature (Jauss, 2005, p.9). This seems to be for two main reasons: in the first place, the arguments of formalist scholars as for the relationship between history and literature are contradictory, hence the connection of these two disciplines may appear unconvincing; in the second place, Jauss believes that both Marxists and Formalists fail in explaining the author-reader relationship, for the limited role they give to the audience. Thereby, for the sake of clarity, it may be necessary to examine these two reasons separately, as each of them is worth being investigated thoroughly.

With regards to Jauss's acknowledgment of the troublesome nature of the formalist critics' relationship with history, it is worth pointing out that at first, Formalism negated the historicity of literature, which was later restored with an extension of their method (Jauss, 2005, p.17). Due to their great concern for the formal characteristics of literary texts, it is inevitable that at the beginning of their theoretical premises,

> The process of perception in art appears as an end in itself, the 'tangibility of form' as its specific characteristic and the 'discovery of the operation' as the principle of a theory. This theory made art criticism into a rational method in conscious renunciation of historical knowledge (Jauss, 2005, pp.16-17).

Thus, it is possible to state that even if formalist critics later reconsidered their initial "renunciation of historical knowledge" (ibid.), their avowal of the prominent role of historicity in fiction has undergone considerable debate. In addition, Steiner analyzes the Formalists' internal contradictions in the study of the "diachrony" (Steiner, 2016, p.55) of literary texts. Particularly, critics from the same school seem to have opposite opinions about the nature of the relationship between history and aesthetic reception: whilst Shklovskij argues that it is the historical evolution of the works of art that affects the reader's perception, Veselovskij conversely believes that it is the progressing of lives, that is, "the developments in social life and the corresponding transformation in the human spirits", that changes the way we perceive a work of art (Steiner, 2016, pp.55-56). These examples illustrate how in formalist theories, the notion of the "diachrony" (Steiner, 2016, p.55) of literary texts does not seem altogether consistent. In general, it may be affirmed that although Jauss acknowledges the importance Formalism gives to the relationship between history and literature, he also recognizes the contradictions of the formalist school in explaining how historicity may affect the readers' aesthetic reception. This is due both to their initial unwillingness to recognize the importance of historicity in the readers' aesthetic response and to the much-debated concept of the "diachrony" (Steiner, 2016, p.55) of narrative fiction.

Moving on to examine the second main reason why Jauss believes that the connection between literature and history is not analyzed exhaustively by both Marxist and formalist critics, it may be stated that it is their failure to understand the relationship between authors and readers. In this regard, he argues that,

> Literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject – through the interaction of author and public (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58).

For this reason, the critique he moves to previous aesthetic paradigms is that,

> [Marxist and Formalist methods] conceive the *literary fact* within the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and of representation. In doing so, they deprive literature of a dimension that inalienably belongs to its aesthetic character as well as to its social function: the dimension of its reception and influence (Jauss, 2005, p.17).

Thus, Jauss believes that the main weakness in the explanation of the historicity of literature shared by both schools of criticism is their limiting interpretation of "the interaction of author and public" (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58) which considers the reading process just as production and representation (Jauss, 2005, p.17).

Furthermore, the lack of consideration given to the readers' aesthetic reception is inevitably reflected in the minimal role Marxist and formalist critics give to the audience (Jauss, 2005, p.17). In this regard, on the one hand, Marxism's interest in the readers is based on the analysis of their social positions and "the relationship between superstructure and basis in the literary work", that is, between "the cultural world of art and ideas" and "the material means of production" (Jauss, 2005, pp.18-19). On the other hand, as for the formalist conception of the audience, it may be asserted that they conceive readers as philologists, whose role is only to discover and reflect on artistic devices (Jauss, 2005, p.18). Steiner clearly explains this when he states,

> At the time the work is produced there seems to be no doubt as to its literariness […] Yet at the moment the readers cease to be a part of the context from which the work arose Tynjanov loses interest in them (Steiner, 2016, p.137).

Overall, Jauss advocates for the end of previous aesthetic paradigms and conceptions of the text-reader relationship, since they either regard the readers as the result of social struggles or merely as tools to analyze literature, and thus "lack the reader in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge: as the addressee for whom the literary work is primarily destined" (Jauss, 2005, p.19).

Having stated the main weaknesses of both Marxism and Formalism, the integration of history and aesthetics is accomplished by the introduction of "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22), a concept that seems to overcome all the limitations of previous forms of criticism. This term was first used by Husserl to explain the consciousness's perception of the world (Jauss, 2005, p.xii), as for the literary texts instead, "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22) may be defined as "an intersubjective system or structure of expectations" (Holub, 2019, p.59) which is "formed by a convention of genre, style, or form" (Jauss, 2005, p.22). In this sense, Jauss employs it to describe what the audience expects from narrative texts, according to their historical and background life experiences, and the confirmations or disappointments of these expectations (Jauss, 2005, p.xii). In contrast to his predecessors, Jauss hence suggests reconsidering the role of the readers in the process of literary production and claims that "in the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history" (Jauss, 2005, p.18). Furthermore, since the readers' expectations change over time, owing to different historical and background conditions, it may therefore be assumed that the essence of a literary work is not static, but has its own "historical life" (ibid.). Jauss clearly explains this, when he says,

> The first reception of a work by the reader includes his test of the aesthetic value in comparison with works already read. The obvious historical implication is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident (Jauss, 2005, p.58).

Thus, the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22) may be interpreted as the key concept Jauss introduces to explain the dialogic text-reader relationship, which in his view, is inevitably subjected to history, for the literariness of the texts is also conceived diachronically in relation to those who chronologically preceded.

To sum up, this subsection has focused on Jauss's "aesthetics of reception" (Holub, 2019, p.57) and shown how he introduces the concept of "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22) to explain the relationship between history and literature. Specifically, he claims that readers approach literary texts with their system of references (Jauss, 2005, p.22), which is inevitably influenced by their historical backgrounds. In this respect, Jauss believes that Marxist and formalist theories lead to a crisis in literary history, as they do not emphasize the active role of the audience in the reading process, hence they contribute to widening the gap between history and literature. In contrast, he suggests that it is only through the interaction

between authors and readers that literature obtains the character of a historical process (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58).

2.2.4 Iser's intentional sentence correlates and the implied reader

After having illustrated the main points of Jauss's theory, it is necessary to examine Iser's, since he also contributes to the greatest "impetus" to the development of reader-response criticism. Particularly, this subsection will first focus on the "virtuality" (Iser, 1987, p.21) Iser attributes to literary texts, and the main theoretical assumptions that he derives from formalist critic Roman Ingarden, such as the "intentional sentence correlates" (Iser, 1987, p.110). Then, this subsection will explain Iser's concept of "defamiliarization" and its centrality in giving a dynamic and temporal character to literary texts (Iser, 1987, p.287). In the end, the concept of the "implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27) will be introduced, to represent an audience that embodies both the structures of the literary text and the effect that they can exercise.

To begin with, it may be affirmed that similarly to Jauss, who states that "a literary work is not an object that stands by itself" (Jauss, 2005, p.45), Iser claims that the text is "no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" (Iser, 1987, p.10). Hence, he also shifts the focus of his attention from a "mechanistic" (Steiner, 2016, pp.46) analysis of narrative to the text-reader relationship, and argues that,

> The literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization, but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism (Iser, 1976, p.21).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that to explain this "virtual" and dynamic interaction (ibid.), Iser draws the main points of his theory from formalist critic Roman Ingarden, especially for his idea of the "concretizations", namely the unconscious initiatives taken by the readers to fill out the "indeterminacies" (Holub, 1987, pp.25-26), or "unwritten part[s] of a text", that require the readers' creative participation (Iser, 1978, p.275). Specifically, according to Ingarden, literary works are characterized by "intentional sentence correlates" (Iser, 1987, p.110), this means that sentences always "aim at something beyond themselves" and "open up a particular horizon" (Iser, 1978, p.278). Hence, to reach their semantic fulfillment, they need the interplay of the readers (Iser, 1987, pp.109-111). Overall, it may be stated that in contrast to the formalist "mechanistic" approach (Steiner, 2016, pp.46), which regarded

literary texts as "autonomous" entities that could be scientifically scrutinized (Holub, 2019, p.17), in Iser's view, the literary work is neither the text itself nor the reader's aesthetic response to it but stands "virtually" between the two (Iser, 1987, p.21). For the purposes of his investigation, he, therefore, draws the key terms and concepts of his theory from Ingarden, who claims that aesthetic objects have a "correlative" in the mind of the readers (Iser, 1987, p.110).

Another point of contact between Iser and Ingarden is the central role they give to image-building. In this respect, Ingarden claims that an essential part of the "concretization" process is the role of phantasy, since "filling in indeterminate places requires creativity" (Holub, 1987, p.25). Likewise, Iser stresses the role of images when he states that "the instructions provided by a text stimulate mental images, which animate what is linguistically implied, though not said" (Iser, 1987, p.36). In this respect, it is necessary to state that Iser and Ingarden share the belief that there are variations in image-building, as they are also subjected to personal circumstances and experiences (Holub, 1987, p.26; Iser, 1987, p.37): "the fact that the reader's role can be fulfilled in different ways, according to historical or individual circumstances, is an indication that the structure of a text allows for different ways of fulfillment" (Iser, 1987, p.37). However, it is worth underlining that both scholars believe that texts impose some limitations on the readers' creative "concretizations" (Holub, 2019, p.25), so that they are prevented from becoming "too blurred and hazy" (Iser, 1978, p.276). Particularly, Ingarden claims that even though it is possible to have different "concretizations" of a literary work (Holub, 2019, p.27), the sequence of sentences "point the way toward what is to come" which is somehow "prestructured by [their] actual content" (Iser, 1987, p.110). Similarly, Iser claims that the "determinacy" of a text is given by its "repertoire", namely "all the familiar territory within the text", which may take the form of "references to earlier works, or to social or historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (Iser, 1987, p.69). In general, it may be stated that both Iser and Ingarden believe that image-building is fundamental in the reading process and is subjected to variations according to the readers' personal experiences and circumstances. Nevertheless, the "indeterminacy" of readers' fulfillment of texts stands in sharp contrast with the "determinacy" of the text structures, therefore it is possible to set some boundaries for the audience's interpretations (Holub, 2019, pp.27-29).

Having explained the foundations of Iser's approach, it is important to introduce another key concept of his theory, that is "defamiliarization" (Iser, 1987, p.287). In this regard, similarly

to Shklovskij, Iser believes that it is the process of "defamiliarization" that gives the work of art its aesthetic nature (ibid.), although it may be stated that there are significant differences in the two critics' conceptions of this literary device. To explain how "defamiliarization" (ibid.) works according to Iser, it is necessary to explain that in his view, the audience's "concretizations" (Holub, 2019, p.25) of literary texts take place within a consistent framework, through which readers make sense of the world (Iser, 1987, p.40). This means that following the signs unfolded by texts, readers try to organize them in a coherent way (Holub, 2019, p.90), depending on the audience's "particular history of experience", "consciousness" and "outlook" (Iser, 1987, p.284), and create an illusion which makes the text readable (Iser, 1987, p.285). However, the possible "concretizations" (Holub, 2019, p.25) of a text are much more than the single consistent interpretation of the reader. In this sense, Iser advocates that,

> At the same time, this consistency conflicts with many other possibilities of fulfillment it seeks to exclude, with the result that the configurative meaning is always accompanied by 'alien associations' that do not fit in with the illusions formed. [...] As the formation of illusions is constantly accompanied by 'alien associations' which cannot be made consistent with the illusions, the reader constantly has to lift the restrictions he places on the 'meaning of the text (Iser, 1978, p.287).

The scholar refers to this process of "alien associations" (ibid.) as "defamiliarization", since the "repertoire", namely "the familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts" (Iser, 1978, p.288), becomes unfamiliar, breaking the illusions of consistency previously created. Moreover, since "the reader will still strive, even if unconsciously to fit everything together in a consistent pattern" (Iser, 1978, p.283), Iser claims that reading, rather than being a linear activity, is a dynamic and temporal process based on "illusion-forming" and "illusion breaking" (Iser, 1978, p.289). In general, whilst for Shklovskij "defamiliarization" is a literary device that helps the readers distinguish between "automatized" objects and aesthetic ones, and thus determines the "literariness" of a work of art (Steiner, 2016, p.136), in Iser's view, "defamiliarization" is a device that participates in the dynamic process of reading by breaking illusions and leading to the creation of new ones. In this sense, the main role of "defamiliarization" (Iser, 1976, p.287) does not seem that of separating the "automatized" and aesthetic spheres (Steiner, 2016, p.136), but rather that of giving a dynamic and temporal character to literary texts.

So far, this subsection has outlined the main theoretical assumptions on which Iser's theorization of the text-reader relationship is based. Nevertheless, nothing has been said about

his conception of the reader yet, which is worth being examined thoroughly. In this sense, it is necessary to state that Iser employs the notion of the "implied" or "phenomenological" reader (Iser, 1987, p.27), to which he devotes a whole collection of essays, *The Implied Reader* (Iser, 1978). To explain this concept, it may first be stated that the "implied reader" (ibid.) is neither a "real" nor an "ideal" reader, but rather "a transcendental model" (Iser, 1987, p.38). With regards to "real" and "ideal" readers, Iser believes that both concepts present several limitations: whilst the first is hard to reconstruct, especially going further back in time, the latter presupposes that the audience's response to literary texts should be totally predictable and universalized (Iser, 1987, pp.28-29). Conversely, Iser's reader has its roots "firmly planted in the structure of the text" (Iser, 1987, p.34) and is supposed to fully understand the meaning already inscribed in a text, through "gap-filling activities activated by the text's indeterminacies" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.7). To provide a definition of the "implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27), it can be stated that "the term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (Iser qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.84). Therefore, it may be affirmed that to describe the role of the audience, Iser is not interested in drawing any empirical or ideal evidence, as his "implied reader" is both part of the text and "embodies all the predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (ibid.).`

2.2.5 Fish's experiment on the interpretive community

This last subsection briefly introduces Fish's opinion regarding the relationship between texts and readers. In this sense, it will first explain that the scholar denies the formalist conception according to which meaning is purely a property of texts, and will then move on to illustrate the experiment he conducted to validate his hypothesis.

Similarly to both Jauss and Iser, Fish is interested in the text-reader relationship and believes that meaning develops in a dynamic relationship between texts and readers. In this sense, he contrasts the idea that meaning is merely embedded in texts (Fish, 1980, pp.8-9) and states that,

> If meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out: but if meaning develops, and if it develops, in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgements, and assumptions, these activities (the things the reader does) are not merely instrumental, or mechanical, but essential (Fish, 1980, pp.2-3).

In general, it can be stated that like Jauss and Iser, Fish believes that the meaning of texts is created through interaction with the audience, rather than being just interpreted by them.

To validate this hypothesis, the scholar conducted an experiment in 1971. His aim was to show that the meaning is a property "neither of fixed or stable texts nor of free or independent readers but of interpretive communities" (Fish, 1980, p.321). In this experiment, he asked the students from one of his literary classes to interpret some random names written on the blackboard and told them that it was a religious poem (Fish, 1980, p.325). In this way, Fish affirmed he had shown that "the act of recognition is not triggered by formal features, but it is rather a source of formal features" (Fish, 1980, pp.325-326), since the students gave different interpretations of the text as a poem starting from the recognition that it was a poem, rather than from its formal features (ibid.). Furthermore, after conducting the experiment, the scholar coined the term "interpretive community" referring to those readers who share the same interpretive strategies, like the students attending his lecture (Fish, 1980, p.14). In Fish's view, this definition of the reading audience is not subjective, since the readers' consciousness is shaped by their social and cultural background: for example, his students were all members of the literary community (Fish, 1980, p.332). Overall, with this experiment Fish tried to validate the hypothesis that meaning is created in a dynamic relationship between texts and readers, and it is not merely embedded in texts.

To conclude, it may be affirmed that both Jauss, Iser and Fish contribute to the new "turn toward the reader", although the methods the scholars use to face this shift of perspective differ significantly. As for Jauss, he believes that to understand the relationship between the "producing" and "consuming" subjects (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58) it is first necessary to restore the connection between literature and history. In this sense, he introduces the concept of "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22) and states that the audience's aesthetic response to literary texts changes over time, as their expectations depend on different historical, social, and background life experiences. Instead, Iser seems less concerned with the historical character of literature and claims that the text-reader relationship is based on "intentional sentence correlates" (Iser, 1987, p.110), since the work of art is based on a "virtual" (Iser, 1987, p.21) and dynamic interaction which unfolds itself over time through a succession of illusions. Furthermore, it may be said that the two critics have a different conception of the reading audience. Whilst Jauss defines the reader primarily as a "consuming subject" (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58), whose role is that of testing the aesthetic value of a work of art (Holub, 2019, p.58), Iser's "implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27) is a textual construct who embodies the potentialities and actualizations of the aesthetic effect of a literary text. In the end, it can be said that Fish contributes to "the turn toward the reader"

as well, since he coins the term "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980, p.14) to indicate a community of readers who share the same interpretive strategies to create the meaning of narrative texts.

2.3 Investigating postmodernist literature with a reader-oriented approach

Having outlined the history of reader-oriented theories, for the purpose of my research, it is now the time to investigate their relationship with postmodernism. To do so, this third and last section will be divided into two subsections. Specifically, the first one will examine the main parallelisms between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism, as they seem to have developed in the same period, and to share some theoretical assumptions. Nevertheless, Hutcheon believes that postmodernism marks the emergence of new features in the literary field, which were neglected by reader-oriented critics (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.78). Hence, the following subsection will investigate Hutcheon's statement more thoroughly in comparison to Jauss's, Iser's and Fish's main theoretical points.

2.3.1 Parallelisms between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism

The aim of this subsection is to explore the parallelism between postmodernist fiction and reader-oriented criticism, which will be based on two different arguments. In this sense, the first will focus on the temporal synchronicity between the two phenomena, drawing evidence from Frederic Jameson and Linda Hutcheon, whose relevance for postmodernist studies has already been introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Then, this subsection will move on to analyze the parallelism from a literary criticism's perspective, as critical theory and literature of a certain period appear to share the same theoretical assumptions (Creighton, 1982, p.216). However, after having explained these parallelisms, it will be shown that Hutcheon denies such an obvious connection between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism, as in her opinion postmodernism marks the emergence of something new in literary theory.

To begin with, it may be affirmed that reader-oriented theories and postmodernism developed in the same period, as "the turn toward the reader" received its greatest impetus in the post-war years, while postmodernist studies were developing and gaining prominence (Creighton, 1982, p.217). Furthermore, this argument is supported by several lines of evidence, since notable critics of postmodernity, like Frederic Jameson and Linda Hutcheon, confirm the synchronicity of these two phenomena. Specifically, as argued in the previous chapter of this thesis, while contextualizing postmodernism, Jameson traces its origins back to the end of the 1950s or early 1960s (Jameson, 1997, p.11). Drawing evidence from Hutcheon is instead less

straightforward because she does not provide a precise temporal signposting for this cultural phenomenon, as she believes it defies any generalizations (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, pp.3-4). Nevertheless, by advocating that postmodernism is "a thing of the past", belonging to the previous century (Hutcheon, 2002, p.164), which scholars struggle to locate chronologically, "after 1945? 1968? 1970? 1980?" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.3), she implicitly provides an approximate span of time to locate it, that is, the second half of the 20th century. Overall, it has been shown that it is possible to draw a parallelism between reader-oriented theories and postmodernism since several sources suggest that they developed synchronically.

In addition, it may be stated that the same parallelism could be drawn from a critical and literary perspective as well. In this respect, for Creighton, the parallels between New Criticism and modernist fiction on the one hand, and reader-oriented criticism and postmodernist fiction on the other, have never received sufficient credit, although each couple developed in a "symbiotic relationship" (Creighton, 1982, pp.216-219). This is precisely the reason why, it is possible to argue that "as post-modernism developed out of modernism, so too did reader-response criticism developed in response to New Criticism" (Creighton, 1982, p.216).

Furthermore, Creighton's parallelisms are supported by several arguments. Firstly, she affirms that while modernist fiction and New Criticism developed in the first half of the 20th century, postmodernist literature and reader-oriented theories pertain to its last decades (Creighton, 2016, p.216), confirming the temporal correspondence already argued in the paragraph above. Her second argument is instead based on a literary and critical basis. Precisely, she says that "critical theory and literature of roughly the same period often share common epistemological assumptions" (ibid.), likewise, Hutcheon says that "it would not be at all surprising that the art of a given period might share the preoccupations of the theory" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.78). Both quotations imply that similar features may be detected in each couple. In this respect, central to this theoretical argument is the role of the audience, for both postmodernist fiction and reader-oriented criticism mark a shift of perspective toward the readers, which was neglected by modernism and New Criticism (Creighton, 1982, pp.216-219). For this reason, it has been explained why postmodernist literature and reader-oriented theory, like modernist fiction and New Criticism, may be connected not only by temporal signposting, but also by shared theoretical assumptions.

However, what is surprising is that later in her work, Hutcheon appears to deny such a direct connection between postmodernist literature and reader-oriented theories. Particularly, she states,

> I would only stress that it was artistic as well as critical romanticism and modernism that did much to bring about that alteration of focus from author to text to reader, and that postmodern art, as well as theory, is perhaps now in a position to show us the next stage (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004).

In the following section, she again underlines that with postmodernism, "we have perhaps moved beyond formalism and even beyond reader response theory per se" (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.86). It can therefore be assumed that although she believes that postmodernist art and reader-oriented criticism share some theoretical assumptions (Hutcheon, [1984] 2004, p.78), postmodernism marks the emergence of something new in critical theory. Thereby, these statements inevitably have some implications in the investigation of the parallelism between postmodernist fiction and reader-oriented criticism, as their connection is less obvious than it may seem.

2.3.2 Limitations of reader-oriented criticism considering postmodernist theory

Having shown how Hutcheon defies the parallelisms between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism, this subsection will investigate the relationship between these two phenomena in detail, making comparisons and contrasts. In the first place, it will be argued that postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism share some similarities, such as the challenge to the "analytico-referential discourse" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74), and the shift of the focus of attention toward the readers. Secondly, it will be explained that Hutcheon believes that postmodernism goes beyond reader-oriented theories as it questions the authoritative power of the "producer" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.75), and considers the author, or narrator, as an "enunciating subject" in the shared context of enunciation (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74). However, I will then highlight some fallacies in the critic's argument since both Jauss's and Iser's theories already present some of the features that Hutcheon claims should be attributed to postmodernism only. Nevertheless, this subsection will show that although Iser's theory is the one who seems to embody all the characteristics of the postmodernist shift toward the reader, it lacks a workable and empirical methodology as with his conception of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27), Iser cannot avoid universalization and generalization. In the end, it will explain the reasons why also Fish's empirical method to validate the interaction between

texts and "interpretive community" may be considered as "flawed" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.8), due to a lack of reliable and quantitative data.

From an epistemological point of view, both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernist fiction may be regarded as challenging the conception of the literary text as an "analytico-referential discourse" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74), which can be defined as

> The coincidence of the order of language (and other signifying systems) with the logical ordering of 'reason' and with the structural organization of a world given as exterior to both these orders (Reiss qtd. in Hutcheon, 2004, p.74).

In this sense, reader-oriented criticism questions previous formalist and structuralist theories, which consider narratives either as objects to be mechanically analyzed (Holub, 2019, p.17), or as structures whose "concretizations" depend on social factors (Holub, 1987, pp.25-26). As explained in the previous chapter, in postmodernism, this challenge is similarly characterized by "broad skepticism", "subjectivism", and "a general suspicion towards reason" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022), hence postmodernist art is generally ambivalent and open to interpretation (Hutcheon, 2003, p.206), for it aims at subverting objectivity (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74). This is exemplified by the multiple endings of the postmodern novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles (Creighton, 1982, p.219), when the omniscient narrator unexpectedly appears in the plot, breaking the conventional boundaries given to his role, and sets his watch fifteen minutes back to replay the final scene (Creighton, 1982, p.222). Particularly, these multiple endings act as "mirrors that, taken together, continually shift our perspective, forcing us to admit that no single aesthetic reality will ever be truly mimetic, truly representative of the complexity of human life" (Scruggs, 1985, p.99). Therefore, it may be affirmed that both postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism feature a refusal of the "analytico-referential discourse" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74) based on logical and objective assumptions, in favour of subjectivism, ambiguity, and skepticism.

Furthermore, it could be stated that this refusal is due to the emphasis of both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernism on the importance of the readers in the process of meaning-making, thus undermining the notion of works of art as "autonomous objects" (Holub, 2019, p.17), which are "self-contained" and "self-reflexive" (Creighton, 1982, p.222). As argued in the previous section, critics of reader-oriented theories, like Jauss and Iser, generally consider the reading process as a dynamic transaction, in which texts and readers are in dialogue (Barton, 2002, p.150). In their views, the text is no longer considered an independent entity, as the meaning is created through the interaction with the audience (Iser, 1987, p.ix). In

postmodernism, this has resulted in a shift of interest from an "analytico-referential discourse" to "the act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74). Specifically, Hutcheon explains that in postmodernity,

> Science, philosophy, and art (having all functioned in such a way as to suppress the act and responsibility of the enunciation) are now themselves becoming the sites of the surfacing of that very repressed practice (ibid.).

As for the role of the readers, it is also worth noting that "the act of enunciation" (ibid.) always includes a "producer" and a "receiver" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.75). Therefore, Creighton affirms that in postmodernist novels, "the reader is drawn back into the fictional transaction, invited to share in the construction of imaginative possibilities" (Creighton, 1982, p.219). In a similar way, Hutcheon advocates for "an overt textual emphasis on the narrating 'I' and the reading 'you'" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.76), inviting the audience to participate in the text's discursive process:

> Certainly many postmodern novels would support such a view of the importance of the act of reading. Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* thematizes the quality and mode of different kinds of readers […] and their demands upon a narrator: "You expect something from me too, don't you?" he asks (Hutcheon, 2004, p.77).

What is important to underline here is that reader-oriented criticism and postmodernism appear to share the same theoretical assumption regarding the text-reader relationship, that is, reading happens as a dynamic and discursive transaction between texts and audience.

Although both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernist fiction advocate that narrative should be considered as an act of enunciation, specifically a dialogic transaction between texts and readers, Hutcheon asserts that postmodernism overcomes reader-oriented criticism because it moves the focus of the attention to "the entire act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.86). It is worth highlighting here the adjective "entire" (ibid.), as the critic states that,

> Postmodernism suggests that there is more to it than this. The enunciation requires more than just text and receiver in order to activate the dynamic process of meaning-generating (Metscher 1972 and 1975). The text has a context, and form is given sense perhaps as much through the receiver's inference of an act of production as by the actual act of perception (Hutcheon, 2004, p.80).

This quote shows how for "the entire act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.86), Hutcheon means not only the discursive text-reader relationship, which has been already discussed by reader-oriented theories, but also the influence of the producer, who is "inferred by the reader from his/her positioning as an enunciating entity" (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.80-81). Furthermore,

the producer plays a pivotal role in shaping the "shared enunciative context" of the dialogic transaction, which "does not ignore the social, historical or ideological dimensions of understanding" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.82). In general, it seems that by neglecting the role of the producer as "inferred by the reader" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.81), reader-oriented theories have failed to explain literary texts as "communicative acts", which are complete as they are set in their context of enunciation (Hutcheon, 2004, p.82).

In this respect, to operate the shift of attention to "the entire act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.86), Hutcheon suggests conceiving the author no longer as a person (Hutcheon, 2003, p.81), but rather as "the enunciating subject as discursive activity" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74). To explain this new definition of the subject, it is necessary to state that,

> Postmodernism highlights discourse or 'language put into action' (Benveniste 1971, 223), language operating as communication between two agents […] the enunciation, the communicative act, is, in fact, the moment of the construction of the subject in language (Hutcheon, 2004, p.82).

Furthermore, it is worth noting how she clearly explains that

> In literary terms, the much celebrated and lamented death of the author has not meant an end to novelists, as we all know. It has meant a questioning of authority or, in William Gass's amusing terms, a decline in 'theological power, as if Zeus were stripped of his thunderbolts and swans, perhaps residing on Olympus still, but now living in a camper and cooking with propane. He is, but he is no longer a god' (1985, 265) (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190).

It is interesting to underline here that the "questioning of authority" or "death of the author" (ibid.), resulting in "the enunciating subject as discursive activity" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74), is part of the general postmodernist loss of a centre (Hutcheon, 2004, p.12), in contrast to the centralization and hierarchization of modernist society (Hutcheon, 2004, p.41). Hence, authors and narrators lose their discursive authority, as they exist in "a fabric of relations" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.83). Overall, this rethinking of the role of the author, perceived as a "discursive activity" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74), marks the postmodernist shift of attention to the "entire act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.86) in which the meaning is grasped in relation to the context of communication (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.81-82).

Having explained the reasons why in Hutcheon's view postmodernism overcomes the limitations of reader-oriented approaches, it is worth highlighting some fallacies in her arguments. In this respect, it may be affirmed that as a representative of reader-oriented criticism, Jauss expresses some concern for the process of literary production and the context of communication. Particularly, as shown above, the critic considers the relationship between

authors and readers as one between "producing" and "consuming" subjects (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58). Hence, Hutcheon's disregard for reader-oriented criticism's interpretation of "the dynamic process of meaning-making" as a transaction limited to just readers and texts (Hutcheon, 2004, p.80) may appear unconvincing. Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to argue that Jauss does not contemplate the context of the enunciation in his theory, since he advocates that the interaction between texts and readers, and thus between "producing" and "consuming" subjects (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.58), is historically mediated. In this respect, he argues that "according to this theory [the aesthetics of reception] the essence of the artwork is based on its historicity, that is, from the effect resulting from its continuous dialogue with the public" (Jauss qtd. in Holub, 2019, p.72). Furthermore, it is possible to state that Jauss examines not only the influence of history on literary texts but also that of the social context, as he affirms,

> The gap between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, can be bridged if literary history does not simply describe the process of general history in the reflection of its works one more time, but rather when it discovers in the course of 'literary evolution' that properly socially formative function that belongs to literature (Jauss, 2005, p.45).

In general, it is necessary to point out that Jauss does not consider the reading process as a transaction just between readers and texts, as he acknowledges the importance of production; furthermore, he believes that the "shared enunciative context" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.82) plays a pivotal role in literary meaning-making, as narrative texts are primarily social and historical phenomena.

Instead, one point in which Hutcheon's considerations of the limitations of reader-oriented criticism are valid is that in Jauss's theory there seems to be no "questioning of authority" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190). Specifically, the author appears in a position of superiority over his readers, as texts "exist only as always-already organized or activated to be read in certain ways" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.79), thus under the producer's control. In this sense, he affirms that,

> The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals, and which also can be described by a textual linguistics (Jauss, 2005, p.23)

In general, by stating that the readers' aesthetic reception is "directed" by "specific instructions" (ibid.), it may be implied that the author has the control over its creation and the audience's way of responding to it.

Furthermore, it could be argued that Jauss's theory has several other limitations. In this sense, scholars generally agree on the fact that he lacks a workable methodology (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.7; Holub, 2019, pp.59-63). Specifically, major issues are aroused by his effort to objectify "the horizon of expectations" through specific factors (Jauss, 2005, p.22). This attempt is explained by the following passage:

> For the specific disposition toward a particular work that the author anticipates from the audience can also be arrived at, even if explicit signals are lacking, through three generally presupposed factors: first, through familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre; second, through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings; and third, through the opposition between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language, which is always available to the reflective reader during the reading as a possibility of comparison (Jauss, 2005, p.24).

Before discussing the objectification of "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22), it is worth underlining that like in the previous quote, by affirming that the author can "anticipate" the audience's response (Jauss, 2005, p.24), Jauss puts him in a position of superiority over his audience. However, this method of investigation may be problematic, since it is difficult to judge "familiar norms" (ibid.) of past works from a present perspective (Holub, 2019, p.60). This is because, to judge them in an objective way, critics and readers should be asked to ignore their "historical situatedness" (ibid.). Moreover, analyzing readers' aesthetic responses by objectifying their "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, p.22), he realizes a purely speculative and intuitive research, in which reader's processing is idealized and universalized (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.7). Overall, in the light of Hutcheon's considerations, it seems that Jauss's "aesthetics of reception" (Holub, 2019, p.57) presents major issues, due to the objectification of "the horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 2005, 22), which leads to a generalization of readers' responses to literary texts, and to a primacy of the author in the process of meaning-making.

So far, this section has focused on Jauss as a representative of reader-oriented approaches. Nevertheless, it may be worth examining Iser as well, and determine whether Hutcheon's statement about the limitations of reader-oriented criticism in the light of postmodernism may work for his theory as well. In this sense, I suggest focusing on the "death of the author" first (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190), since differently from Jauss's, in Iser's theory it is possible to see a "questioning of the authority" (ibid.). In the first place, this "questioning of authority" (ibid.)

may be illustrated when he clearly states that he disagrees with the belief that the audience's aesthetic response can be totally grasped, defined, or imagined by the author. To do so, he quotes critic Wayne Booth and says,

> 'It is only as I read that I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the author's. Regardless of my own beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader (Booth, 1963)' […] One wonders whether such an agreement can really work (Iser, 1987, p.37).

Therefore, it could be argued that Iser questions the authors' centralized control over their creations, since they cannot "anticipate" (Jauss, 2005, p.24), or imagine, the audience's fulfilment of the text's "indeterminacies" (Holub, 1987, pp.25-26), although it has already been explained that they are somehow prevented to deviate too far from the prestructured content (Iser, 1978, p.276). Furthermore, he questions the centralization of the author, when he says that he agrees with Sterne's statement:

> If the author existed all on his own, he could write as much as he liked, but his work would never see the light of day as an object, and he would have to lay down his pen in despair. The process of writing, however, includes as a dialectic correlative the process of reading, and these two interdependent acts require two different active people' (Sterne qtd. in Iser, 1976, p.108).

Therefore, in contrast to Hutcheon's argument that postmodernism overcomes reader-oriented criticism as it introduces a "questioning of the authority" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190), the undermining of the centralization of the author may be seen also in Iser's theory.

In addition, it would be inaccurate to affirm that Iser does not consider the author as an "enunciating subject" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74) located in a situational context of production (Iser, 1987, p.60). To explain this, it is necessary to state that the scholar believes that the language of literature resembles that of "the illocutionary act" (Iser, 1987, p.83), even if he notices consistent differences between the two in the mode of application (Iser, 1987, p.60). Particularly, he claims that the two methods of communication differ since,

> Saying something is never merely saying something, but is saying something with a certain tune and at a proper cue while executing the appropriate business, the sounded utterance is only a salience of what is going on when we talk. […] And what is meant can never be totally translated into what is said, the utterance is bound to contain implications, which in turn necessitate interpretation (Iser, 1987, p.59).

From this citation, it may seem that Iser believes that the difference between literary texts and the "illocutionary act" is that the first are devoid of the "conventions and procedures" of the situational context of production (Iser, 1987, p.60), which in Hutcheon's view is fundamental

to the dynamic process of meaning-making (Hutcheon, 2004, p.80). Nevertheless, to contrast this apparent discrepancy, Iser later states that,

> The symbols of language do not have any empirical reality, but they do have a representative function. As this does not relate to an existing object, what is represented must be language itself. This means that literary speech represents ordinary speech, for it uses the same symbolic mode, but as it is without any of the empirical references, it must increase the density of instructions to be imparted by the symbolic arrangement (Iser, 1987, p.68).

Hence, this quote underlines that far from being devoid of a situational context of production (Iser, 1987, p.60), literature conveys this context in a different way, since the only means used by narrative texts is language and its power of symbolic evocation (Iser, 1987, p.68). If the whole context of production is conveyed through language, this may imply that the "producer" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.75) of the literary speech itself could be conceived as a self which is constructed through the discursive and symbolic relationship with the readers, rather than a person with its integrity. Overall, it has been possible to show that Iser's reader-oriented theory has some of the features that Hutcheon claims pertain only to postmodernism, that are the "questioning of the authority" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190) and the concept of the author or narrator as an "enunciating subject" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.74) located in a situational context of production.

Even if from a theoretical point of view, Iser's formulation of the text-reader relationship seems to contradict the limitations highlighted by Hutcheon, major issues arise with regards to the possibility to employ it in the investigation of literary fiction. This is particularly due to Iser's concept of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27), which emerges as an attempt to examine the readers' presence, without having to deal with real or empirical readers (Holub, 2019, p.84). In this respect, the reader is both conceived as "a textual structure", for it is "a network of response-inviting structures" (Iser, 1987, p.34), and a "structured act", since it embodies all the ideational activities and fulfillments of the audience (Iser, 1987, p.36). Hence, Iser's notion of the reader appears more as a literary abstract concept than a suggestion for an empirical and realistic method of investigation (Iser, 1987, p.27).

However, as it has been explained in the previous section, it is necessary to note that Fish tries to assess the hypothesis that the text is created through the interaction with the readers providing some empirical evidence. Hence, it would be inappropriate to affirm that none of the reader-oriented critics quoted in this chapter has attempted to validate their theories with empirical investigation. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that as the "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980, p.14) for his experiment, Fish merely takes into consideration

students attending one of his literary classes (Fish, 1980, pp.322-327). For this reason, the results he draws from this experiment may be regarded as limited. Moreover, his methods seem "flawed" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.8) as he does not provide any quantitative data or statistical measures, but he merely reports "anecdotes", which is the term the critic uses to refer to his experiments and the results he derives from them (Fish, 1980, p.305, p.312, p.317, p.322, p.332). Thereby, it can be stated that although Fish attempts to provide empirical data to validate his hypothesis, the methods he uses seem imprecise and the conclusions he draws unconvincing.

Overall, this section has investigated the relationship between postmodernism and reader-oriented criticism, specifically Hutcheon's argument that postmodernism goes beyond reader-oriented criticism, as it marks a shift towards "the entire act of enunciation" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.86). In this sense, the critic claims that differently from reader-oriented approaches, postmodernism emphasizes the role of the author as "the enunciating subject as discursive activity" (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.80-81) and the importance of the shared context of enunciation (Hutcheon, 2004, p.82). However, it has been possible to show that Hutcheon's statement presents several fallacies since both Jauss's and Iser's theories seem to present some of the features she believes are limited to postmodernism. However, although Iser's theory appears to be the closest to postmodernist thought, his notion of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27) is not suitable to investigate the audience's processing of literary texts, as it is not derived from any actual or realistic evidence and seems hard to be applied to any empirical research. Furthermore, Fish's empirical research may appear limited and the results he draws from his experiment unconvincing, since he does not provide any reliable data or statistical measures.

Conclusion

To sum up, the aim of this chapter has been that of investigating whether reader-oriented criticism can be employed in the investigation of readers' aesthetic responses to postmodernist fiction. To do so, it has first been necessary to provide the main features of reader-oriented approaches, and the different theoretical assumptions offered by its main critics, such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. In this sense, it has been explained that reader-oriented criticism features a shift of the focus of attention to the role of the readers in the process of meaning-making, in contrast to the formalist and "mechanistic" (Steiner, 2016, pp.46) approaches of previous schools of criticism.

Furthermore, since postmodernism developed in the same period of reader-oriented criticism and shares its concern for the study of literary texts as a dynamic interaction between text and audience, it has been possible to draw some parallelisms between these two phenomena. Particularly, it has been shown that Iser's theory seems to embody the new postmodernist concepts of "the questioning of authority" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.190) and the author as "the enunciating subject" (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.80-81). However, I would state that it may be difficult to employ Iser's theory in the investigation of postmodernist fiction, and literary fiction in general, as although the critic offers interesting suggestions, his concept of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1976, p.27) is not based on empirical evidence, but is drawn from an idealized and abstract process of response to textual structures. Likewise, although he attempts to provide empirical evidence to validate his hypothesis, Fish's concept of the reading audience as an "interpretive community" is employed in an unconvincing way, since in his experiments he merely considers the students attending one of his courses without giving any quantitative data. For this reason, another method is needed to investigate literary texts, combining both theoretical and empirical elements.

Chapter 3

The Reluctant Fundamentalist: the dramatic monologue in post-9/11 historiographic metafiction

"Postmodenism is a contradictory enterprise. […] Historiographic metafiction, for example, keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.106)

Introduction

Having provided a theoretical overview of postmodernism and the limits of reader-oriented approaches in investigating postmodern fiction, this chapter examines *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Moshin Hamid as an example of postmodernist writing. Specifically, it will be explained that Hamid's novel may be considered not only an example of post-9/11 fiction (Kowal, 2014, pp.57-58), but of post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.ix), which is characterized by the dramatic monologue as a narrative form that stresses the process of enunciation in literary narrative.

In this sense, the first section introduces "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.ix) as a genre that regards history and fiction as "human constructs" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5), comparing Jameson's and Hutcheon's concepts of history and historiography. This is because it is by contrasting Jameson's view on their relationship with postmodernism that Hutcheon lays the foundations for her theorizing of "historiographic metafiction". Furthermore, this section will underline the differences between the two scholar's views on what distinguishes postmodernist art: on the one hand, Jameson asserts that postmodernist fiction is mainly characterized by "pastiche" (Jameson, 1997, p.23), or "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (ibid.), which features a lack of historical depth; on the other, Hutcheon believes that its main trait is "historiographic metafiction", a form of writing which problematizes the relationship between fiction and reality, and shows that language is a tool that can be manipulated to provide a subjective account of historical facts.

After defining the postmodernist revised concepts of history and fiction, the second section will examine *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction".

Specifically, it will first explain the centrality of history in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and post-9/11 fiction in general, and the reasons why it may be affirmed that Hamid's novel problematizes historical knowledge, as it relates to historiography in a paradoxical way, showing its nature as a "human construct" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5). Having analyzed the relationship of the novel with history, this section will then explore its self-reflexivity and metafictional elements, particularly the technique of "the frame narrative" (White, 2019, p.444) and the metafictional depiction of its own processes of production and publication.

Before drawing the conclusions, the last section will instead explore the narrative form employed in Hamid's post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction[al]" novel, that it, the dramatic monologue. Furthermore, it will be explained that, in a typical postmodern way, this literary form stresses the importance of enunciation (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.168-169) in the narrative discourse. To do so, we will focus on the features of dramatic monologues as they are defined by Byron: "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8). Particularly, it will be stated that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the "revelation of character" (ibid.) is portrayed as "the assertion of identity through difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59).

3.1. Historiographic metafiction: history and fiction as human constructs

The aim of this section is to investigate Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction", which she regards as the most distinguishing feature of postmodernist literary fiction. To do so, I suggest examining the postmodernist revised concepts of history and fiction. In this sense, we will focus on Jameson first, particularly on his advocacy for a postmodern "loss of historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.5), as it is by contrasting the scholar's view that Hutcheon lays the foundations of her theory of "historiographic metafiction". Then, we will move on to analyze the consequences of this "loss of historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.5) in postmodernist fiction. Particularly, Jameson claims that postmodernist literary works are characterized by "a new [historical] depthlessness" (Jameson, 1997, p.16) or "pastiche", which is "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (Jameson, 1997, p.23). In the second place, we will instead consider Hutcheon's view on postmodernist historicity and the critique she moves to Jameson, since she believes that postmodernism problematizes the notion of history, rather than effacing it (Hutcheon, 2004, p.46). In the end, it will be underlined that in historiographic metafictions, it is the metafictional rewriting of history that allows to rethink

historicity in a critical and contextual way, since it conceives historiography as a construct which can be manipulated by the subject (Hutcheon, 2004, p.15).

To begin with, as stated above, in Hutcheon's view, postmodernist literature is characterized by what she calls "historiographic metafiction". The term was coined by the scholar in 1987 in *Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern* (Hutcheon, 1987), and then developed in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Hutcheon, 2004), first published in 1988 (Butter, 2011, p.296). In the latter, Hutcheon explains that,

> In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative—be it in literature, history, or theory—that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5).

Having explained that "historiographic metafiction" features a new conception of both history and fiction, it may be worth focusing on these two notions to start investigating postmodernist literature.

In this sense, I suggest examining both Jameson's and Hutcheon's concepts of history and historiography, since it is by contrasting Jameson's view on their relationship with postmodernism that Hutcheon lays the foundations for her theorizing of "historiographic metafiction". Specifically, considering Jameson as a "detractor" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.xii) of postmodernism, for he regards this phenomenon as "the negative and opposite of modernism" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.18), Hutcheon clearly states that,

> Despite its detractors, the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge. [...] The recent work of [...] Frederic Jameson [...] among others, has raised the same issues about historical discourse and its relation to the literary as has historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, 2004, p.xii).

This quote illustrates how from the very beginning of her work about postmodernism, Hutcheon criticizes Jameson's view of postmodernism as a "dehistoricized" or "ahistorical" phenomenon (ibid.). However, it is necessary to underline that Hutcheon shares Jameson's "issues about historical discourse", for she claims that "the problematizing of history by postmodernism" is "the guiding concern" of her work (ibid.).

Having explained that Jameson's concern for historicity in the postmodern is the same principle of Hutcheon's founding of "historiographic metafiction", it may be worth

investigating Jameson's opinion about the relationship between postmodernism and history more thoroughly. In this regard, Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Jameson, 1997), opens by stating the scholar's concern about the postmodernist "loss of historicity" or "historical deafness", which he considers an "exasperating condition that determines a series of spasmodic and intermittent, but desperate, attempts at recuperation" (Jameson, 1997, p.5). Furthermore, it is worth noting that in Jameson's view, the "loss of historicity" (ibid.) may be defined as postmodernism's most distinguishing feature, as he claims,

> I have tried to prevent my own account of Postmodernism -- which stages a series of
> semiautonomous and relatively independent traits or features -- from conflating back into the
> one uniquely privileged symptom of a loss of historicity (ibid.).

Hence, it may be affirmed that according to Jameson, history plays a central role in the discourse of postmodernism and that the relationship between these two phenomena may be considered problematic since he affirms that the "loss of historicity" is not only postmodernism's main feature, but also the cause of its "exasperating condition" (ibid.).

It is necessary to point out here that by saying that postmodernism is characterized by a "loss of historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.5), Jameson refers to the disappearance of what he defines as "genuine historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.24) or "real history" (Jameson, 1997, p.25) in favour of "the primacy of the present" (Jameson, 1997, p.6). In this sense, whilst "genuine historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.24) features the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.24), in the postmodern,

> The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukacs defines it,
> the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project […] has meanwhile itself become a
> vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum (Jameson, 1997, pp.23-24).

It is here worth clarifying that the scholar believes that in postmodernist fiction we lose our connection with history, for the linear modernist and bourgeois conception of historical time is forever gone (Jameson, 1997, pp.5-6). For this reason, the scholar argues that postmodernism has "a pathology distinctively autoreferential" (Jameson, 1997, p.6) and it is thus essential to introduce a new "concept of history" (Jameson, 1997, p.149). Particularly, in postmodernity,

> Historicity is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future
> (although its various forms use such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a
> perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow

defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective (Jameson, 1997, p.192).

In general, although the critic claims that the postmodern is "ahistorical" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.xii), he does not mean that it is completely devoid of historicity, but that it lacks the role of the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.24), that it is reduced to a series of disconnected images. Furthermore, he argues that the postmodern features a "primacy of the present" (Jameson, 1997, p.6), which in contrast to the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.6), is "incomparable virtually by definition" (Jameson, 1997, p.6).

Having explained Jameson's view of history in the postmodern, it is worth noting the consequences that his conception of historicity has on postmodernist art, which seems to lack any forms of historical depth. In this sense, Jameson states that, due to the "loss of historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.5), literature is characterized by "a new depthlessness" (Jameson, 1997, p.16), which may be defined as "a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the Postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts" (Jameson, 1997, p.18). In practice, since postmodernist literary texts lose their connection with the "genuine" (Jameson, 1997, p.24) historical reality, they feature "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past", which Jameson refers to as "pastiche" (Jameson, 1997, p.23). In Jameson's opinion, this is the case with E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, as it may be affirmed that,

> This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past. […] We are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach (Jameson, 1997, p.28).

Overall, it is worth highlighting that Jameson believes postmodernist art is characterized by "pastiche", as it lacks historical depth (Jameson, 1997, p.23), owing to the loss of the role of the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.24). Thereby, in the postmodern, it is possible to see the emergence of a new kind of historicity, in which the present predominates over "real history" (Jameson, 1997, p.25).

So far, this section has focused on Jameson's opinion on how the postmodern relates to history. By contrast, the next paragraphs will discuss Hutcheon's view on the same issue, by making a comparison with Jameson's. In this regard, it is first worth noting that Hutcheon agrees with Jameson in advocating that postmodernism lacks "genuine" historicity (Jameson,

1997, p.24), that is, a notion of temporality based on "homogeneity, linearity and continuity" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.87). However, in contrast with his view, she states that,

> Certainly it is marked by a return to history, and it does indeed problematize the entire notion of historical knowledge. But the reinstalling of memory is not uncritical or reactionary, and the problematization of humanist certainties does not mean their denial or death. Postmodernism does not so much erode our 'sense of history' and reference (Foster 1985, 132), as erode our old sure sense of what both history and reference meant. It asks us to rethink and critique our notions of both (Hutcheon, 2004, p.46).

In general, in this quote, Hutcheon seems to criticize Jameson's negative attitude towards the postmodern, which appears to efface any modernist conceptions of history. Instead, she asserts that rather than effacing, postmodernism encourages a problematization and rethinking of values, especially linear historicity.

Hence, it is necessary to explain in detail what Hutcheon's rethinking of postmodernist history consists of. In this sense, it may be argued that her view of postmodernist historicity is innovative, as it is based on the acknowledgement that history itself depends on conventions and ideology (Hutcheon, 2004, p.112). Specifically, she argues that in postmodernity,

> There seems to be a new desire to think historically, and to think historically these days is to think critically and contextually. Part of this problematizing return to history is no doubt a response to the hermetic ahistorical formalism and aestheticism that characterized much of the art and theory of the so-called modernist period. If the past were invoked, it was to deploy its 'presentness' or to enable its transcendence in the search for a more secure and universal value system (Hutcheon, 2004, p.88).

Overall, it is possible to note that differently from Jameson, Hutcheon believes that considering the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.6) as "bracketed or effaced" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.24) is an oversimplification of the relationship between postmodernism and history, since the postmodern witnesses a rethinking of history as a "human construct" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5) which can be though critically and contextually.

As it has been argued for Jameson in the paragraphs above, after having explained Hutcheon's opinion on the relationship between postmodernism and history, it is now the time to investigate the influence her revised concept of historicity has on postmodernist art. In this respect, whilst Jameson claims that postmodernist literature is mainly characterized by "pastiche" (Jameson, 1997, p.23), Hutcheon asserts that its main trait is "historiographic metafiction", which problematizes the notion of the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.6). Specifically, it may be stated that this problematization is due to the critical approach employed by metafiction, which Patricia Waugh defines as,

> [A form of] fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (Waugh, 2002, p.2).

Likewise, Hutcheon claims that if modernism features the primacy of the historical novel (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5), which is marked by a realistic mode of representation and narrative order (Hutcheon, 2004, p.113), postmodern fiction problematizes the rewriting of history to question its relationship with reality and that of reality with language (Hutcheon, 2004, p.15), since historiography is no longer conceived as a "neutral account of what happened but rather a biased story determined by the needs and convictions of those who tell it" (Butter, 2011, p.626). Hence, it may be affirmed that in "historiographic metafiction", the concept of the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.6) is not effaced, but problematized, as metafiction shows that language is considered as a tool that can be manipulated to provide a subjective account of historical facts.

To sum up, this section has introduced "historiographic metafiction", a termed coined by Hutcheon to refer to the genre that characterizes postmodernist literary fiction. In this sense, it has been explained that she primarily defines "historiographic metafiction" as the "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (ibid.). Furthermore, it may be stated that it is the metafictional rewriting of history that highlights the nature of history and fiction as "artifact[s]" (Waugh, 2002, p.2), which are subjective and can be manipulated. Particularly, to examine this revised concept of historiography, it has been necessary to compare Jameson's and Hutcheon's opinions on the relationship between postmodernism and history. This is since it is by contrasting Jameson's postmodernist "loss of historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.5), that Hutcheon lays the foundations for her concept of "historiographic metafiction". On the one hand, Jameson regards the loss of the past as "referent" (Jameson, 1997, p.24) and "the primacy of the present" (Jameson, 1997, p.6) as negative traits of postmodernism, for they lead to a form of new historical "depthlessness" (Jameson, 1997, p.16), which is reflected in postmodernist art by the emergence of "pastiche" (Jameson, 1997, p.23). On the other, Hutcheon suggests that in the postmodern, rather than being "bracketed or effaced" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.24), the past is problematized, since it is rethought critically and contextually.

3.2 Investigating the postmodernist revised concepts of history and fiction in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Having provided a general definition of "historiographic metafiction", this subsection will investigate the main reasons why *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may be considered as an example of this genre. To begin with, it will be necessary to explain the main features of historiographic metafictions according to Hutcheon, and then explore Hamid's novel as a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction" in the light of Hutcheon's definition. To do so, we will first investigate the central role of history in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in post-9/11 fiction in general. Furthermore, we will examine the depiction of the traumatic outcomes of September 11, and the paradoxical way in which the novel relates with historiography using a "dual time frame" (Butter, 2011, p.296). In the second place, this section will talk about the novel's self-reflexivity and metafictional elements, focusing on the technique of "the frame narrative". Specifically, it will be stated that this technique is employed to "break the boundaries between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 2002, p.2) and highlight "the fictionality of the world outside the text" (ibid.), exploring the relationship between fiction, reality, and truth (White, 2019, pp.447-448) and the connection of knowledge with power (Hutcheon, 2004, p.20). In the end, we will explain the description of the processes of production and publication of Erica's manuscript as a metafiction element (Hamid, 2007, p.58, p.99), which may be considered as a reference to Hamid's novel itself.

As argued in the introduction above, although a general definition of "historiographic metafiction" has already been provided in the previous subsection, I suggest starting by investigating it more thoroughly to examine if it can be applied to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as well. Specifically, Hutcheon says that "[by historiographic metafiction] I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5). Hence, it may be stated that "historiographic metafiction" shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.120). It is important to clarify here that postmodernist novels are paradoxical, because the postmodern works within the same conventions it tries to subvert (Hutcheon, 2004, p.3). This is the case with both the notions of fiction and "genuine historicity" (Jameson, 1997, p.24), or "real history" (Jameson, 1997, p.25), which are exploited and then subverted to examine their relationship with reality and their nature as "human constructs" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5). Thus, to explain why Hamid's novel can be regarded as an example of "historiographic

metafiction", I suggest focusing on its paradoxical relation to history and historical knowledge first, and then move on to analyze its self-reflexivity and metafictional features.

To begin with, to explore the novel's relationship with historical knowledge, it may be worth highlighting its nature not only as a post-9/11 novel (Kowal, 2014, pp.57-58), but as post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction". Focusing on its nature as a post-9/11 novel first, it is necessary to clarify that post-9/11 literature may be defined as a genre which refers to those literary texts written in the aftermath of September 11 and whose narratives usually revolve around the events that took place on that day and their traumatic repercussions (Kowal, 2014, p.57; Morey, 2011, p.135). As for the influence of the terroristic attacks on literature, it is important to note that writers generally consider 9/11 "an epoch-defining moment of central historical importance" (Ilott, 2014, p.571), whose shock they are still struggling to "metabolize" (Garner and Szalai, 2021). Because of their "excessively visible nature" (Gleich, 2014, p.162), the attacks seem to have generated a crisis in linear historical and narrative representation (Gleich, 2014, p.162; Gonçalves, 2016, p.152), which novelists are trying to face by searching for new narrative forms. In this sense, Hamid also advocates for the centrality of the events that happened on 9/11 in shaping and changing the plot of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, when he affirms that,

> But then September 11 happened and my sort of quiet attempt to tell the story was overtaken by events. I spent some years continuing to write the novel set before September 11. But I didn't know how to tell the story and not have the whole thing overwhelmed by September 11 [. . .] it was not possible to escape that (Hamid, 2011).

Furthermore, in another article published on the same year, he similarly highlights the difficulty in finding a new narrative form to represent these catastrophic events, as he argues that after 9/11,

> My world changed. I wrote the novel again. And again. I wrote it in the first person. I wrote it in the third person. I wrote it as a fable. I wrote it in an American accent. It just refused to work. I looked to Camus for inspiration […] And I also arrived at what I hoped was an appropriately permeable form, a dramatic monologue (Hamid, 2011).

Overall, it may be argued that the 9/11 terroristic attacks play a pivotal role in Hamid's novel, as they are not only central in the plot, but also in choosing an appropriate narrative form to describe the shock they caused.

Having explained the importance of 9/11 in the novel, it is worth focusing on the second main feature of post-9/11 fiction, that is, the depiction of the traumatic outcomes of these events. In this sense, it is necessary to note that while post-9/11 novels are usually focused on

individual traumatic experiences (Morey, 2011, p.143), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* investigates trauma on a national and global rather than individual scale (Kowal, 2014, p.57). As examples of personal "trauma narratives" (Morey, 2011, p.136) it is possible to quote Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (Finck, 2015, p.22; Gleich, 2014, p.161) whose main protagonist, Keith Neudecker, is a traumatized survivor of the Twin Towers' crash (Gleich, 2014, p.164), or Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, describing Oskar's melancholia due to his father's death in the 9/11 attacks (Gleich, 2014, p.169). In this sense, it may be stated that both novels illustrate the psychological outcomes of 9/11 at a personal or family level (Kowal, 2014, p.57).

Conversely, in Hamid's novel, the traumatic experience is portrayed at a global and national level, as it is exemplified by the "anxieties and xenophobic attitudes" towards the Muslim immigrants and refugees (Toossi, 2021, p.253) and the "War on Terror" in the Bush administration (Gleich, 2014, p.161), which function as a social and cultural background for the novel. Particularly, the fact that the mourning and violent response to terrorism is depicted at a national level may be illustrated by the following passage:

> New York was in mourning after the destruction of the World Trade Center. They all seemed to proclaim: We are America - not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different - the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath (Hamid, 2007, p.89).

Furthermore, an extract that may be quoted as an example of the global repercussions of the 9/11 attacks that the novel talks about is:

> As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away (Hamid, 2007, p.190).

In general, it has been explained that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may be considered as a post-9/11 novel, since it features the centrality of the 9/11 events in its plot and their traumatic consequences, although on a national and global scale.

Having explained the centrality of history in Hamid's narrative, it is worth investigating why it could be stated that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* relates to the historical events of 9/11 in a paradoxical way, and could, therefore, be considered not only as an example of post-9/11 fiction, but of post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction". Specifically, according to critics, "historiographic metafiction" (ibid.) is generally characterized by a "dual time frame" (Butter,

2011, p.296) that "problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.89). It is necessary to clarify here that by stating that it features a "dual time frame" (Butter, 2011, p.296), scholars mean that "historiographic metafiction" usually portrays,

> A fictional present where one or more characters – often first-person narrators who address specific narratees – undertake explorations of the past and frequently reflect on their activities and the epistemological problems they face (Butter, 2011, p.296).

In this sense, it may be argued that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* features this alternation of past and present, which is illustrated by the following extract:

> You seem worried. Do not be; this burly fellow is merely our waiter, and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet, as we will pay him later, when we are done [...] Where were we? Ah yes, Underwood Samson. On the day of my interview, I was uncharacteristically nervous (Hamid, 2007, p.6).

Particularly, the present of the narration is here an imprecise moment after September 9/11, when the two protagonists, Changez and a mysterious American "auditor" (Ilott, 2014, p.574), meet in a café in Lahore (Hamid, 2007, p.1). Instead, the past of the narrative is Changez's recount of the events that preceded and followed the terroristic attacks: on the one hand, he describes the fulfilment of his "American Dream" (White, 2019, p.446) when he tells the "auditor" about his studies at Princeton University (Hamid, 2007, pp.1-3), the prestigious job at Underwood Samson (Hamid, 2007, pp.5-7), and his meeting and love for Erica (Hamid, 2007, pp.18-20), who represents "Am-Erica" (White, 2019, p.446); on the other, the disenchantment he undergoes after 9/11 (Hamid, 2007, pp.85-86, 112-116), Erica's disappearance (Hamid, 2008, p.185) which seems to coincide with Changez's loss of identity as an American (Finck, 2015, p.30), and his final decision to go back to Pakistan (Hamid, 2008, p.107). This intertwining of past and present problematizes the notion of historiography because the past is rewritten for the readers through Changez's gaze and point of view, hence there is no way to ascertain the truth of the historical events he tells (White, 2017, p.445). In this regard, it is also possible to state that in "historiographic metafiction", the notion of an historic objective truth is undermined in favour of a subjective multiplicity of truths (Hutcheon, 2004, p.109). Overall, it may be stated that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and historiographic metafictions in general, historiography is not conceived as a neutral and objective practice, but as a subjective and biased "act of the imagination" (Butter, 2011, p.296), and this can be shown using a "dual time frame" (Butter, 2011, p.296).

So far, this subsection has examined the novel's paradoxical relationship with history and historiography, now it may be worth examining its self-reflexivity and metafictional elements.

To do so, I suggest referring to Waugh's definition of metafiction which has already been quoted above, starting by the statement that metafiction is a form of fictional writing which makes the audience "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 2002, p.2). In this sense, it may first be argued that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007), the author "break[s] the boundaries between the fictional and the real" (Waugh, 2002, p.2) at a formal level, adopting the technique of "the frame narrative". It is worth clarifying here that "the frame narrative" can be defined as "a story in which another story is enclosed or embedded, 'a tale within the tale'" (Oxford Reference, 2022). In this case, the main narrative is the story Changez tells to his "auditor" about the events that happened in his past life, whilst "the frame narrative" is set in the fictional present and concerns the exchange between Changez and the American (White, 2019, p.445), to whom the narrator addresses with the pronoun "you" (Hamid, 2007, p.1). Particularly, critics generally believe that this pronoun may have multiple references and can address both the readers and the fictional characters at the same time (Bell et al., 2019, p.244). This particularity of the pronoun "you", however, will be examined into detail the next section. Overall, it has been argued that, at a formal level, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be considered a metafictional novel because, by employing "the frame narrative", the narrator creates an almost direct conversation with the real audience, breaking the boundaries between fiction and reality and making the readers pose questions about their relationship (Waugh, 2002, p.2).

Another reason why the technique of "the frame narrative" may be considered as metafictional is that it highlights "the fictionality of the world outside the text" (Waugh, 2002, p.2) and that both history and fiction are to be considered as practices which are "discursively structured" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.120). In this respect, it is important to note the double meaning that can be given to the term "frame": on the one hand, "the text's potential to frame its readers into believing the narrator's devious allegories", while on the other, the continual reframing of the main narrative through the narrator's arguments and comments, to question the audience's assumptions of the relationship between fiction, history, and truth (White, 2019, pp.447-448). Furthermore, it is possible to argue that by underlining "the fictionality of the world outside the text" (Waugh, 2002, p.2), the novel emphasizes the connection between power and knowledge, which is generally problematized by postmodern historiographic metafictions (Hutcheon, 2004, p.20). This is clearly explained by Hutcheon with a quotation by Rushdie, who states that,

> History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance […] Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks…. History loves only those who dominate her (Rushdie qtd. in Hutcheon, 2004, p.120).

In general, "the frame narrative" may be considered as a metafictional technique because it not only breaks the boundaries between fiction and reality, but it also highlights the fictionality of the real world (Waugh, 2002, p.2) showing that there may be multiple versions of the same historical facts, although the ones that survive are usually those written by the most powerful.

Having explained the reasons why "the frame narrative" and postmodern novels in general emphasize "the fictionality of the world outside the text" (Waugh, 2002, p.2), it is necessary to provide some evidence from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In this sense, it may be stated that this is particularly clear when the narrator tells the audience some details about the night when he watches the attacks to the Twin Towers on television (Hamid, 2007, p.82). On the one hand, it may be affirmed that Changez "frame[s] the readers" (White, 2019, p.447) into believing in the post-9/11 stereotypes about terrorism (White, 2019, p.445), such as its connection with "young", "well-travelled", Middle Eastern "male[s]", and, therefore, consider him as "the stereotypical terrorist" (White, 2019, p.452), first by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, and then depicting his unexpected reaction to the attacks:

> And yet… No, I ought to pause here, for I think you will find rather unpalatable what I intend to say next, and I wish to warn you before I proceed […] I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one - and then the other - of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed (Hamid, 2007, p.82).

Hence, it is possible to say that since Changez recounts his "auditor" that he laughed at watching the terroristic attacks (Hamid, 2007, p.82), the audience could be encouraged to adopt a biased perspective and associate his origins and social and cultural background to terrorism.

On the other hand, the narrator may "reframe" (White, 2019, p.444) this general assumption by explaining the reasons behind his reactions and questioning the innocence of his "auditor" and of America as a nation,

> Yes, despicable as it may sound my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist. But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others. […] I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. […] But surely you cannot be completely innocent of such

feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips - so prevalent these days - of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies? (Hamid, 2007, pp.82-83).

Similarly, a few pages later, Changez describes the bombing of Afghanistan broadcast on television, and his shock at seeing the American bombers with their sophisticated weapons and the "ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below" (Hamid, 2007, p.46). Particularly, he states that "on those rare occasions when I did find myself confronted by such programming […] I was reminded of the film Terminator, but with the roles reversed so that the machines were cast as heroes" (ibid.). The passages just quoted highlight "the fictionality of the world outside the text" (Waugh, 2002, p.2) because they make the readers question their general understanding of global geopolitics (Morey, 2011, p.138). In this regard, it may be argued that these extracts point out how historiography is a "human construct" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5), built on master narratives, which are usually written by those who have more power, portraying themselves as the heroes (Hutcheon, 2004, p.20). Likewise, as stated in Chapter 1, Butler also claims that in our contemporary society, most information should be distrusted as it is "more of a contribution to the manipulative image-making of those in power than to the advancement of knowledge" (Butler, 2002, p.3). Thereby, it may be argued that through the technique of "the frame narrative", the speaker can "reframe" the readers' general assumptions, and problematize the relationships between history, reality, and truth.

Another reason why the novel may be considered as metafictional is that it portrays its own processes of production and publication (Madiou, 2019, p.274). This could be the case with the passage quoted below:

> 'My manuscript' she said. 'I'm sending it to an agent tomorrow'. I took it respectfully in both hands, resting it flat across my upturned palms. 'Congratulations', I said, and then noticing it was rather light, added, 'Is this all of it?' She nodded. 'It's more a novella than a novel', she said. 'It leaves space for your thoughts to echo' (Hamid, 2007, p.58).

Specifically, it is possible to say that, although the extract talks about Erica's "work of fiction" (Hamid, 2007, p.33), there are here two references to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. First, critics seem to struggle as to whether define Hamid's work as a "novella" or a "novel" (Madiou, 2019, p.296), hence the statement "it's more a novella than a novel" (Hamid, 2007, p.58) may illustrate the confusion that scholars face in defining its genre. This is since *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is "a small book" (Hamid, 2011), which is only 210 pages long, and could be read in a few hours. Furthermore, the plot develops in one single evening (Anderson, 2010, p.4), that may be, therefore, the same amount of time needed to read the whole story. In the second place, "it leaves space for your thoughts to echo" (Hamid, 2007,

p.58) could appear as another reference to Hamid's novel, which requires the readers' active engagement in the process of meaning-making. In this sense, Hamid states, "It seemed to me that I should try to write novels that maximized this possibility of opening themselves up to being read in different ways, to involve the readers as a kind of creator, indeed as a kind of co-writer" (Hamid, 2011). Thereby, Erica's manuscript could be a metafictional reference to Hamid's work, for it can both be described as "a novella" and "a novel" (Hamid, 2007, p.58), and asks the readers to actively participate in the interpretation of the text.

Another reference to the process of publication of the novel is when Changez describes the publishing of Erica's work:

> 'I got an agent!' Her initial blind submissions had been unsuccessful, she explained, but she had recently sent her manuscript to an agency that represented a family friend; a junior agent there had just this afternoon agreed to take her on. He said length had been his only concern - the novella form being, in his words, a platypus of a beast - but upon reflection he thought he could make a strong case to publishers (Hamid, 2007, p.99).

Particularly, it may be stated that also Hamid's first draft was received with skepticism by his agent in July 2001 (Hamid, 2011), and the author himself says that this initial attempt "was terrible, as my first drafts always are" (ibid.). Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the novel, Erica's manuscript becomes "a strong case to publishers" (Hamid, 2007, p.99) only after 9/11. Likewise, Hamid states that his story reached its final form after September 11, whose events overwhelmed his unsuccessful first drafts (Hamid, 2011) and made the novel worth being published in 2007. However, it is necessary to clarify that conversely to what happens in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where the terroristic attacks play a pivotal role in the plot, Erica's work does not seem to refer to 9/11, since it is described as "a tale of adventure, of a girl on an island, who learns to make do", whose narrative is simple and hopeful (Hamid, 2007, p.188). Overall, it may be stated that apart from the statement "it's more a novella than a novel" (Hamid, 2007, p.58), other metafictional elements can be found in the description of the process of publication of Erica's manuscript, specifically her unsuccessful first submissions and the publication after September 11, although its contents do not seem to be concerned with narrating the terroristic attacks.

To sum up, starting from Hutcheon's description of historiographic metafictions (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5) and Waugh's definition of metafiction (Waugh, 2002, p.2), this section has explained that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007) may be considered not only a post-9/11 novel (Kowal, 2014, pp.57-58), but a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction". In this sense, it has been explained that Hamid's novel is metafictional for two main reasons.

First, it makes the readers "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 2002, p.2) and that between historical knowledge and power (Hutcheon, 2004, p.20), employing the technique of "the frame narrative". Second, it investigates its own status as fiction, portraying its processes of production and publication, which are reflected by Erica's manuscript (Hamid, 2007, p.58, p.99). Furthermore, it has been explained that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may be considered as a "historiographic metafiction" also owing to its paradoxical relationship to both history and historiography. In this regard, it has been stated that history plays a pivotal role in the novel, as the events of 9/11 and their traumatic outcomes were fundamental in shaping the plot and deciding its narrative form (Hamid, 2011). However, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* relates to the historical events in a paradoxical way, since the novel problematizes the notion of historical knowledge (Hutcheon, 2004, p.89), exploiting it to examine the relationship between fiction and reality and how history can be manipulated by the subject, and can, therefore, be considered as a "human construct" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5).

3.3 The dramatic monologue and the stress on enunciation

While the first two sections have introduced "historiographic metafiction" as the genre that characterizes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and postmodernist literary fiction in general, the aim of this section is instead to explore the novel's narrative form, that is, the dramatic monologue. Furthermore, it will explain the reasons why this narrative form seems particularly suitable for the investigation of the readers' engagement with literary fiction. To do so, it will refer to the definition of narrative texts as "act[s] of enunciation" provided by both reader-oriented and postmodernist theorists. In this sense, this section will first give an overview of this literary form and its main traits, and then explore its features in Hamid's novel. Specifically, we will begin introducing the "interplay between speaker and audience" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) and explaining that the dramatic action develops in the present time, although the novel is characterized by a "dual time frame" (Butter, 2011, p.296). Then, before moving on to analyze the "revelation of character" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) whose identity is asserted through difference (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59), I suggest focusing on the textual features that elicit the readers' active engagement in the process of meaning-making, namely the use of the pronoun "you" as "a referentially ambiguous pronoun" (Bell et al., 2019, p.244), and the text's inconsistencies. As for the "revelation of character" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) instead, this section will in the end focus on the importance of the

concept of difference in postmodernity (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59; Jameson, 1991, p.16), and the way the relationship between East and West is problematized in the novel.

First, it is important to say that "historiographic metafiction" emphasizes enunciation, the speaking subject as the "agency of discourse", and the contexts in which language is used (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.168-169). Furthermore, it is worth noting that, as stated in the previous chapter of this thesis, both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernist fiction claim that narrative should be regarded as an act of enunciation. Particularly, this stress on enunciation may be achieved using the dramatic monologue, a literary form that flourished in England in the Victorian period (Byron, 2003, p.30) and underwent a revival in the late 1960s (Byron, 2003, p.121). It may be worth clarifying here that originally, dramatic monologues were poems in which first-person speakers addressed the audience (Byron, 2003, pp.8-11). Furthermore, according to Session, one of the main critics of this literary form, dramatic monologues usually present seven formal features: "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8). Overall, it may be argued that the dramatic monologue may be employed in "historiographic metafiction" to stress the enunciation between a speaker and its "auditor", and the context in which the discourse takes place. For this reason, the dramatic monologue may be considered a narrative form which particularly suits the investigation of the readers' engagement with literary fiction, since theorists of both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernism assert that narrative should be considered as an "act of enunciation", involving a dialogic and dynamic transaction between texts and readers.

Having illustrated the main formal features of the dramatic monologue, it is now worth explaining why it may be stated that it is adopted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In this sense, the narrative form of Hamid's novel can be considered a dramatic monologue because it features an "interplay" between a speaker and an "auditor", and a "dramatic action" which is initiated by an "occasion" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8), "unfolding with the speaker's words and in the present time" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.25). Furthermore, I suggest that in this novel, the "revelation of character" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) takes place as "the assertion of identity through difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59). Particularly, "difference" may be considered a key concept of the postmodern (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59; Jameson, 1997, p.16), as it replaces the modernist search for "homogenous identity", "stable aesthetics" and universal moral values (Hutcheon, 2004, p.6). Overall, it may be argued that

all these elements are present from the very beginning of the Hamid's novel. Thereby, to show that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* possesses all the characteristics Session attributes to dramatic monologues (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8), it may be useful to analyze them separately, making references to specific passages from the novel.

First, it is necessary to focus on the "interplay between speaker and audience" (ibid.). In this sense, it can be affirmed that since the first lines, the novel portrays the presence of a speaker, the narrative "I", and an auditor, the "you" to whom the speaker addresses his speech:

> Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a mission, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services. How did I know that you were American? (Hamid, 2007, p.1).

It is worth clarifying again here that the speaker is first-person narrator Changez, whose name, however, is revealed only a few pages later (Hamid, 2007, p.7), while the "auditor" is a mysterious American, whose identity is instead never disclosed throughout the novel. In addition, it is important to note that this word is used by critics (Ilott, 2014, p.574; Morey, 2011, p.138) to highlight how the role of the American is purely that of a listener, as he is silent for the whole novel, and his interjections are described by Changez (Ilott, 2014, p.573). Specifically, in the extract quoted above, this is the case with "may I be of assistance?", "do not be frightened by my beard" and "how did I know that you were American?" (Hamid, 2007, p.1), which entail both an emotional and verbal reaction on the part of the American to which the readers, however, have access only through Changez's words (White, 2019, p.445). Likewise, in his *Dramatic Monologue* (Byron, 1995), Byron argues that,

> Most Victorian dramatic monologues feature an auditor who must, in order for the monologue not to slide into dialogue, remain silent or at least unheard by the reader, since interventions and responses from the auditor are sometimes implied by the speaker's words (Byron, 2003, p.20).

In general, it may be stated that Hamid's novel features an "interplay between speaker and audience" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) as the narration takes the form of "a monologue disguised as a dialogue" (Ilott, 2014, p.573) between first-person narrator Changez and a mysterious American "auditor", whose enunciations are described by the speaker.

In the second place, it may be stated that the "occasion" for the "dramatic action" to occur (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8) is the meeting between Changez and the American in the district of Old Anarkali, and that this encounter "unfold[s] with the speaker's words and in

the present time" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.25). Particularly, Changez offers the American to seat at a café, which is the setting where the whole monologue takes place,

> Come, tell me, what were you looking for? Surely, at this time of day, only one thing could have brought you to the district of Old Anarkali - named, as you may be aware, after a courtesan immured for loving a prince - and that is the quest for the perfect cup of tea. Have I guessed correctly? Then allow me, sir, to suggest my favorite among these many establishments. [...] You prefer that seat, with your back so close to the wall? Very well (Hamid, 2007, p.1).

As for its temporality, the passage just quoted shows that the "dramatic action" (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8), that is, the conversation between the two characters, develops in the present time following the narrator's utterances, so that the reader may feel like an observer of something in process (Byron, 2003, pp.8-9). It is worth clarifying here that this is not to be seen in contrast with the novel's "dual time frame" (Butter, 2011, p.296): although Changez tells his "auditor" about some past events in his life, this recount takes place in the present. Furthermore, Byron states that in dramatic monologues, openings and endings generally depict events that are already in process or "events to come" (Byron, 2003, p.26), and this may also be the case with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Specifically, the novel opens in *medias res*, with the meeting between the two characters, and is characterized by open-endedness (Madiou, 2019, p.274), requiring the audience to give their own interpretation of the final scene. Overall, although the novel is characterized by two different temporal frames, it is possible to identify an "occasion" (Session qtd in Byron, 2003, p.25) for the story to begin, that is, the meeting between the two characters, and to state that the "dramatic action" (ibid.) unfolds in the present time, as the conversation takes place in the present, although some events from the past are recalled.

Before focusing on the last feature that characterizes dramatic monologues, namely the "revelation of character", it is important to introduce the role of the readers in this genre. This is because they seem to have a central function in the process of meaning-making, and, therefore, in the identification and interpretation of the character which is revealed through the monologue (Byron, 2003, p.20). In this sense, it is worth underlining that this emphasis on the role of the readers in the process of meaning-making is also central to the entire discipline of reader-oriented theory. Particularly, while reading dramatic monologues the audience is asked to actively engage in the narrative owing to two specific textual features. In the first place, since Byron argues that dramatic monologues are arranged in a way to elicit the audience's response by associating the role of the auditor to that of the readers (Byron,

2003, p.21), in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it is possible to regard the mysterious American as a foil for the audience (Ilott, 2014, p.574). Particularly, this identification occurs using the pronoun "you", which could be defined "a referentially ambiguous pronoun" (Bell et al., 2019, p.244), because it can be employed both in the singular and in the plural, and hence to address either a fictional character in the story or the real "collective audience", or both (ibid.). Furthermore, Hamid himself seems to be aware of the character-reader connection in his narratives and to encourage the identification between the two when he says,

> I also never really understood the boundary between the roles of character and reader. Often, when I read, I felt like the character I was reading about. […] And I also arrived at what I hoped was an appropriately permeable form, a dramatic monologue, a half-conversation spoken to "you" that leaves it to the reader to supply its missing context (Hamid, 2011).

Thereby, this quote illustrates how in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2008), the pronoun "you" may be considered ambiguous (Bell et al., 2019, p.244), as it can refer to both the fictional American "auditor" and the actual readers, who have thus a central role in the narrative and could feel directly addressed in the conversation.

Having explained the first textual feature thanks to which the audience plays a central role in the novel, it is now time to focus on the second, namely the text's inconsistencies, that are, as stated in the previous chapter of this thesis, "the unwritten part[s] of a text", that require the readers' creative participation (Iser, 1978, p.275). Specifically, in Iser's view, narrative sentences always "aim at something beyond themselves", therefore, to reach their semantic fulfillment, they need the interplay of the readers (Iser, 1987, pp.109-111). In this respect, it may be argued that, in dramatic monologues, the audience is fundamental in the narrative process as they are asked to act "as a kind of character[s], indeed as a kind of co-writer[s]" (Hamid, 2011). This is particularly evident at the end of the novel, since the final scene is open to interpretation:

> Ah, we are about to arrive at the gates of your hotel. It is here that you and I shall at last part company. Perhaps our waiter wants to say goodbye as well, for he is rapidly closing in. Yes, he is waving at me to detain you. I know you have found some of my views offensive; I hope you will not resist my attempt to shake you by the hand. But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards (Hamid, 2007, p.81).

Analyzing the passage just quoted, it can be stated that the readers are left with four possible different endings, in which they can regard either Changez or the American as an assassin, or both of them, or none (Ilott, 2014, p.573). This ambiguity may especially be elicited by the

equivocal "glint of metal" (Hamid, 2007, p.81), that can be interpreted as a gun. Overall, it could be stated that the novel requires the readers to actively participate in the process of meaning-making, since it features some narrative "gaps" which the readers are required to fill (Iser, 1978, p.275).

Likewise, the title of the novel also seems to have a "gap" in meaning (Iser, 1978, p.275), for it features an interplay of the words "fundamentals" and "fundamentalism" (Morey, 2011, p.143), leaving the readers to provide their own interpretations. Specifically, the audience can decide whether "fundamentalist" refers to religious fundamentalism, precisely Islamic fundamentalism and, therefore, consider the narrator as a terrorist from the beginning of the novel, or to the fundamentals of capitalism in the American society (Madiou, 2019, p.272). This is since in the novel, Changez tells that "*focus on the fundamentals* […] was Underwood Samson's guiding principle, drilled into us since out first day at work" (Hamid, 2007, p.118). Similarly, White argues that the term "fundamentalist" is problematized, for it may refer both to "the protagonist's politics" and thus to terrorism, and to an economic mode which pertains to the new globalized world and is responsible for inequalities (White, 2019, p.445). In this regard, a few lines later the quotation above, the narrator appears to describe the inequalities of this economic system, when he says,

> Because to be perfectly honest, sir, the compassionate pangs I felt for soon-to-be-redundant workers were not to be overwhelming in their frequency; our job required a degree of commitment that left one with rather limited time for such distractions (Hamid, 2007, p.188).

Overall, the term "fundamentalist" may be considered a "gap" for the readers to fill (Iser, 1978, p.275), since it asks the readers to provide their own interpretation whether to regard it as either religious fundamentalism, or economic fundamentalism, or both.

As for considering fundamentalism in its religious form, it could be argued that this interpretation may sometimes appear paradoxical. First, this could be because Changez does not tell any details about his faith throughout the novel (Morey, 2011, p.139), and his name seems to suggest the opposite of fundamentalism (Madiou, 2019, p.272), as it may refer to the word "change" or "changes" (Robjant, 2013, p.2). Nevertheless, readers may associate him to Islamic fundamentalism for his resentment against the United States, especially after the bombing of Afghanistan (Hamid, 2007, pp.112-113), and the fact that he wears a beard (Hamid, 2007, p.1), although some critics suggest that the beard may symbolize cultural, rather than religious association (Madiou, 2019, p.286). In the second place, if

fundamentalism is interpreted from the religious point of view, another cause of confusion could be the adjective "reluctant", meaning "hesitating" or "unwilling" (Merriam-Webster, 2022), hence Changez's identity as an Islamic "reluctant fundamentalist" may seem paradoxical (Madiou, 2019, p.286). In general, it may be asserted that not only the narrative, but also the title itself seems to require the readers to actively engage to construct meaning, and that the interpretation of the word "fundamentalist" as a form of religious fundamentalism, could sometimes result as paradoxical.

After having explained the pivotal role played by the readers in the process of meaning-making, it is now necessary to examine the last feature of dramatic monologues, namely, the "revelation of character", as "the assertion of identity through difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59). First, it may be worth explaining the importance of the concept of "difference" in postmodernity (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59; Jameson, 1997, p.16). Particularly, Hutcheon claims that postmodernism is characterized by a rethinking of margins and borders (Hutcheon, 2004, p.58): while the modernist society was centralized, postmodernity is characterized by the re-emerging of peripheries (Hutcheon, 2004, p.69). Hence it may be stated that "the local, the regional, the non-totalizing are reasserted as the centre becomes a fiction - necessary, desired, but a fiction nonetheless" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.58). Likewise, Jameson argues that the postmodern features "a new mode of relationship through difference" (Jameson, 1997, p.32) and that the postmodern society is characterized by "heterogeneity" and "social differentiation" rather than "totality" (Jameson, 1997, p.115). Thereby, the postmodern features the centrality of "difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59; Jameson, 1997, p.16), which is to be understood in opposition to the centralizing and homogenizing forces of modernity.

As for the centrality of "difference" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59; Jameson, 1991, p.16) in postmodernist literary fiction in particular, it is necessary to highlight that 9/11 seems to have opened narrative "to formerly marginalized voices" (Garner and Szalai, 2021) and to "a new mode of relationship through difference" (Jameson, 1997, p.32), problematizing the binary opposition between the East and the West (Hutcheon, 2004, p.62). In this sense, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the whole story unfolds through Changez's words, who could be defined as an example of the "formerly marginalized voices" (Garner and Szalai, 2021). This is because, as stated in the previous section, Hamid's novel challenges the conventions of post-9/11 fictions: whilst the latter are generally concerned with "trauma narratives" of victims of the attacks, or stories investigating the cruelty and injustices experienced by

Muslims under Islamic regimes (Morey, 2010, p.136), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* questions the common stereotypes shared in the aftermath of September 11 (Morey, 2010, p.136). This is the case with the general association of wearing a beard with Islamic fundamentalism, a stereotype at which the narrator seems to hint several times during the narrative (Hamid, 2007, p.1, p.25, p.29, p.63). Thereby, Changez may be considered a "marginalized voice" (Garner and Szalai, 2021) as it challenges the conventions and stereotypes usually connected with post-9/11 fiction.

After having analyzed Changez as a "marginalized voice" (ibid.), it is now worth explaining how the relationship between the East and West is portrayed in the novel and its problematization. In this respect, it may be argued that this relationship is primarily illustrated by the interaction between Changez, a former Pakistani student at Princeton University (Hamid, 2007, pp.2-3), and the mysterious American "auditor", who is aligned with the Western reading audience using the pronoun "you" (Bell et al., 2019, p.244). Furthermore, it may be affirmed that the author attempts to elicit an empathetic engagement with "the Muslim other" (Toossi, 2021, p.253), through the first-person recount of the narrator's life and hidden motives behind his beliefs and actions. However, it is also possible to state that the binary opposition west-east is problematized, and its fixed boundaries destabilized (Hutcheon, 2004, p.62), making the readers question any cultural certainties. Particularly, by portraying Changez as a victim of the American capitalistic global economy and "neo-imperial" power (Morey, 2010, p.145), the author leads the readers to doubt their geopolitical assumptions (Morey, 2010, p.145) and shows that, in the discourse of terrorism, the distinctions between "perpetrator[s] and victim[s]" (White, 2019, p.452) are less clear-cut than how they are usually portrayed in western traditional narratives. At the same time, nevertheless, Changez can also be defined as an unreliable and ambiguous narrator, as his narrative is full of contractions (Toossi, 2021, p.266). Hence, the audience may be encouraged to see him both as a "victim" of the American society and a "perpetrator" (White, 2019, p.452). A good example of this is the already quoted description of Changez's unexpected reaction to Twin Towers' attack in which the audience may be led to question his role purely as a victim, as he smiles at seeing the towers collapsed (Hamid, 2007, p.82). Overall, it may be stated that the relationship between the West and the East is problematized as Changez is an ambiguous narrator, who may be perceived both as a victim of the American capitalistic society and a perpetrator (White, 2019, p.452) at the same time.

To sum up, this section has focused on the narrative form that characterizes Hamid's novel, namely, the dramatic monologue. In this sense, it has also been shown that the dramatic monologue emphasizes the process of enunciation as its features a speaker and an audience (Session qtd. in Byron, 2003, p.8), here first-person narrator Changez and the mysterious American, and a "dramatic action" which "unfolds with the speaker's words and in the present time" (ibid.). Furthermore, it has been highlighted that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* readers are required to actively engage in the narrative, supplying the missing contents. In this respect, this section has shown that dramatic monologues may be considered a narrative form which particularly suits the investigation of the readers' engagement with literary fiction, since theorists of both reader-oriented criticism and postmodernism assert that the audience is actively engaged in the process of meaning-making and that narrative should be considered as an "act of enunciation". However, their engagement with Changez may be problematical as the "revelation of character" involves "the assertion of identity through difference (Hutcheon, 2004, p.59), and, therefore, their questioning of common assumptions and cultural certainties.

Conclusions

To conclude, this chapter has examined the relationship between *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and postmodernism. Specifically, it has shown that the novel may be regarded as a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction" which features the dramatic monologue as its narrative form. Particularly, describing the novel's genre and literary form, it has been possible to highlight the main traits of postmodern novels, some of which will be referred to in the next chapter, to suggest an approach which may be suitable in the investigation of readers' empathetic response with postmodern literary fiction.

In this respect, the first two sections have explained that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, portray both history and fiction as "human constructs" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5), that can be manipulated to provide a subjective account of historical events. As for historiography, it may be stated that the novel relates with it in a paradoxical way and reveals its nature an "act of the imagination" (Butter, 2011, p.296), which is strictly connected with power. Regarding fiction, it has instead been possible to show that employing metafiction, the author makes the readers question the relationships between fiction, reality, and truth, and the fictionality of the real world.

In the end, the third and last section has focused on the features of the dramatic monologue and its stress on the process of enunciation. In this sense, it has also been possible to show how narrative discourse is problematized as the audience is asked to actively engage in the text, supplying its missing context and providing different interpretations, due to the text's inconsistencies and the character's unreliability and ambiguities.

Chapter 4

Negative empathy and cognitive dissonance in readers' engagement with postmodernist narrators: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s narrator Changez as a case study

"As I evolved as a writer [...] I became more and more interested in the interactive nature of fiction. [...] If the novel was special because it allowed writers and readers to create jointly, to dance together, then it seemed to me that I should try to write novels that maximized this possibility of [...] involving the reader as a kind of character" (Hamid, 2011)

Introduction

This chapter aims at investigating readers' empathetic engagement with Hamid's first-person narrator Changez. Furthermore, it is worth saying that this chapter is based on theoretical assumptions discussed in previous chapters, such as the insufficiency of reader-oriented approaches in examining the audience's processing of postmodernist literary novels (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.80-82). This is the case with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which has been defined as a postmodernist "historiographic metafiction".

As for its structure, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first introduces psychonarratology as an approach which blends cognitive psychology and narrative studies (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37). In this sense, this section will first discuss narrative's "ubiquitous nature" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1), highlighting the mutual influence narratology and cognitive psychology have on each other. Then, it will examine psychonarratology more thoroughly and explain the reasons why it may suit the investigation of literary fiction, comparing Iser's reader-oriented approach, and the limitations of his concept of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.34). Specifically, this thesis will focus on postmodernist literary fiction.

The second section will instead focus on the connection between negative empathy, cognitive dissonance and "strange narrators" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.1). Particularly, it will first provide an overview of negative empathy as a process of "cathartic identification" with negative, unreliable, postmodernist characters. In this respect, it will also explain the phenomenon of identification, that is, "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them"

(Cohen, 2001, p.245). Having introduced negative empathy and identification, this section will then explain cognitive dissonance, a psychological phenomenon deriving from the readers' empathetic engagement with ambiguous fictional characters, which consists in holding two different mental states, cognitions, or beliefs contrasting one another (Festinger qtd. in Egan et al., 2007, p.978). Specifically, it will be highlighted that readers generally employ two strategies to cope with the unpleasant feeling provoked by cognitive dissonance, namely "attitude change" and "imaginative resistance" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.21). In the end, this section will provide Caracciolo's definition of "strange narrators" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.1) and point out two main criteria to employ the adjective "strange" (ibid.) in the description of fictional characters and narrators.

To conclude, the third and last section will feature a "thought experiment" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.26) about readers' identification and empathetic engagement with first-person narrator Changez. Specifically, this section will be divided into two subsections: whilst the first will explain the methods employed in this investigation, in the second the "thought experiment" (ibid.) will be presented. In this sense, it will be possible to show that while engaging with Changez, the audience may experience negative empathy and cognitive dissonance, as they are encouraged to identify, empathize, sympathize, and cope with dissonance through "imaginative resistance" at the same time.

4.1 Psychonarratology: theoretical background and empirical evidence for readers' processing of postmodernist literary fiction

This section concerns psychonarratology, as a discipline that may suit the investigation of postmodernist literary fiction. In this sense, the section has been divided into two subsections. Specifically, the first explains the mutual influence cognitive psychology and literary studies have on each other: on the one hand, it will be argued that narratives are essential to interpret the reality around us and make sense of our selfhoods, hence, literary studies could help us investigate cognitive processes involved in meaning-making; on the other, it will discuss that cognitive psychology can be useful to understand narrative choices, analyzing readers' responses to specific features of texts. Instead, the second section will focus on the term "psychonarratology", coined by scholars Bortolussi and Dixon in *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Studies of Literary Response* (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003), and will investigate the influence the two disciplines have on each other more thoroughly. In this sense, it will be asserted that psychonarratology is an approach which blends cognitive

psychology and narrative studies: whilst the first focuses on the audience's processing of narrative, namely, readers' "constructions", the latter analyze the text's formal and objective characteristics, which are referred to as "textual features" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.24). In the end, having provided an overview of psychonarratology and the way it works, it will be pointed out that introducing the notion of "the statistical reader" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.34), this approach gives some empirical evidence to the theory of readers' response, supplying the deficiencies of previous methods and approaches.

4.1.1 Premises to psychonarratology: narrative's ubiquitous nature

It is not surprising that narrative is now studied across a large array of disciplines (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.1-2). In this sense, it will first be argued that narrative discourse is central to all our social interactions. Particularly, this subsection will emphasize the pivotal role of narratives not only in literary studies but also in human conscious experiences, such as shaping the meaning of our selfhood. In the end, after having illustrated how narratives can help us understand how the human mind works, it will be shown that cognitive psychology may also be central in explaining literary choices.

To begin with, it may be said that when we talk about narrative, we may address not only the literary context, but also the whole reality that surrounds us, for "narrative permeates all aspects of our social experience" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1). In this regard, it could be affirmed that narrative and storytelling have an "ubiquitous nature" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1; Hineline, 2018, p.471), as narrative forms are found "in the recollection of life events, in historical documents and textbooks, in scientific explanations of data, in political speeches, and in day-to-day conversation" (Nash qtd. in Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1). Hence, narratives may be considered as essential to analyze and interpret the world around us.

Furthermore, with respect to the major role played by narratives in our social life, Caracciolo emphasizes their importance in shaping human selfhood. To do so, he compares spiderwebs to human creations, particularly storytelling and narrative discourse (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xiv). In this sense, he writes that,

> Humans weave a self through narrative: our self— the originating center of our conscious experiences— derives from the stories we tell about ourselves, and these stories are often just as natural and spontaneous as it is for spiders to spin their webs (ibid).

Since narratives help us to shape the meaning of our selfhood (ibid.) and interpret the world around us (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1), by analyzing texts, it could be possible to understand how cognitive processes work (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.1; Caracciolo, 2014, pp.xiv-xv). Hence, it may be affirmed that what is interesting in investigating literary fiction is that it allows us to understand both narrative features and how our mind works.

So far, this section has explained how narratives can help us understanding cognitive processes. Nevertheless, it is now worth showing how cognitive psychology may also shed light on literary devices and features. In fact, Bortolussi and Dixon assert that,

> What readers do with the text is crucial for an understanding of narratives and how they function. In our view, there is a common supposition that the process of reading must be considered to understand the way in which narratives function (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.35).

Therefore, the way in which readers respond to texts could explain how specific narrative features are employed and affect readers' processing (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.35-36). In this respect, in their experiment about readers' response, analyzing the audience's processing of narrative "you", Bell and other scholars show that this pronoun could be employed to elicit ambiguity in identification with fictional characters, providing insight into textual understanding and narrative choices (Bell et al., 2019, pp.258-259). In general, it may be argued that not only narrative may help us to better understand how our mind and cognitive processes work, but also cognitive psychology could support us in examining how fiction works and how literary choices and devices function.

To sum up, this short section has attempted to highlight how literary studies and cognitive psychology are connected to one another. In this sense, narratives help us investigate all our cognitive experiences, since narrative has a central role in several fields of our everyday life. Particularly, narratives are useful in making sense not only of the reality around us, but also of our own selves. In the end, it has been shown that if literary texts may shed light on the working of the mind, cognitive psychology could be a support in understanding how literary features and devices are employed as well. Thus, due to the influence they have on one another, it may be affirmed that literary studies and cognitive psychology may be used by scholars to examine each other's functions.

4.1.2 Psychonarratology as a method to overcome the limitations of reader-oriented approaches

The aim of this subsection is to introduce psychonarratology, as a response to the deficiencies of reader-oriented approaches with regards to the audience's processing of literary fiction. Specifically, it will first provide a general overview of psychonarratology, as a new discipline adopting both a speculative and empirical method of investigation, focusing on the term and its origins. Then, we will discuss the distinction between "textual features" and readers' "constructions", which is essential to analyze readers' responses to literary texts (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.24), with a particular insight on narrators. In the end, although they have already been explained in the second chapter of this theory, this subsection will investigate the main limitations of Iser's theory in the light of psychonarratology more thoroughly.

To start our analysis of psychonarratology, I suggest focusing on the term and its origins, and then attempt to provide a general description of how this approach works. In this regard, it is commonly assumed that the word "psychonarratology" was coined by Bortolussi and Dixon in *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Studies of Literary Response* to explore the mutual influence narratology and cognitive psychology have on each other, thus affirming narrative's "ubiquitous nature". Specifically, to explain how this new approach to literary studies works, it is possible to compare its functioning to that of psycholinguistics (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37). In this sense, the scholars state that,

> [Psycholinguistics] involves the use of empirical methods from cognitive psychology to investigate how features of language are processed by language comprehenders. In many cases, formal linguistics provides the conceptual distinctions and interesting variables for this investigation, while cognitive psychology contributes the empirical methods and interpretive tools (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37).

Therefore, since psycholinguistics and psychonarratology work in a similar way, it may be asserted that the latter also employs the "empirical methods from cognitive psychology" to examine the readers' processing of narrative texts (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37). In addition, like psycholinguistics, stylistics and narratology provide instead the variables which are necessary for this investigation, such as "the characteristics of the individual reader", "the nature of text", and "the context in which the reading takes place" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.13). In general, we can state that psychonarratology is a term coined by scholars Bortolussi and Dixon to describe an approach to literary studies combining narratology and cognitive psychology, in which the first provides the variables for the analysis of readers'

processing of narrative, while the latter the "empirical" and "interpretative tools" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37).

Furthermore, Bortolussi and Dixon argue that a distinction between "textual features" and "constructions" is essential to analyze readers' responses to literary texts. Specifically, the two scholars assert that psychonarratology is "the investigation of mental processes and representations corresponding to the textual features and structures of narrative" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.24). Focusing on "textual features" first, they can be defined as those characteristics of texts that can be identified in an objective way, such as narration styles, speech styles, and "aspects of characterization" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.28), namely the traits that may be given to characters (rif.). In this sense, it may be stated that narrators, described as the "implied speaker of the words of the text" (Dixon and Mullins, 2007, p.263), are also based on identifiable "textual features". This is the case with statements about their identity, like proper names, details about their physical appearance and social status, (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.65), personality traits, likes and dislikes, and their explicit judgements on characters and events in the fictional world (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.247). In addition, the narrators' relationships with the story worlds can also be considered a "textual feature" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.63), and, therefore, it is possible to distinguish between extradiegetic third-person narrators, autodiegetic first-person narrators, homodiegetic, intradiegetic, or heterodiegetic narrators (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.63-64). In general, it could be argued that narratology and stylistics are those disciplines involved in "the theoretical description of formal characteristics of narrative texts" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.9), allowing us to identify the "textual features" of different elements of the story worlds.

On the other hand, "constructions" are the readers' mental processes, which are both subjective and contextual (ibid.). In addition, "constructions" are investigated through empirical evidence from cognitive psychology, focusing on the cognitive processes, especially those involved in reading (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.28-29). In this sense, narrators can also be conceived as mental representations in the minds of the readers, since they can draw some inferences based on their own knowledge, previous experiences, and the assumption that the narrator is being cooperative and coherent in telling the story (Dixon and Mullins, 2007, p.263). Particularly, according to the scholars, this means that literary narratives may function as real conversations, in which the narrator is to be understood as a conversation participant and the reading process as an act of communication (Dixon and

Mullins, 2007, pp.262-264). Therefore, it is possible to state that narrators derive from the interaction between the audience and the text, and that, as it has already been argued for reader-oriented approaches, readers can be considered as the activators of the contextual networks (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.28). Overall, a distinction between "textual features" and "constructions" is fundamental to gain an insight into how psychonarrotology works combining narratology and cognitive psychology: whilst the first focuses on the formal and objective characteristics of texts, the second is concerned with the readers' processing of narratives.

Having stated that an analysis of both "textual features" and readers' "constructions" is essential to investigate the processing of narrative, it is worth noting that the scholars claim that if a theoretical approach may be useful to examine the first, it lacks, however, the tools to explore the latter, which need empirical evidence (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.28). This is the reason why it may be affirmed that although Iser offers interesting suggestions to the study of the audience's processing of texts, such as the acknowledgement that the work of art is neither the text itself, nor the readers' responses to it, but it stands "virtually" between the two (Iser, 1987, p.21), his methodology presents major limitations, as it is purely speculative (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.5). In this respect, in *The Act of Reading*, Iser precisely states that "the theory developed here has not undergone any empirical tests" (Iser, 1987, p.x). Thereby, it can be argued that even if his theoretical approach assumes that literary texts are constructed through the interaction between the formal features of narratives and the audience's subjective contributions, it lacks the empirical evidence necessary to explore literary fiction, and his analysis may appear merely as an abstraction of readers' processing.

As argued in the second chapter of this thesis, the limitations of Iser's theory are particularly evident in his concept of the reader. In this respect, it may be affirmed that he gives no explanation of what happens in the minds of real readers, since he clearly asserts that he is not interested in investigating an "actual living reader" (Iser, 1987, p.31), but just one that is implied by the text. Particularly, he states that "the implied reader as a concept has its roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader" (Iser, 1987, p.34). Thereby, although the critic acknowledges the existence of different possible fulfilments of the same narrative text, as "mental images are colored by the reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background" (Iser, 1987, p.38), he does not seem to solve the gap between individual and collective reading process (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.44-45). This is since his method of investigation is purely

theoretical and offers a generalized view of the reading activity. Furthermore, although he provides some empirical evidence to validate his hypothesis of the existence of "interpretive communities", Fish's method can be considered limited and unreliable, as he does not provide any quantitative data. Conversely, psychonarratology seems to fill in the gap between the individual and collective audience (ibid.), introducing "the statistical reader", which lies on the assumption that readers' responses are idiosyncratic, but share some common properties that can be measured (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.44-45). Precisely, the scholars argue that "the statistical reader" is based on two main concepts, that are, "population" and "measurement distributions" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.44). Whilst the term "population" refers to the group of individuals chosen for the investigation, a "measurement distribution" is a set of measurements, "anything that one can assess or evaluate from an individual" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.45), which can be measured and described objectively. Thus, it may be affirmed that with psychonarratology it is possible to close the gaps between individual and collective reading experiences, introducing the concept of "the statistical reader", which is necessarily based on empirical evidence.

To sum up, this section has shown that psychonarratology may be defined as a multidisciplinary approach to literary studies, combining narratology and cognitive psychology to investigate readers' responses to narratives. Specifically, we have started by analyzing the mutual influence these two disciplines have on each other, since narratives can shed light on cognitive experiences and vice versa. Furthermore, it has been shown that while narratology focuses on the investigation of the formal features of literary fiction, cognitive psychology provides the empirical tools. Furthermore, psychonarratology may be regarded as a response to the deficiencies of reader-oriented approaches, since by introducing the concept of "the statistical reader", it is possible to fill the gaps between individual and collective processing of narrative texts (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.44-45).

4.2 Negative empathy, cognitive dissonance, and strange narrators

This section examines negative empathy and its connection with "strange" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.1) postmodernist characters, eliciting cognitive dissonance. Particularly, it will open with an introduction on negative empathy, as a process based on "cathartic identification", involving narrative empathy (Ercolino, 2022, p.46). Hence, this section will explain the phenomenon of identification and the way it relates to empathetic and sympathetic engagement, highlighting that the debate about which experience is the "precursor" of the

other is still unresolved (Keen, 2007, xii). In the second place, it will be argued that to explain negative empathy, it may be worth introducing another mental process, namely, cognitive dissonance, since it seems to be directly related to empathetic engagement (Caracciolo, 2016, p.21). In this respect, a definition of cognitive dissonance will first be provided, explaining how human beings usually react when they hold two contrasting cognitions. After having provided a definition of cognitive dissonance, this section will then explore this phenomenon in postmodernist literary fiction, where the empathetic engagement with characters is problematized, as they may be considered "strange", since they elicit contrasting feelings. In the end, before explaining the use of the adjective "strange", this section will explain two strategies with which the audience may cope with dissonance, that are, "imaginative resistance" and "attitude change" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.21).

To begin with, it is important to state that negative empathy has both a cognitive and affective dimension, since it is based on a process of "cathartic identification" which includes narrative empathy, involving feelings of attraction and revulsion for fictional characters at the same time (Ercolino, 2022, pp.8-9). Particularly, this phenomenon is cathartic, as it involves a regressive aesthetic experience due to the identification with negative characters (Ercolino, 2022, p.60). Furthermore, it can be stated that the audience can react to "cathartic identification" in different ways, since it can either be open to agency, although there seems to be still great debate on the relationship between empathy, identification, and social behaviour (Keen, 2007, p.178), or be limited to the readers' minds (Ercolino, 2022, p.70). In general, in this research, negative empathy will be considered as a process of identification with negative and unreliable postmodernist characters.

Having provided an overview on negative empathy, it is now necessary to focus on identification. In this sense, it is possible to argue that readers can identify with both characters and narrators of fictional literary works through a "self-other merging" phenomenon, and experience empathetic and sympathetic engagement. Hence, I suggest starting by providing an overview of reader-character identification, as a process of readers' engagement with literature which is fundamental to consider a narrative text as "a good story" (Krieken et al., 2017, p.2). Specifically, identification with a character or narrator can be defined as a dynamic process whose intensity changes while reading (Krieken et al., 2017, p.1) and "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (Cohen,

2001, p.245). Therefore, the readers may assume the identity, goals, and perspective of a fictional character (Cohen, 2001, p.250). Likewise, Cheetham affirms that,

> Identification refers to the transient experience of imaginatively perceiving oneself as transposed into the thoughts, feelings and situations of a media character, experiencing the character's happenings from the character's perspective, and of merging with or being that character (Cheetham et al., 2014, p.1836).

In general, identification can be described as a temporary process through which readers can experience a "self-other merging" phenomenon, and be absorbed in the events taking place in the plot and in its characters or narrators (Cohen, 2001, p.245).

Furthermore, it is important to note that identification relates to both empathy and sympathy (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.115). In this regard, it may be stated that although identification and narrative empathy should be regarded as two distinct processes (Ercolino, 2022, p.44), it is difficult to determine which is the "precursor" of the other, as they seem to have a mutual influence on one another (Keen, 2007, xii). Specifically, to explain how identification, empathy and sympathy are connected, it is possible to argue that when identifying with a character, readers can "put [them]selves in the shoes of characters" (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.111) sharing feelings and emotions (Cheetam et al., 2014, p.1836; Cohen, 2001, p.256). In addition, the audience can also sympathize with fictional characters or narrators, feeling pity or concern for them (Keen, 2007, pp.xx-xxi), since empathy is often a precursor to sympathy (Keen, 2007, p.4). As for the difficulty in determining which of the two phenomena comes first, it is worth noting that on the one hand, Jauss believes that identification is the "basic mechanism" to elicit narrative empathy (Ercolino, 2022, p.46), and that similarly, Jumpertz affirms that empathy is a consequence of identification (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.116). On the other hand, Cheetam says that processes associated with empathy are responsible for eliciting identification (Cheetam et al., 2014, p.1836): this shows that determining which phenomenon is the "precursor" of the other is an unresolved question (Keen, 2007, xii). In general, for the purpose of my investigation of negative empathy and reader-responses, I suggest considering narrative empathy and identification as two distinct phenomena, although strictly connected with one another: whilst identification refers to a "self-other merging" process, through which readers can be absorbed in the events taking place in the plot and in its characters or narrators (Cohen, 2001, p.245), empathy concerns "put[ting] [our]selves in the shoes of characters" (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.111) and feeling what another person feels (Keen, 2007, p.5).

After having explained that negative empathy is based on a process involving both "cathartic identification", and empathetic or sympathetic perspective taking, it may be worth introducing another psychological phenomenon, namely cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, it may be stated that cognitive dissonance is related to empathy (Caracciolo, 2016, p.21), and, therefore, I suggest considering it connected to negative empathy as well. In this sense, it is necessary to start by providing some definitions of this psychological phenomenon. Specifically, Leon Festinger, whose account of cognitive dissonance has become one of the most successful in social and psychological studies (Caracciolo, 2013, p.21), states that "the term cognitive dissonance describes a psychological state in which an individual's cognitions - beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours - are at odds (Festinger qtd. in Egan et al., 2007, p.978). Likewise, in *Theories of Cognitive Consistencies* (Abelson et al., 1968) Abelson affirms that "dissonance is a negative drive state that occurs whenever an individual simultaneously holds two cognitions (ideas, beliefs, opinions) which are psychologically inconsistent" (Abelson et al., 1968, p.5). Furthermore, both scholars seem to suggest that human beings generally aim at reducing the inconsistencies (Abelson et al., 1968, p.6; Caracciolo, 2013, p.24), since they are perceived as unpleasant, trying to add "consonant cognitions" (Abelson et al., 1968, p.6). In general, from a psychological point of view, cognitive dissonance may be defined as a mental state in which opposite cognitions are hold, and are, hence, reduced to limit their disturbing outcome.

Whilst the previous paragraph has provided a general definition of cognitive dissonance, it is now the time to explain how this psychological phenomenon relates to literature, starting from the acknowledgement that fiction encourages us to try on other perspectives, and engage with characters' emotional states, and conditions (Keen, 2007, p.4). However, it may also be argued that there are some cases in which empathic perspective taking becomes problematic. This is clearly explained by Caracciolo, when he asserts that "in relating to fictional characters readers learn about worldviews and beliefs systems that can be significantly different from those that guide their everyday life" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.26). Furthermore, this could imply that sometimes, the audience may be asked to identify with characters that are perceived as "strange": whilst on the one hand, they encourage identification, empathetic and sympathetic engagement, on the other, they act or think in a way that is considered immoral by the readers (Caracciolo, 2013, p.30). The adjective "strange" may, therefore, be regarded as suitable to postmodernist fictional characters, because they are ambiguous and paradoxical. In this respect, even if in *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction*

(Caracciolo, 2016) Caracciolo does not focus on postmodernist fiction, he recognizes, however, that postmodern novels favour unreliability and problematize the audience's engagement with characters (Caracciolo, 2016, pp.28-29). A notable example of a character perceived as "strange" may be Maximilien Aue, a former SS officer in *The Kindly Ones* (Littell, 2010), who may elicit the audience's pity for his condition as a survivor of WWII, but also their disgust for the recount of the crimes he committed and the attempt to shorten the "moral distance" with the readers (Ercolino, 2022, p.101). As a result, these kinds of fictional characters may elicit cognitive dissonance in their audience, as readers are first encouraged to align the perspective with theirs, experiencing identification, empathetic and sympathetic engagement, and then "personal distress" (Ercolino, 2022, p.34), owing to the rejection of the characters' point of view (Caracciolo, 2013, p.32). Thus, it can be stated that although fiction generally encourages the readers to identify and empathize with characters, the empathetic relationship may be problematized, due to the emergence of cognitive dissonance.

After having explained cognitive dissonance in literary texts, it is now worth focusing on the strategies readers use to cope with it. In this respect, as argued above, it is possible to suppose that readers try to reduce the dissonance (Abelson et al., 1968, p.6; Caracciolo, 2013, p.24) elicited by "strange" and ambiguous fictional characters, resisting the empathetic/sympathetic engagement and identification (Caracciolo, 2013, p.30) and feeling morally enquired and "mobilized" (Ercolino, 2022, p.113). Since it may be affirmed that negative empathy as a process of "cathartic identification" is open to agency, or "limited to the inner life of the empathizing subject" (ibid.), two of the possible outcomes of cognitive dissonance could be "imaginative resistance" and "attitude change". Whilst the latter may be easier to understand, since it concerns and adjustment of the readers' beliefs and values, based on what they have learnt and experienced from taking the characters' perspectives (ibid.), the concept of "imaginative resistance" could be more difficult to grasp. In this respect, it can be stated that "the primary source of imaginative resistance is not our inability to imagine morally deviant situations, but our unwillingness to do so" (Glender qtd. in Driver, 2008, p.303). Hence, if identification implies that "we forget ourselves and become the other" (Cohen, 2001, p.247) and that the story world becomes temporarily more real than the real world (Krieken et al.., 2017, p.2), the inability to imagine and identify with an immoral character may restore the boundaries between the fictional and the real, interrupting the "merging" phenomenon. In

addition, to provide a useful definition of this phenomenon, it may be worth quoting Caracciolo, who describes "imaginative resistance" as the opposite of "attitude change":

> Just like attitude change shows that the perspectives readers temporarily adopt while relating to characters can have an impact on their beliefs, values, and self-concept, imaginative resistance suggests that readers' own values can, in some scenarios, discourage them from adopting fictional characters' perspectives (Caracciolo, 2016, p.33).

Overall, it is possible to assert that among the strategies with which readers may try to cope with cognitive dissonance, there are "imaginative resistance" and "attitude change". Specifically, whilst the first involves a rethinking of beliefs and values, the second causes a suspension of identification and empathetic or sympathetic engagement with fictional characters, since readers could feel morally enquired (ibid.).

In the end, before moving on to explore readers' responses to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* providing some empirical evidence, it is important to examine the concept of "strange" characters more thoroughly. Although the paragraphs above have already provided some insight into this concept, it may be worth underlining two main features. As for the first, it is necessary to quote Caracciolo's definition of "strange narrators", which could also be applied to those postmodernist narrators and characters eliciting negative empathy and cognitive dissonance. In this regard, the critic says that,

> Some [narrators] are likely to appear particularly strange or unusual to the readers. […] They are fascinating, because of how they deviate from the selves we tend to encounter in our everyday experience, including of course our own selves (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xv).

Particularly, although in his work *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction* (Caracciolo, 2016), the critic employs as case studies narrators that are "strange" because they suffer from neurocognitive or developmental disorders, mental illnesses, or are "naturally impossible narrators", like animals or objects (Caracciolo, 2016, p.2), in *Patterns of Cognitive Dissonance* (Caracciolo, 2013), he asserts that it may be easier to accept that a narrator is an incorporeal entity, rather than imagining something that goes against the audience's own ethical stances (Caracciolo, 2013, p.30). This is since readers appear to consider more "deviant" (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xv) those narrators that they judge as immoral, than "unnaturally impossible" (Caracciolo, 2013, pp.30-32; Caracciolo, 2016, p.2). Likewise, many critics claim that the audience can experience more "imaginative resistance" to those characters that are "evaluative deviant" rather than "descriptive deviant" (see e.g., Driver, Stokes, Gendler qtd. in Kim et al., 2018, p.195). Overall, this paragraph has explained a first

criterion to describe narrators as "strange", that is, they are far from the readers' everyday experiences (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xv), or immoral (Caracciolo, 2013, pp.30-32), although the latter case seems to trigger more "imaginative resistance" than the first (Kim et al., 2018, p.195).

Having provided Caracciolo's definition of "strange narrators", it is now necessary to explain the second criterion that may be used to describe a narrator in this way. In this respect, it is worth underlining that this second criterion relates with the emotions "strange narrators" can elicit in their readers, which Caracciolo refers to as "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi), and explains that,

> These feelings span a relatively wide experiential gamut and are often characterized by a different emotional valence (positive for being intrigued, negative for being disturbed, neutral or negative for perplexity). Yet it would be counterproductive to draw sharp distinctions between such feelings: puzzlement often borders on curiosity, and both may paradoxically go hand in hand with aversion (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xv).

Since the critic says that "feelings of strangeness" (ibid.) are paradoxical, it may be stated that they could result in negative empathy and cognitive dissonance, since they can provoke attraction and revulsion, identification, empathetic/sympathetic engagement, and imaginative resistance at the same time. In general, it may be affirmed that the adjective "strange" could be given to those characters and narrators who are able to evoke contrasting and paradoxical feelings in their audience, due to their being far from the readers' everyday experiences (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xv), or immoral (Caracciolo, 2013, pp.30-32).

To conclude, this section has attempted to explain the connection between negative empathy, cognitive dissonance and "strange narrators". In this respect, negative empathy has been defined as a process of "cathartic identification" with negative, unreliable, postmodernist characters, involving narrative empathy. Furthermore, to better understand negative empathy, this section has first introduced the process of identification with fictional characters and its connection with empathy and sympathy. Particularly, it has been stated that while identification can be described as a "self-other merging" phenomenon, empathetic engagement involves feeling what other people feel (Keen, 2007, p.5), without identifying with them. As for cognitive dissonance, it has been defined as a psychological phenomenon deriving from holding two different mental states, contrasting with one another (Festinger qtd. in Egan et al., 2007, p.978), which problematize the audience's relationship with fictional characters. Hence, it has been highlighted that readers try to cope with these mental states by reducing the dissonance that causes unpleasant feelings, through coping strategies such as

"attitude change" or "imaginative resistance". In the end, it has also been explained that cognitive dissonance could be elicited by "strange" characters or narrators that arise feelings which "paradoxically go hand in hand" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xv), such as attraction and repulsion, sympathy, and disgust.

4.3 Investigating readers' identification and empathetic engagement with Changez

The aim of this section is to provide a "thought experiment" about readers' processing of first-person "strange" narrator Changez, through identification and negative empathy. Specifically, this section will first highlight the method of investigation, hypothesis and approach adopted. Then, it will explain why this study could be considered as a "thought experiment", although it employs psychonarratology as the approach of investigation. In the second place, this section will present the "thought experiment", providing empirical evidence for the audience's identification and empathetic engagement with first-person narrators and "imaginative resistance" based on "linguistic cues representing emotions" which are judged as immoral by the readers.

4.3.1 Method of investigation

This short subsection examines the method employed in the investigation of readers' identification and empathetic engagement with first-person postmodernist narrator Changez. In the first place, it will explain the hypothesis and approach adopted in this study. As for the approach, it will be stated that this experiment adopts Bortolussi and Dixon's psychonarratology, since it supplies the deficiencies of reader-oriented theories. Then, this subsection will list the "textual features" and "constructions" adopted in this study and explain why this experiment may be considered as a "thought experiment", pointing out the experimental research on which it is based.

As stated in the introduction above, to begin with, it is necessary to point out the hypothesis and approach on which this research is based. Specifically, the hypothesis of this study is that while engaging with "strange" first-person narrator Changez, the audience experiences negative empathy and cognitive dissonance. This is since the novel elicits both the readers' identification, empathetic/sympathetic engagement, and "imaginative resistance" at the same time. As for the approach that this study adopts, it may be stated that it is the one described by Bortolussi and Dixon in *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Studies of Literary Response* (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003), since the previous sections have outlined the reasons why it may suit the exploration of postmodernist narrative texts and literary fiction in

general. Hence, to validate our hypothesis, the experiment will try to blend elements from narratology and cognitive psychology, to enrich theoretical analysis with some empirical evidence.

Furthermore, since a distinction between "textual features" and "constructions" is essential to analyze readers' responses to literary texts with a psychonarratological approach (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.24), it is worth explaining the "textual features" and the "constructions" (ibid.) employed in this "thought experiment". Whilst on the one hand, first-person homodiegetic narrator, internal focalization and "linguistic cues representing emotions" are considered as "textual features", on the other, emotional identification, empathetic/sympathetic engagement and "imaginative resistance" are the readers' "constructions". This choice is based on Bortolussi and Dixon's definition of "textual features" as those characteristics of texts that can be identified in an objective way, and readers' "constructions" as the audience's mental processes (Bortolussi, and Dixon, 2003, p.28). Specifically, the choice of "linguistic cues representing emotions" as "textual features" derives from Krieken's definition of identification as "a multidimensional experience for which different dimensions are evoked by different linguistic cues that give expression to various aspects of the narrative character's viewpoint" (Krieken et. al, 2017, p.5). Although the scholar clearly explains that identification is both a spatiotemporal, cognitive, emotional, moral, embodied, and perceptual phenomenon (ibid.), for the purpose of this experiment, it has been decided to focus only on one dimension, namely emotional identification. This is due to time and length constraints and to the relevance of the emotional dimension of identification on the examination of the audience's empathetic and sympathetic engagement with fictional characters. In general, it may be stated that identification, first-person homodiegetic narrator, internal focalization and "linguistic cues representing emotions" on the one hand, and empathetic/sympathetic engagement and "imaginative resistance" on the other, can be considered as appropriate "textual features" and "constructions" for the investigation of readers' processing of literary fiction with psychonarratology.

Having explained the centrality of "textual features" and "constructions" in psychonarratology (ibid.), it is now worth focusing on how this study blends theoretical assumptions with empirical evidence and the concept of "the statistical reader", based on the concepts of "population" and "measurement distributions" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.34). In this sense, it is important to state that although this research is not based on original

empirical evidence, it is supported by experiments showing that the "textual features" considered are directly connected with the "constructions" chosen for this study, namely identification, empathetic/sympathetic engagement and "imaginative resistance". This method seems to be validated by Caracciolo's "thought experiment" about "empathy for characters and attitude change", which is not based on "an original empirical study, but it is at least consistent with experimental research both on cognitive dissonance in real-world settings and on readers' engagement with characters" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.23). In this sense, before quoting the "experimental research" (ibid.) on which this specific "thought experiment" is based, it may be worth explaining the "population" and "measurement distribution" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.34) considered for the purpose of this study: on the one hand, since "a population is a collection of individuals about which interesting claims might be made, [for example] a population might be all the undergraduate students in the United States and Canada" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, pp.44-45), it is possible to regard as "population" the participants each scholar chose for their experiments; on the other hand, as for "measurement distribution", which is "anything that can be assessed by an individual (ibid.), we can regard anything that has been objectively measured by the critics. Specifically, De Graff's experiment explores the relationship between first-person narrators and identification employing a questionnaire in which 200 students from a Dutch university, whose age varied between 18 and 28, were asked to answer questions measuring their attitudes after reading a story, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (De Graff et al., 2010, pp.811-815). Similarly, Jumpertz and Wiekbe examine the link between first-person narrators using internal focalization with the audience's identification and empathetic engagement employing four text excerpts and a questionnaire of twenty questions for each excerpt, based on Cohen's definition of identification, providing yes/no-answers, fivepoint scales and comment fields as answering possibilities (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.119). Jumpertz and Wiebke's participants were 34 students, non-native English speakers, whose average age was 21.2 (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.117). As for the connection between emotional identification and "linguistic cues representing emotions", Wallentin's demonstrates that heart-rate variability increased with passages from *The Ugly Duckling* that were rated more emotionally intense, due to the presence of "linguistic cues", using a rating scale from -5 for strong negative emotions to +5 for strong positive emotions, and fMRI acquisition (Wallentin et al., 2010, p.966). The scholar tested 26 participants (17 males, 9 females), whose median age was 25 (ibid.) In the end, Kim's experiment, involving 1216 participants whose average age was 38.8, focuses on the relationship between "imaginative resistance" and "counter-moral"

propositions (ibid.) which are expressed through "linguistic cues representing emotions". Particularly, he used a questionnaire to assess readers' "imaginative resistance" to "counterevaluative" and "counterdescriptive" statements in literary texts. To conclude, it can be affirmed that although this study has not undergone any original empirical research, it adopts the approach of psychonarratology, as theoretical assumptions are based on empirical evidence from various experiments investigating readers' engagement with fictional characters.

4.3.2 Negative empathy and cognitive dissonance: a thought experiment

The aim of this subsection is to provide an investigation of readers' empathetic engagement with first-person narrator Changez, employing the approach of Bortolussi and Dixon (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003). First, it will introduce the importance of narrative viewpoint techniques and focalization in readers' identification with fictional characters. In this respect, two experiments will be quoted to prove the audience's identification with first-person narrators using internal focalization. Furthermore, it will be stated that the audience may experience identification and empathetic engagement with first-person narrator Changez, basing this assumption on empirical evidence. In the second place, this section will move on to analyze the readers' emotional identification owing to "linguistic cues representing emotions", quoting some passages from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Thirdly, this section will focus on sympathy and its connection with moral values, providing some evidence from the novel, and it will be explained how morality plays a pivotal role in the experience of negative empathy, cognitive dissonance, and "imaginative resistance". In the end, before drawing our conclusions, this section will show how imaginative resistance" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.24) may be caused by Changez's morally deviant statements or behaviours, and it will be also clarified why it may be regarded as as a "strange narrator".

To begin with, it may be worth pointing out the centrality of viewpoint techniques and focalization in readers' identification and empathetic engagement with fictional characters. In this respect, critics generally state that readers are encouraged to identify with a first-person narrator using internal focalization (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.122), owing to the subjectivity and internal perspective that the adoption of this viewpoint technique allows (Krieken et al., 2017, p.12). Similarly, first-person narrators can also elicit the audience's empathetic and sympathetic engagement, whose intensity seems to relate to focalization as

well (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.120). As for identification, Krieken illustrates the point clearly by stating that,

> First person narratives invite readers to represent the perspective from their personal, spatial body perspective. In text processing, the grammatical first person guides the reader toward identification with the 'I'- character, who is the deictic centre in which the text is referentially grounded; by default, speakers implicitly perceive and think from this centre (Krieken et al., 2017, p.4).

Caracciolo also seems to have grasped the possibility of identifying and empathizing with first-person narrators, when he states that,

> In engaging with first-person narrative, readers, and especially readers interested in the psychological dimension of characters, are encouraged to build a mental model of the narrator's fictional, but still narratively woven, self (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xiv).

Hence, owing to first-person narratives and internal focalization, readers are not only encouraged to identify with narrators, but also to share their feelings through narrative empathy (Caracciolo, 2014, pp.34-35), as they can build a mental model of the characters' selves (Caracciolo, 2014, p.xiv).

Furthermore, since psychonarratology adopts "empirical methods from cognitive psychology" (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.37), to explore readers' engagement with Changez, it is necessary to provide some empirical evidence for identification and empathetic involvement with first-person narrators. In this sense, I suggest quoting two different experiments. First, it is worth noting De Graaf's *Experiment 2*, as it shows that perspective influences identification and that readers can easily identify with the "I"- characters (De Graaf et al., 2012). Specifically, this experiment, which was carried out in 2012, addressed 200 students from a Dutch university. The students were randomly provided with one of the two versions of a first-person narrative about two sisters discussing their mother's possible euthanasia: whilst the first version was told from the perspective of the sister supporting euthanasia, the second was narrated by the sister against it (De Graaf et al., 2012, pp.811-815). As a result, the experiment showed that participants identified more with the sister whose perspective the story was told from, regardless of her position on euthanasia, confirming the link between identification and perspective in narrative discourse (De Graaf et al., 2012, pp.815-816). Another experiment concerning identification and empathetic engagement with first-person narrators is Jumpertz and Wiebke's (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020). It is worth underlining here that the two scholars focused particularly on the difference in identification with first and third-person narrators, proving that identification with a first-person narrator seems to be

more immediate and stronger than the one with a third-person narrator (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.122; Krieken et al., 2017, p.4). In this sense, their experiment involved 34 students from different literary study programmes, who were non-native speakers of English, and four text excerpts with different points of view and focalizations in both original and manipulated versions (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, pp.117-119). Consequently, the scholars showed that the greatest level of identification occurred in *Maze Runner*'s manipulated version, featuring a homodiegetic first-person narrator, and that empathy scored highest in this excerpt as well (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, pp.120-121). Overall, these two experiments demonstrate that identification and empathetic engagement are strongly dependent on narrative point of view and focalization, and that first-person narrators using internal focalization seem to be the ones who elicit the highest level of identification and empathy.

Moving on to explore the audience's identification and empathetic engagement with Changez in the light of this empirical evidence, it can be asserted that readers are encouraged to identify and empathize with him, since he is an autodiegetic first-person narrator using internal focalization. It is necessary to clarify here that Changez may be defined as an autodiegetic narrator, because he is the protagonist of his own narrative (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003, p.64). In this sense, it can be argued that employing the "frame narrative technique", "Changez-narrator" tells the story of "Changez-character"'s life before and after 9/11 (White, 2019, p.445). As for focalization, it may be stated that the narrator employs internal focalization, since readers can get information about his inner world (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.114). Particularly, it may be useful to specify that internal focalization is usually distinguished by verbs that express mental processes (Sanders, 1994, p.10), and this is the case with: "I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York" (Hamid, 2007, p.106), or "[I] tried to prevent myself from asking her what it was - whether because I thought it would upset her or because I thought it would upset me, I do not now know - but I failed" (Hamid, 2007, p.127). In general, it may be affirmed that readers may experience identification and empathetic engagement with Changez, since empirical findings support the assumption that identification is strongly dependent on and influenced by internal focalization and the perspective from which the story is told, and that readers, therefore, are encouraged to identify with the "I" characters (Krieken et al., 2017, p.4), or first-person narrators.

So far, we have explained the connection between identification with narrative perspective and internal focalization, which portrays "the character's mental discourse", his thoughts and perceptions (Sanders, 1994, p.55). In this sense, since it has been argued that identification is a multidimensional phenomenon, I suggest focusing on a specific dimension of this process, that is, emotional identification (Krieken et al., 2017, p.6), which seems to be linked to internal focalization, empathetic and sympathetic engagement. Although the distinction between empathy and identification has already been explained, I suggest exploring it more deeply, and then move on to provide some empirical evidence to show how emotional identification works. In this respect, while empathy may be described as the ability to understand characters' feelings, which may result in "affective response", or "sympathy", derived from the apprehension and recognition of the other person's emotions (Brink et al., 2011, p.2), emotional identification could instead be defined as "the adoption of the feelings of another" (Krieken et al., 2017, p.6). In other words, while with identification the readers can experience the same emotions of fictional characters, as identification is a "self-other merging" phenomenon, with empathetic engagement, the audience can "mentally simulate" the characters' feelings (Brink et al., 2011, p.2), but reader and character do not "merge". As for explaining how emotional identification works, it may be stated that scholars suggest that this process may be activated by specific "linguistic cues", like "verbs of emotion", or adjectives indicating "the character's emotional viewpoint" (Krieken et al., 2017, p.8). Furthermore, this may be supported by psychophysiological experiments, measuring galvanic skin response and heart rate variability (Krieken et al., 2017, p.11). For example, Wallentin and other scholars showed that heart-rate variability increased with passages from *The Ugly Duckling* that were rated more emotionally intense, due to the presence of "linguistic cues" representing the character's emotions (ibid.), both regarding pleasant and unpleasant scenes (Wallentin et al., 2010, p.969). Particularly, the participants were a group of 26 students from the Nordic Institute at Aarhus University who were asked to rate the emotional intensity of specific extracts from the story, while being placed in a MR-scanner (Wallentin et al., 2010, p.966). Similarly, using fMRI, Hamman and Mao reported an increased blood flow in the amygdala in response to words connected with emotions, both negative and positive (Hamman, Mao, qtd. in Krieken et al., 2017, p.8). Overall, this paragraph has explained that although empathy and sympathy involve an "affective response", they should be considered distinct from emotional identification, which may be defined as "the adoption of the feelings of another" (Krieken et al., 2017, p.6). Furthermore, the findings of the experiments quoted

can be regarded as empirical evidence of the readers' emotional identification with fictional characters, based on "linguistic cues representing emotions".

To show how empathetic/sympathetic engagement and emotional identification with Hamid's first-person narrator evolve during the reading experience, I suggest focusing on some passages portraying "linguistic cues representing emotions". Particularly, following the scholars' analysis, it is possible to consider as "linguistic cues" both verbs, adjectives, and metaphors related with emotions. In this sense, it may be worth quoting the passage in which Changez describes his first interview at Underwood Samson, depicting his emotional states:

> I would like to think that I was, in that moment, outwardly calm, but inside I was panicking. How does one value a fictitious, fantastic company such as the one he had just described? Where does one even begin? I had no idea. I looked at Jim, but he did not seem to be joking. So I inhaled and shut my eyes. There was a mental state I used to attain when I was playing soccer: my self would disappear, and I would be free, free of doubts and limits, free to focus on nothing but the game. When I entered this state I felt unstoppable. […] My essence was focused on finding my way through the case. I started by asking questions to understand the technology: how scalable it was, how reliable, how safe. Then I asked Jim about the environment: if there were any direct competitors, what the regulators might do, if any suppliers were particularly critical. […] And in the end, I arrived at a number […] He extended his hand. "You've got an offer. We'll give you one week to decide." At first I did not believe him. I asked if he was serious, if there was not a second round for me to pass. […] It was exhilarating (Hamid, 2007, p.14).

It is worth highlighting here the "linguistic cues" which are relevant to explore readers' emotional identification: "outwardly calm", "panicking", "I felt unstoppable", "I did not believe him" which may indicate Changez's incredulity, and "exhilarating" for his excitement (Hamid, 2007, p.14). Furthermore, since several experiments have validated emotional identification elicited by emotional "linguistic cues", it may be stated that in this passage, readers are encouraged to identify with Changez and adopt his feelings (Krieken et al., 2017, p.6). As for the audience's empathetic engagement, readers can empathize with Changez and feel sympathy for him, that is, a feeling of apprehension (Keen, 2007, pp.xx-xxi), especially when he tells that he was panicking (Hamid, 2007, p.14). Overall, this passage has shown that readers can experience both emotional identification and sympathetic engagement with Changez, owing to "linguistic cues representing emotions".

Likewise, the audience's emotional identification and empathetic engagement could also be triggered by those passages in which Changez tells his "auditor" (Ilott, 2014, p.574) about his love story with Erica. It is worth clarifying here that Erica may be interpreted as a personification of the USA, since it could be argued that Hamid himself spells it out for his

readers as the expression "I am Erica", although never pronounced in the novel, can suggest an inevitable connection between Erica and America, and, therefore, between Changez's initial love for both Erica and America (Robjant, 2013, p.1). Specifically, emotional identification with Changez's love and attraction for Erica may occur in the following extract, depicting the first night they make love:

> I congratulated her and said I would most willingly accompany her on any adventure she chose for the evening; she suggested we purchase a magnum of champagne and proceed to my flat, which was just around the corner. She said it as though it was the most natural thing in the world; I smiled assent in - as best I could manage - the same easy manner. But it was clear to both of us, I think it safe to say, that a certain gravity had attached itself to our actions, and I for one was uncharacteristically clumsy as I searched in my pocket, first in a liquor store for change, and later on the steps in front of my building for my keys (Hamid, 2007, p.100).

While reading this passage, the audience may experience Changez's emotions owing to some "linguistic cues", among which are: "a certain gravity had attached itself to our actions" suggesting excitement and feelings of attraction, and "I smiled assent in - as best I could manage - the same easy manner" which may indicate incredulity and perplexity (Hamid, 2007, p.100). Furthermore, readers may feel sympathy for Changez not only because he describes himself as "clumsy" (ibid.), but also since earlier in the novel, he says that he struggled to gain Erica's love and attention. This is due to her enduring love for her dead boyfriend Chris (Hamid, 2007, p.30), whose loss she is unable to overcome (Bhattacharya, 2007), and her being difficult to seduce, since she is "regal", and desired by many other men:

> I did live behind a love, and her name was Erica. We met the summer after we graduated […]. When I first saw Erica, I could not prevent myself from offering to carry her back-pack – so stunningly *regal* was she […] It was immediately apparent that I would not have, in my wooing of Erica, the field to myself. In fact, no sooner had we set sail on our ferry to the islands than did a young man […] begin to strum his guitar and serenade her (Hamid, 2007, pp.18-19).

In general, it is possible to assert that readers may experience emotional identification and sympathy with Changez in the parts of the novel in which he describes his relationship with Erica. Particularly, the audience could sympathize with him because he has to fight to gain her attention, as she seems unreachable and "otherworldly" (Hamid, 2007, p.101).

Before moving on to examine the readers' "imaginative resistance", cognitive dissonance, and negative empathy, it may be worth investigating the role of sympathy more thoroughly. Furthermore, its connection with morality will also be briefly introduced, to explain, in the next paragraph, the audience's experience of negative empathy and "imaginative resistance" (ibid.), when they feel morally enquired and "mobilized". To begin with, it is necessary to

clarify that readers may experience sympathetic engagement in several parts of the novel, especially when the narrator depicts his relationship with the US. For example, this could be the case with the description of his arrival at Princeton:

> What did I think of Princeton? […] When I first arrived, I looked around at me at the Gothic buildings […] and thought, *This is a dream come true*. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible (Hamid, 2007, p.3).

In this passage, readers could be encouraged to sympathize with the narrator for his naivety in considering America as the land where all his dreams can come true (Hamid, 2007, p.3). In addition, sympathy for Changez can also be elicited by those parts of the narrative in which he is depicted as a victim of colonialism, postcolonial politics, American imperialism (White, 2019, p.445) and of the US's violent response to 9/11 (Morey, 2011, p.145). This may be illustrated when he tells his "auditor" about America's "assumptions of superiority" after the collapse of the Twin Towers (Hamid, 2007, p.190), and the racial discrimination he experiences. Specifically, Changez recounts how,

> Once I was walking to my rental car in the parking lot of the cable company when I was approached by a man I did not know. He made a series of unintelligible noises – 'akhala-malakhala', perhaps, or 'khalapal-khalapala' - and pressed his face alarmingly close to mine. I shifted my stance, presenting him with my side and raising my hands to shoulder height; I thought he might be mad, or drunk; I thought also that he might be a mugger, and I prepared to defend myself or to strike. Just then another man appeared; he, too, glared at me, but he took his friend by the arm and tugged at him, saying it was not worth it. Reluctantly, the first allowed himself to be led away. "Fucking Arab," he said (Hamid, 2007, pp.133-134).

Furthermore, Changez may appear as a victim of American capitalism and globalizing power when he describes the alienation and exploitation he faces at Underwood Samson. Good examples of this could be: "we international students were searched all around the globe […] were given visas and scholarships […] in exchange we were expected to contribute our talents to your society" (Hamid, 2007, p.4), or as described in the passage below,

> *Focus on the fundamentals*. This was Underwood Samson's guiding principle, drilled into us since our first day at work. It mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value. And that was precisely what I continued to do, more often than not with both skill and enthusiasm. Because to be perfectly honest, sir, the compassionate pangs I felt for soon-to-be-redundant workers were not overwhelming in their frequency; our job required a degree of commitment that left one with rather limited time for such distractions (Hamid, 2007, p.112).

All the passages quoted in this paragraph could play a pivotal role in eliciting the audience's sympathetic engagement with Changez, since by depicting him as a victim, they may provoke "supportive emotions" (Keen, 2007, p.5). Hence, it can also be added that empathetic and

sympathetic engagement with others' sufferings may arise the readers' moral values, due to the understanding of the injustices and inequalities that others have to face (Hoffman qtd. in Keen, p.16). In this regard, the readers could also start questioning the position of the US in the global economy and their relationships with foreign countries, as their policies seem to have only a violent and self-aggrandizing purpose (Morey, 2011, p.145). Overall, this paragraph has shown how sympathy may be elicited by several passages in the novel that portray Changez as a victim of Western society and may also trigger the readers' moral values, condemning the immorality of the American capitalistic and global power.

Having introduced the link between sympathy and moral judgement, it is now the time to focus on "imaginative resistance", which may be considered as a strategy to cope with the cognitive dissonance caused by the readers' empathetic engagement with "strange" and ambiguous postmodernist narrators like Changez (Caracciolo, 2013, p.24). Consequently, readers could be discouraged from adopting fictional characters' perspectives (Caracciolo, 2016, p.33), and interrupt the "self-other merging" phenomenon. In this respect, it is possible to argue that "[m]ost convincing examples of imaginative resistance involve requests to imagine situations where morally highly deviant behaviours and attitudes are endorsed" (Jackson qtd. in Kim et al., 2018, p.195). This implies that, in literature, readers can experience "imaginative resistance" when they face counter-moral and "counterevaluative" propositions (Altshuler and Maier, 2022, p.524; Kim et al., 2018, p.194), that are, "statement[s] that overturn a held evaluative belief" (Kim et al., 2018, p.208). A good example of a "counter-moral" statement (Kim et al., 2018, p.194) could be the last sentence of the following extract:

> Sara never liked animals. […] To get back at her father she poured bleach in the big fish tank, killing the beautiful fish that he loved so much. Good thing that she did, because he was really annoying (Altshuler and Maier, 2022, p.523).

Having defined "counterevaluative" statements, to provide some empirical evidence for the connection between "imaginative resistance" and morally deviant propositions, I suggest quoting the experiment by scholars Kim, Kneer and Stuart (Kim et al., 2018). Particularly, this experiment involved 1296 participants, English native language speakers, who were randomly assigned different scenarios and questions concerning either a moral, or a humour, or an aesthetic norm (Kim et al., 2018, p.199). The main goal was to determine which were the main factors triggering "imaginative resistance", especially whether "counterevaluative propositions" elicited higher "imaginative resistance" than "counterdescriptive ones".

Thereby, the scholars were able to show that "imaginative resistance" depended more on the "weirdness" of the text's content, than on its being descriptive or evaluative (Kim et al., 2018, p.219). It is worth clarifying here that "weirdness-factors" were defined as all "the potential resistance-inducing properties of a text", such as "unusualness", "distance from the actual world" and "surprisingness" (Kim et al., 2018, p.213). Furthermore, it is possible to state that these properties are not exclusive to "counter-moral" or "counterevaluative propositions", but also pertain to those propositions describing events or characters that the readers perceive "deviant" for several other reasons (Kim et al., 2018, p.213). As argued in the previous section, this may be the case with "naturally impossible narrators", like animals or objects, or characters suffering from mental illnesses and cognitive disorders (Caracciolo, 2016, p.2). In general, it is necessary to explain that what is interesting for the purpose of my research on readers' response is not to determine which features trigger the highest resistance, but rather the evidence that "imaginative resistance" (Caracciolo, 2013, p.24) may be caused by morally deviant statements or behaviours adopted by fictional characters.

Hence, to show how the audience may employ this strategy to cope with the cognitive dissonance and negative empathy elicited by first-person narrator Changez, it is possible to refer to "counter-moral" propositions employed in the novel (Kim et al., 2018, p.194). Specifically, I suggest quoting some passages in which "counter-moral" propositions (ibid.) are expressed through "linguistic cues representing emotions", which may be regarded as immoral by the audience. This may be the case with Changez's description of his reaction to watching the Twin Towers' attacks during his business trip to Manila:

> I turned on the television […] I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York's Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. Your disgust is evident […] But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack […] no, I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly bloat America to her knees (Hamid, 2007, p.83).

As explained above, readers may feel encouraged to empathize with Changez and adopt his emotions, experiencing emotional identification through the following "linguistic cues": "I smiled" and "remarkably pleased" (Hamid, 2007, p.83). However, readers may also feel revolted by Changez: it goes without saying that his pleasure at seeing the twin towers collapse and America brought to her knees (Hamid, 2007, p.83), may be shocking and disturbing for an audience who generally conceive those events as a tragedy (McKenzie, 2011). Thereby, the emotions represented by the "linguistic cues" "I smiled" and "remarkably pleased" can be considered immoral. Furthermore, a similar reaction may be elicited by

another passage in the novel, where the narrator recounts another night in which he makes love with Erica:

> I do not know how to describe my experience of what happened next […]. It was as though we were under a spell, transported to a world where I was Chris […] and we made love with a physical intimacy that Erica and I has never enjoyed. […] The entrance between her legs was wet and dilated, but was at the same time oddly rigid; it reminded me – unwillingly - of a wound, giving our sex a violent undertone […]. I felt at once both *satiated* and *ashamed* […] (Hamid, 2007, pp.119-121).

Particularly, empathetic engagement and emotional identification may here occur for the adjectives "satiated" and "ashamed" (ibid.), which the audience may temporarily be required to adopt. At the same time, readers could, nevertheless, feel disgusted by Changez, since when he says he felt "satiated" and that "she was silent and un-moving", "it was difficult to enter her" (ibid.), he may convey the impression of being a rapist with an uncontrolled sexual desire. Overall, it may be argued that both passages feature "counter-moral" propositions (Kim et al., 2018, p.194) which are characterized by "linguistic cues representing emotions" that may be regarded as immoral by the audience and elicit their disgust and revulsion.

Having provided some examples for considering the narrator's actions and beliefs as immoral, it is now worth explaining their connection with "imaginative resistance" in the light of the experiment by scholars Kim, Kneer, and Stuart (Kim et al., 2018). Hence, it will be possible to clarify the reasons for regarding Changez as a "strange narrator", eliciting "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) in the audience. In this sense, it can be stated that the audience could experience personal distress, negative empathy, and cognitive dissonance at "feeling [and identifying] with a character whose actions are at odds with [the] reader's moral code" (Keen, 2007, p.134): it goes without saying that identifying with a narrator who smiles at seeing the Twin Towers collapse (Hamid, 2007, p.83) and describes himself almost as a rapist (Hamid, 2007, pp.119-121) could make the readers feel morally enquired and "mobilized". Furthermore, cognitive dissonance, as a psychological phenomenon in which it is possible to experience contrasting mental states, cognitions, or beliefs, may also be elicited by the coexistence of passages in which readers are encouraged to feel sympathy for Changez, as he is portrayed a victim both of America and Erica, with others in which he may be seen as a perpetrator of violence against America and Erica, since he could appear as a terrorist and a rapist. Hence, Hamid's narrator can elicit "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) in his audience, as they may at the same time experience sympathy and pity for him, but also disgust and revulsion. In general, Changez can be defined as a "strange narrator" (Caracciolo,

2016, p.1), because he provokes "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) in his readers causing negative empathy and cognitive dissonance, which they may try to solve through "imaginative resistance".

To sum up, readers can experience "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) while engaging with first-person narrator Changez. Hence, they can feel negative empathy and cognitive dissonance. This is since whilst on the one hand, they are encouraged to identify and sympathize for him, on the other, they experience "imaginative resistance" and disgust. As for identification and empathetic engagement, it is possible to state that it is elicited by his being an autodiegetic first-person narrator, using internal focalization. Particularly, this section has shown that identification and empathetic engagement are strongly dependent on narrative point of view and focalization, and that first-person narrators using internal focalization seem to be the ones who elicit the highest level of identification and empathy. This has been proved by De Graff's (De Graaf et al., 2012) and Jumpertz and Wiebke's (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020) experiments on the audience's engagement with fictional characters with different perspectives. Furthermore, this section has demonstrated that emotional identification can be caused by "linguistic cues representing emotions", through which the audience is encouraged to adopt Changez's emotions. As for "imaginative resistance" and disgust, this section has demonstrated that it could be provoked by passages featuring "counter-moral" propositions representing emotions that can be considered as immoral by the audience and elicit their disgust and revulsion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided "a thought experiment" concerning readers' identification and empathetic engagement with Hamid's first-person narrator, Changez. In this sense, it has been argued that readers can experience negative empathy, which is a process of "cathartic identification" with negative, unreliable, postmodernist characters, involving narrative empathy and cognitive dissonance, a psychological phenomenon that stems from holding two different mental states contrasting the one with the other. Particularly, it has been shown that the audience is encouraged to identify and empathize with Changez, as he is a first-person narrator using internal focalization (Jumpertz and Wiebke, 2020, p.122). At the same time, it has been argued that readers struggle cope with the cognitive dissonance elicited by Changez's ambiguity through "imaginative resistance".

Furthermore, this chapter has shown how the method adopted for this "thought experiment" is psychonarratology, which blends cognitive psychology and narratology to investigate readers' processing of narrative texts, providing empirical evidence. This is because psychonarratology distinguished between "textual features", that are, those characteristics of texts that can be identified in an objective way, and readers' "constructions", namely the audience's metal representations. In this sense, psychonarratology may be seen as supplying the deficiencies of previous methods of research that adopted only speculative methods (Hutcheon, 2004, pp.80-82). This is, for example, the case with Iser's reader-oriented approach and his concept of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1976, p.34), that failed to fill in the gap between individual and collective reading experience.

Conclusions: main findings, implications for the field of work, recommendations for further research

To conclude, the aim of the present research was to find an approach to investigate readers' empathetic engagement with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s first-person narrator Changez. Particularly, it has been explained that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be regarded as a postmodernist novel, specifically a post-9/11 "historiographic metafiction", which has the dramatic monologue as its narrative form. In a typically postmodern way, the novel features a paradoxical relationship with history and historiography, stresses the process of enunciation between Changez and his mysterious American "auditor", and the narrator's unreliability. Furthermore, the "thought experiment" showed that while engaging with "strange narrators", readers can experience negative empathy and cognitive dissonance. This is because Changez is an ambiguous character who may elicit "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) or contrasting mental states in his audience: on the one hand, readers can experience sympathy and emotional identification with him; on the other, they may also feel revulsion and "imaginative resistance", due to "counter-moral" propositions (Kim et al., 2018, p.194) representing emotions that can be considered as immoral.

As for the approach adopted in this research, this thesis asserted that "psychonarratology" can be considered the one which better suits the investigation of the audience's processing of literary fiction, since it combines both theoretical and empirical evidence, supplying the deficiencies of reader-oriented methods.. Particularly, Iser's concept of "the implied reader" (Iser, 1987, p.27), which emerges as an attempt to examine the readers' presence without having to deal with real or empirical readers (Holub, 2019, p.84), seems more a literary abstraction than a suggestion for a realistic method of investigation (Iser, 1987, p.27). In addition, since a distinction between "textual features" and "constructions" is essential to analyze readers' responses to literary texts with a psychonarratological approach, for the purpose of this research, first-person homodiegetic narrator, internal focalization and "linguistic cues representing emotions" are considered as "textual features", whilst emotional identification, empathetic/sympathetic engagement and "imaginative resistance" are the readers' "constructions".

Overall, this study lays the groundwork for future research into the connection between negative empathy, cognitive dissonance, postmodernism, and "strange" and ambiguous

fictional characters or narrators. In this sense, if negative empathy can be defined as a process of "cathartic identification" with negative characters, this thesis has shown that this concept may be employed to describe the audience's empathetic engagement with postmodernist unreliable narrators. Furthermore, a natural progression of this work would be to analyze the readers' engagement with the American "auditor", who may elicit "feelings of strangeness" (Caracciolo, 2016, p.xvi) like those provoked by Changez. This is since readers are asked to interpret his role in the novel and decide whether to consider him an assassin, or a victim of the narrator, or both (Ilott, 2014, p.573). More information on the audience's responses to the "auditor" would also help to establish how readers' identification and "imaginative resistance" changes throughout the novel.

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